

Setting of New Culture and Studies

Setting of New Culture and Studies: A Study of Alan Kirby's *Digimodernism*

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Abstract

In his path-setting book *Digimodernism: How Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure our Culture*, Alan Kirby points out how the thumbs and fingers have taken the center stage in creating our culture. The book emphasizes the shift from physical books to digital media where the internet has become the mother of all needs. The grand narrative is created through digital media and almost everyone can participate in creating the narrative. The book claims that postmodernism is dead and a new set of narratives has been created not only by textbooks but also by the digital materials available via the internet, television, videos, and video games.

The pandemic has been successful in handing down digital technology to everyone's hands and to every corner of the world. As the pandemic set in, these digital materials have taken a center stage and the culture of reading a book itself has a different meaning altogether. The study aims to decipher the narratives created by Alan Kirby in the Digimodern era and connect the same to the Pandemic era, the upgraded version of the digital era. It will also analyze the widespread effects of technological reach and how it has changed our culture through the lens of Alan Kirby.

Key words: *Digi modernism, C culture, Technology, Grand Narrative*

In his path-setting book *Digimodernism: How Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure our Culture*, Alan Kirby points out how the thumbs and fingers have taken the center stage in creating our culture. The book emphasizes the shift from physical books to digital media where the internet has become the mother of all needs. The grand narrative is created through digital media and almost everyone can participate in creating the narrative. The book claims that postmodernism is dead and a new set of narratives has been created not only by the textbooks but by the digital materials available via the internet, television, videos, and video games.

Postmodernism has become old-fashioned. Digimodernism is the next phase of postmodernism. It is a new form of modernism without the prefix “post”. A new form of text has emerged, “The new cultural climate thrown by digitization” (Kirby, 2009 p.3). The new textuality has been created through the internet paving a new set of cultural norms for internet users. The culture or the age of postmodernism has come to an end, but it has not completely wiped out the planet. The set of values and ideas it has created has mutated into subdued forms and is presenting itself as new to the world.

Postmodernist traits have become “Common Sense” which “goes without saying” (Kirby, 2009 p.6) making it an integral part of everyday life. The mutated form of the common sense of postmodernism is the emergence of a new cultural dominance in the twenty-first century. The author asserts that as there is a beginning for every culture, there is a death too. Postmodernism has died and a new culture has emerged not completely replacing it, but adopting the general ideas as “common sense” and adapting to the new technical era, which he

calls digimodernism.

Kirby steps into the world of movies to ascertain his notion of digimodernism. The movie *Toy Story* began as a landmark of digitalization fusing the needs of the young and the old. It also spoke of the new consumeristic identity and breaking of the stereotypes of the past. The movie set a trend of representation of the real world through CGI fusing the entertainment world of the children and the moral values of the grown-ups. New textuality started to emerge through digital representation.

The textual representation and building of the narrative from the text are multiple through these digital representations. Digital representation is loved by the old as well as the young. It's an amalgamation of past history and present realism. Examples of these include movies like *Toy Story*, *Chicken Run*, *Shrek*, *Snow White*, and so on. *Finding Nemo* depicts a simple search for the lost kid for their family. *Cars* do not glamorize showbiz and the constant need for attention, but the need to listen to and respect the old generation.

The shift from modernism to postmodernism to digimodernism has been a gradual but conscious one. Modernism moved itself to postmodernism – the avant-garde movement of the 1960s which was shaken by the idea of deconstruction. In the 2000s a new movement called remodernism emerged. Though the movement was more towards changing the art form in England, they started a new era of art with “tiny digital cameras”. Deconstruction revamped the notion of the center and the dependencies on the integrated center. With the advent of technology, the center itself was deconstructed and handed over to everyone globally. The internet was the trendsetter and the fingers that were used to explore to create the knowledge were the tool needed to step into the new age.

The culture was based on the theories of renowned artists, writers, and thinkers. But Kirby claims that “Theory is dead” - the new culture is going back to the pre-modern age where theories do not define culture but popular culture does. The set of practices, beliefs and values followed by the people becomes the culture of the era and the popular culture of our times is defined by the people using the internet. Derrida and Eagleton have paved the way to the new dimension of modernism through their idea of deconstruction.

The digimodernism generation stormed out of the theories and academic definitions of culture. They try to create a culture of their own and this culture is changing every day depending on the usage of the internet users. For example, a song released on YouTube sets the trend for a week or so, trending at number one. In the next few days, the song becomes obsolete as a new song tops the chart. The trend sets the culture and it is arbitrary in nature. “It's a cultural shift, a communicative revolution, a social organization. The most immediate way, however, of describing digimodernism is this: it's a new form of textuality” (Kirby, 2009 p.50).

The digi modern texts are the shows on TV, music albums, video games, movies, and comments on the internet. “The content is tangible; the act is physical” (Kirby, 2009 p.51).

