

The Universe of the Avengers: A Rendezvousing Space in the Marvel Universe

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Abstract

Recently, in an animated movie named *Batman Ninja* (2018)—the scene shifted from Gotham city to the land of Nippon—Batman is seen fighting his arch enemies adopting samurai convention of mediaeval Japan. A location is always necessary for an action to be executed; its multi-dimensional nature gets reflected through the interplay of key elements such as time, space, and settings. The Marvel Universe as a multiverse provides a location or space in which worlds and universes of superheroes created by Marvel Comics Industry exist in harmony and balance. With the birth of the Avengers team in 1963 by the hand of Stan Lee, the universe of the Avengers occupies a pivotal place in the Marvel Universe. Like the Marvel Universe, the universe of the Avengers also creates a fictional space in which the adventure of the Avengers team takes place. The fictional space of the Avengers universe comes into existence as various superheroes from the Marvel Universe gather under one roof. This aim of this paper is to address why the fictional space or location of the Avengers team is designated as a universe. Moreover, addressing this preceding question, this paper attempts to position the Avengers universe at the centre of the Marvel Universe.

Keywords: Location, Space, Rendezvous, Multiverse, Superhero City, Adventure

As a universe of comics narratives, the birth of the Marvel Universe is materialised through the efforts of the Marvel Comics Industry. The Marvel Universe as a “multiverse” (Sanderson 11) provides a location or space in which worlds and universes of superheroes created by Marvel Comics Industry exist in harmony and balance. Regarding the definition of multiverse, in his article Anthony Aguirre writes this: “Multiverse [is] a hypothetical collection of potentially diverse observable universes, each of which would comprise everything that is experimentally accessible by a connected community of observers.” According to Marvel Database, “the Multiverse is the collection of alternate universes which share a universal hierarchy; it is a subsection of the larger universe, the collection of all alternate universes” (“Multiverse”). To talk about the harmonious co-existence of fictional networks within universes of comics narratives, Jason Craft upholds this following fact:

In these universes, both the complex structure of unfolding fiction and the ongoing process of fiction-making are simultaneously negotiated. These negotiations sometimes result in explicit discontinuities, moments where the fiction is disrupted by the inevitable gaps inherent in disturbed fiction-making. In response to this inevitability, there is the ongoing practice of continuity, constructive retrospection that determines how the corpus of published work represents a coherent and logical fictional world. (2)

Like other comics universes, the Marvel Universe as a multiverse also projects its various worlds and universes in a unique way. In fact, in the Marvel Universe lie the worlds and universes of superheroes, operating in isolation on their own, without interfering with one another. For instance, Spider Man and Iron Man never run into each other while pursuing their enemies although they are the residents of the same city called New York. To quote in Peter Sanderson's words, "the Marvel Universe is a 'multiverse' consisting of many universes, each existing in its own dimension" (11) and "still outside these [superhero] team books, it was rare for characters from one superhero series to appear in another: from the most part the heroes lived not in a common 'universe,' but in their separate worlds" (9). Carl Silvio, analysing the position of the Marvel Universe from the perspective of post-modern fictional world, further asserts this: "The Marvel Universe differs from the most other fictionalized text-worlds by virtue of the fact that it is not contained within a single volume. Instead, it is the aggregate of thousands of individual comic books collectively published by Marvel Entertainment Group Inc." (41). As a repository and collection of numerous comics narratives, the Marvel Universe establishes itself as a universe of comics through the formation of "an intricate 'narrative field' " (Silvio 43). As compared to the DC Universe, the Marvel Universe places most of its superheroes in a location that resembles that of the real world: "In keeping with their portrayal of real people as superheroes, Marvel's heroes are very much based in the real world. New York is home to Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four, to the Avengers and Captain America" (Bainbridge 75). The references of the places of the actual world, in which we live, in the adventures of the Marvel Universe is very much apparent through the words of Ahrens and Meteling: "While superheroes in DC comics, like Superman or Batman, function as archetypes in stylized and exaggerated fictitious cities, the Marvel style is about realistic compositions, locating the heroes in recognizable places in New York city, for example, with the Fantastic Four basing themselves in the Baxter Building. . . ." (13)