The characteristics of a digi modern text are varied. The first is onwardness, the time is unlimited in the text. It has a beginning, but no end. Next is haphazardness, meaning there are infinite possibilities in the text. The third is evanescence, it does not show interest in reproducible items. Fourth is the reformulation and intermediation of textual roles, the functional roles like writer and reader are given a new meaning and hybridized. Anonymous, multiple, and social authorship, a pseudo-identity is created on social media. Next is the fluid bound text, they are not physical texts to have a bound. It becomes boundless with infinite representations.

The last one is electronic digitality, the typing of the fingers presents the information before the reader, and digitalisation is connected to the fingers and the information they can acquire. In today's world, a mobile phone without a stable internet connection is beyond imagination. The majority of the urban population has adapted to the new culture and is a participant in the new culture. Fingers mark the journey of knowledge of the mass population to traverse into the digi modern world. The mass creates textuality through their participation and creates textuality and literature.

This literature can be termed “Ergodic literature” and “Participatory literature” since it follows the non-linear form of the text and even a common man can participate in the text according to Kirby. Speaking about reader response theory, he quotes Terry Eagleton who claims that the reader is as important as the writer as literature can happen when the writer writes and there is a reader to read. The reader finds the cues in the text and constructs the meaning of the text rather than the writer deciphering the text for the reader. The relationship between the reader and writer has not been fixed as the non-linear and interactive mode of understanding has created a new universe in terms of textuality.

Rolan Barthes' idea of “the death of the author” and Michel Foucault's concept of “author-function”, depict the idea that the author has to leave space for the reader to take control. But digimodernism “silently restores the authorial, and revalorizes it” (59).

the digi modernist author is mostly unknown or meaningless or encrypted. Who writes Wikipedia? Who votes on Big Brother? Who exactly makes a video game? Extended across unknown distances, and scattered among numerous zones and layers of fluctuating determinacy, digimodernism authorship seems ubiquitous, dynamic, ferocious, acute, and simultaneously nowhere, secret, undisclosed, irrelevant. Today, authorship is the site of a swarming, restless creativity and energy; the figure of the disreputably lonely or mocked or dethroned author of postmodernism and post-structuralism is obsolete. (Kirby, 2009 p.60)

The introduction of the personal computer is the path-changing movement that paved the way for digimodernism texts to emerge. The texts that are spoken about are usually user-generated like YouTube videos, Facebook content, Tik Tok videos, and WhatsApp messages that generate new trends for the audience/reader and the creator/writer makes the user read the text

and participate in the textuality of the user-created content.

The “representatives of cinema, photography, journalism, tv, music, literature and the performing arts” (Kirby, 2009 p.75) were the precursors to the new form of textuality. The new type of textuality is compared to a pantomime, where the audience participates in the mime. Though the pantomime is staged for the children, the elders also show interest in participation. This intertextuality and participation of the audience was the first step towards digimodernism. The audience of social media constantly participates and creates new textuality with their comments and overwhelming participation.

Web 2.0 has more user-generated content. It refers to the way the internet is used in the current situation. The higher level of information available and the interconnectedness among the participants make it more open for grand narratives to be created.

It can also be read textually. Many of these platforms have a hard-copy precursor: the diary (blogs), the newspaper letters page (message boards), the script for a play (chat rooms), the encyclopedia (Wikipedia). At a second degree, YouTube resembles a festival of short films or documentaries. Social networking sites, slightly more problematically, adapt an earlier electronic platform, the personal Web page, rather than a pre-Web form of text, but this is not finally prohibitive of textual analysis. And if Web 2.0 can, on the whole, be assimilated to forms universally considered texts, then they are texts themselves (of a sort) and can be studied—as I’m going to here, in a way—textually (Kirby, 2009 p.103).

The textuality we create is “Cultural hardware” through ipads, file sharing, downloads, and cell phones rather than “Cultural Software” through films, music, etc. Web 2.0 creates a space between democracy and fascism where Wikipedia writers and blog creators create textuality so powerful and YouTube videos make an impact. Through these texts, the creators become powerful and accountable as well as transparent and invisible in the narratives created.

The chat rooms or the WhatsApp create Visually, this never-ending, forever-turning stream of communication may resemble the flowing of a minor sea, but its tide never goes out: (discreetly) compatible with many people’s working habits and extending over territories and therefore time zones, the sun never sets on the chat room and the moon cannot reverse its inexorable onwardness. It’s an endless communicative narrative, into which you shyly emerge (Kirby, 2009 p.105).

Communication happens on a global scale through these platforms. Through these spaces, identity is created but the identity created is anonymity or pseudonymity. The comments passed are also anonymous and create a deep impact on the suggestions/recommendations made by the global audience. This kind of communication and identity creates megalomaniacs around the globe questioning the idea of trust and belief in the ideas generated. Human emotions are also

transformed electronically. Facebook friends are not real friendships but electronic friendships where the emotion is textualized and posted on the walls of Facebook to a global audience to read and interact. “the thoughts, moods, and impulses of our everyday existence will translate so immediately into the electronic, textual digimodernism realm that we will no longer be conscious of transference” (Kirby, 2009 p.123).