The universe of the Avengers as a part of the Marvel Universe builds up its own distinct universe in which the adventure of the Avengers superhero team takes place through its own unique, distinct story arcs. In the Marvel Universe, several other Avengers universes—such as Dark Avengers, Young Avengers, Uncanny Avengers, etc., whose story arcs differ from each other—exist as a parallel or spin-off series, apart from the universe of the Avengers. In this article, the focus has been laid on the Avengers who materialised the birth of the Avengers team in the history of the Marvel Universe. Thus, as an original as well as a main-stream story arc, the superheroic adventure of the Avengers projects its own unique storyworld that remains segregated from the other Avengers and the rest of the worlds as well as universes of superheroes. Since a storyworld as "a complex spatio-temporal totality" (Ryan 33) allows its participants and events to reside in the story concerned, the universe of the Avengers through the projection of a spatial dimension creates its storyworld in which the superheroes from the Marvel Universe and the events related to them dwell congruously. As the participants and events in a storyworld reveal their existence, they become the part of the storyworld projected by a text: ". . . the core constituents of stories are events and their participants. Since participants are existents, and since existents are objects with spatial extension, they must exist somewhere" (Ryan 39). Since a storyworld, as Ryan argues in her

book, has the potential to emerge as a universe, it is the storyworld of the Avengers that constitutes the Avengers universe.

The next question that arises is why the storyworld of the Avengers superhero team is designated as a universe. The idea of a universe is constructed when the various worlds converge into a rendezvousing space. The storyworld of the Avengers creates a rendezvousing space wherein the various worlds of superheroes co-exist in harmony and balance. From the perspective of storyworld, the location of the universe of the Avengers emerges out as an imaginary location embedded in the Marvel Universe. This fictional community of superheroes comes into existence as a result of mutual agreement among its members. The nature of this mutual agreement or contract echoes the essence of the so-called proverb that necessity is the mother of invention. Although various worlds of superheroes converge into one location and formulate a universe, yet the Avengers universe designates a single storyworld. The nature of the proliferation or expansion that the storyworld of the Avengers reflects, involves “a [story]world that includes many stories” (Ryan 36). In the Marvel Universe, most of the superheroes, who form the Avengers superhero team, have their own separate storyworld wherein their superheroic adventure runs its course. For instance, Thor, Hulk, Iron Man, Captain America, and so on have their individual storyworld in which their individual adventures unfold consistently. In fact, their separate storyworlds, as Peter Sanderson mentions earlier, never come into conflict with each other, unless a special crossover series is crafted by the comics artists and industry. In case of the universe of the Avengers, the convergence of multiple storyworlds of superheroes creates a new, distinct space that allows the ‘play’ of superheroes in a unique way. In his essay Stephen Packard, using Bhaktin’s concept of chronotops, analyses how the convergence of various worlds of superheroes in comics constitute a unique as well as distinctive space:

The most obvious answer seems to be that the two protagonists, who usually inhabit different places in some sense, are now placed within a shared space in which they might run into each other, possibly one created by combining the two original realms. But those merged spaces are not identical to the usually depicted space of each comic, which is a fictional New York in both cases and lacks any mutually exclusive restrictions. (57)

As regards the concept of a storyworld that arises out of “shared space” (57), even he refers to the idea of Mark J.P. Wolf: “. . . the term ‘world’ is not used in the geographic sense (like planets), but in the experiential sense, meaning the sum total of a character’s experiences . . . ” (57). Since the space of the Avengers universe and its inhabitants are mutually correlated, under the concept of “performative cartography” (Uricchio 121), the space of the Avengers universe unfolds through the action of the Avengers as well as their cumulative experiences. According to Uricchio, the concept of “performative cartography” takes both action as well as experience into its account in unfolding the space of the superhero universe (130). Moreover, the coalescence of the action and cumulative experience of the superheroes from the Avengers team forms the idea of ‘adventure’. Under the concept of “shared universe” (Jeffrey 38), and as a performative as well as experiential space, the universe of the Avengers projects its complexities and diversities as various superheroes gathers under one roof.