To speak of popular culture/mass culture/high culture – children’s stories and archetypes have been transformed into American mass movies like Avatar, Star Wars, Harry Potter, etc., and “infantilizing” the modern culture. The infantilization of the culture results in speaking of the needs of the younger children and denies the needed maturity or the experience to be learned by the adults. The values propagated meet the needs of the children and the adults also look upon such movies to learn the values. The experience to be gained through growing up with knowledge is budged through these texts.

The success of the digi modernist texts lies in the representation of the reality of everyday life. Like the blurred YouTube videos, the real content of Wikipedia, and the unfiltered photos in the blogs, the reality of life is presented to the audience. Being earnest is the mantra of the content creators and the audience of those texts like the earnestness reflected in the texts.

Apart from movies and TV shows, there are also a wide variety of other mediums through which the textuality is created. For example, the video games also create an author, whereby playing the games, the participant of the games, creates their own identity and their own story. These are all endless narratives as opposed to open narratives of postmodernist texts. Anyone can create an identity and the identity does not remain the same and is tangible based on individual needs and necessities. “Digimodernist endlessness derives its possible existence from old forerunners, but its shape and detail emerge from the social, cultural, and technological specific city of the electronic-digital world(Kirby, 2009 p.163).

Another example of the textuality created through digimodernism is the soap operas. For example, “Friends” a global phenomenon speaks of the narratives of everyday life and not particularly on the professional lifestyle of the people. The professions of the characters do not come in the front but the family and friends are presented as real culture. The soap opera created a culture that even today there is a mass following and it tops the charts on Netflix.

The CGI revolutionized the textuality created through movies. Jurassic Park, Harry Potter, Chronicles of Narnia, and Lord of the Rings trilogy introduced the audience to a world they visited never before. These form cutting-edge texts where technology creates a grand narrative with the aid of technology. The internet and the global pandemic reinvented the way we watch movies “And the era of the internet may reinvent cinema as a domestic cultural mode” (Kirby, 2009 p.187). Every week we watch new movies and we have started to binge-watch series. Stepping out of the home to watch movies is slowly fading out from the lives of people.

Individual identity and indigenous cultures are also encouraged through this textuality.

Reality shows like Big Boss and Master Chef have indigenous versions and the reader creates his narrative by responding to these shows. “So by the time the “viewer” reaches for his/her phone to vote, the distinctive textual apparatus surrounding this act lends it a special authorial meaning. Narrative will come of it; it’s creative, story-making” (Kirby, 2009 p.194). A huge cannon is created by book reviews and suggestions made by celebrities on social media and the audience throng to buy and read those books creating a new surge of reading habits among the public. The criticism and explanation of the texts are overflowing on the internet so that anyone can understand the classics and seek help when required in understanding the text. Kindle, google books, and a wide range of options available on Amazon and other online bookstores pose new variables to the form of text.

Alan Kirby also extends his narrative to picture the threat to digimodernism. He says the grand narrative created by consumerism is a huge threat to digimodernism and it does not conquer moral values.

Consumerism here is the transformation of the practices and mind-set of consumption into the sole overriding model for all human life. In this way it becomes a fanaticism. Postmodernism’s commitment to many valid viewpoints is obsolete, overpowered by an all-swamping single creed. Consumerism is megalomaniacal: it wants everything to be run its way. (Kirby, 2009 p.239)

To sum up the notion of Alan Kirby on Consumerism,

So we are engulfed. Everything is remodeled. Freedom is reconfigured as “choice,” happiness as “retail therapy”; there are no universals except the oneness of infinite valid individual preferences in exchange for money. Families splinter into pockets of isolated consumption, each with his TV or her computer, nothing shared, nothing communicated; relationships, like commodity ownership, become transitory, consecutive, and pragmatic; social groups form solely around shared consumption patterns, fragmenting societies and alienating generations. Its heroes are “celebrities” who seem only to consume, not to work or learn; employees self-define as “commodities” needing every day to sell themselves to a company. There are consumerist TV programs, in denial as “lifestyle” shows, about how to buy, furnish, renovate, declutter, clean, extend, and sell your “property”. (Kirby, 2009 p.239)

To conclude, the textuality created by the consumerist culture stands at the top of all other cultures creating an inclination to follow the grand narrative created. But this narrative poses a threat to the other artistic and academic narratives produced through web 2.0. The internet has changed the phase of the world in which it functions and the setting in of the pandemic changed the way we look at the world i.e., through the lens of the internet. The narratives created are arbitrary and have no censor whatsoever. Though it opens up the possibilities of creativity and unstoppable freedom, the sensory emotions of the audience are given more importance than the cognitive skills of the audience. The textuality and the grand narratives

created through web 2.0 is the new normal and we have already adapted to the culture it presents before us. The change is already here; the pandemic has buried postmodernism completely, and digimodernism has emerged as cultural globalisation.

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