There has been no doubt that one of the distinct characteristic features of the Avengers universe is the convergence of various superheroes in its storyworld. Although the Avengers team comprises a few numbers of superheroes, yet one can find that some storyworlds reveal other superheroes who take part in the story arc without being the part of the Avengers team. For instance, in one of the adventures in *Behold the Vision*, it is shown that Spider Man reads a newspaper, hanging the flagpole attached to Daily Bugle news office, and that he remains immune to the affairs of the Avengers (Thomas et al., issue#59). In another event from the same graphic novel that projects the marriage ceremony between Yellow Jacket, alternatively known as Ant Man, and Wasp, many superheroes other than the Avengers—Fantastic Four, Dr. Strange, Spider Man and so on—from the Marvel Universe gathers in the wedding and become the part of the storyworld without involving themselves in the affairs of the Avengers (Thomas et al., issue#60). The presence of these ‘extra’ superheroes, along with the Avengers superhero team, in some storyworlds of the Avengers helps to expose the location of the universe of the Avengers in a vivid manner. Moreover, although the universe of the Avengers allows the entry of multiple superheroes, it creates a ‘metaphysical’ boundary of its own through the fabrication of its distinct story arc. In the third adventure of the graphic novel *Earth’s Mightiest Heroes*, it becomes evident that although Iron Man’s image-projection travels across various superheroes’ worlds, such as Spider Man’s, Fantastic Four’s, and X-men’s worlds, in order to find Hulk and detect a crime in New York city, yet the storyworld of the Avengers does not interfere with those worlds of Spider Man, Fantastic Four and X-men (Lee et al., issue#3). A similar example is also seen in *the Assault of Olympus* as well. It illustrates the temporal shift of the Avengers mansion to “4 Freedoms Plaza, New Home of The Fabled Fantastic Four” (Stern et al., issue#278), as the primary mansion of the Avengers team is completely wrecked due to the clash between a group of supervillains and the Avengers team. In this particular adventure, the temporal shift of Avengers mansion to the Baxter Building, which serves as the head quarter for the Fantastic Four, without any previous reference in the story, allows the readers and critics to understand how the ‘metaphysical’ boundary operates between the Avengers universe and other superheroes’ worlds.

Along with these previous instances, there are a couple of adventures of the Avengers that make the references of temporal leave of absence of superheroes in the Avengers team in illustrative ways. The temporal leave of absence shows that the superheroes concerned are busy with their individual adventures or some private tasks. For instance, when the Avengers team led by Captain America faces the public censure in *Once An Avenger*, the public demands the return of old members of the Avengers team. Further, the readers witness the portrayal of Thor, Iron Man, and Giant Man who are engaged in their individual adventures (Lee et al., issue#22). Another instance illustrates Thor, Quick Silver, and Hawkeyes’ involvement in other affairs. Their temporal absence as the members of the Avengers team is vividly referred to the panel of the graphic novel *Bride of Ultron*: ‘Quick Silver, meanwhile, dwells with the Uncanny Humans among the ruins of the Attilan . . . (Conway et al., issue#161 10). Such references also serve as an indication the Avengers universe occupies a pivotal location in the Marvel Universe. By positioning itself at the core of the Marvel

Universe, the Avengers universe is able to connect numerous worlds of superheroes in a systematized way.

Unlike a single superhero world, the Avengers superhero team creates its own universe through the constellation of multiple superheroes and through complex as well as diversified story arcs. In single superhero comics such as Spider Man, Iron Man, Batman from the DC Universe, most of the adventure of a single superhero protagonist remains confined to the city he/she belongs. For example, most of the superheroic adventures of Spider Man and Batman take place in New York and Gotham city respectively, and their adventures do not cross the boundary of the city they belong to. Unlike a single superhero storyworld and assuming the nature of a superhero universe, the universe of the Avengers serves as a rendezvousing space through which the superheroes from the Marvel Universe enter and exit in accordance with the story arc concerned. Under this narrative logic of the adventure of the Avengers as well as distinct visual iconographies such as the Avengers Tower, Manhattan Island and Bridge, Quinjet, and so on, the Avengers universe not only provides mere a setting but also enforces a “condition for the iterative generation of endless stories” (Uricchio 125). In terms of the location of the Avengers universe, the comics auteurs position the universe of the Avengers in the Marvel Universe in such a way that as a rendezvousing space, it possesses the ability to open up various worlds and to connect these various worlds in a systematized way. Thus, the Avengers universe receives its unique position in the Marvel Universe because of its unique location. As the Marvel’s leading superhero team, the comics artists of the Avengers comics have been in constant effort to make the universe of the Avengers more and more complex and diverse.

N.B.: The term *comics* refers to comic strips or a comic book or comic books, whereas the term *comic* bears a different meaning. For instance, this phrase *a comic artist* refers to an individual who performs in comedy shows. Hence this term has been used in a plural form in order to avoid confusion and to bring clarification.

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¹ The volume in the bracket denotes the number of season; the hash tag portion indicates the collection of the Avengers comics issues.

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