

DIGIMODERNISM – THE NEW LEVEL OF POSTMODERN?

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Postmodern interpretation of culture, which has dominated arts and philosophy for decades since the turn of the nineteenth century, seems to have become too broad and too vague towards the 1980s with the emergence of digital technology. New inventions, such as Web 2.0 applications and the new possibilities these technologies allowed to manifest in cultural products have inspired new thoughts. The new reality cannot be fully and precisely described along the coordinate system of postmodern criticism and philosophy. The objective of this paper is to describe how textuality and narrative can be viewed in digimodernism that have the potential to expand postmodernist interpretation of the world vis-à-vis digital technologies.

According to postmodernism, there is no objective truth. What we consider true or real is just the construct of our brain. Culture, morals, religion, even language, science and arts are mere social constructs. Implementation of digital technologies in production of documentary films created a situation in which imagined reality can vindicate the right to be called documentary – a genre that declares to document the real, the valid and the scientifically proven. The answer might possibly be found in digimodernism.

The postmodern is dead. David Rudrum and Nicolas Stavris in their Introduction for the anthology titled *Supplanting the Postmodern* compare postmodernism to the breadth of a river which has become too broad, has slowed down and dispersed. What we may observe is the raise of a series of views, approaches, standpoints and formulations that all have the potential to become dominant in our century alone or in combination with one another and replace the stagnating postmodernism. Remodernism, performatism, hypermodernism, automodernism, renewalism, altermodernism, digimodernism, and metamodernism all try to depict a new paradigm and replace the too all-inclusive definitions of postmodern. The key word in this evolution is reality. We seem to move towards a wider definition of reality that goes beyond the postmodern interpretation of the world based on relativism and irony.

Postmodern for the superficial observer seems to be in opposition to modernism. It, however, hardly did more than drove the modernist world view to extremes introducing relativism and individualism. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. By deconstructing the whole, we may not necessarily understand it in its complexity. Digimodernism may have the potential to provide precise answers to the questions postmodern could not fully answer. Changes and improvement in understanding the world around us have always been triggered by technological advancements. Digital revolution seems to be the following step in this development. Computer science, information technology and digital forms

of communication belong among those milestones that mark the turning points on the way of human development.

Digimodernism is the product of the computer age. According to Kirby, digimodernism can be globally expressed as the effects of digitalization on cultural forms and historically is situated as the cultural-dominant succeeding postmodernism prompted by new technologies [Kirby p. 279]. Digimodernism focuses mostly on audio-visual media – film, TV, and radio – but reads them alongside new electronic developments such as the World Wide Web and internet [Kirby, p.272]. Digimodernism manifests itself in new textuality and in new visuals.

Documenting is based on precise textual frameworks. Digimodernist texts have different characteristics than classical postmodern texts. According to Kirby, “In its pure form, the digimodernist text permits the reader or viewer to intervene and physically make text, to add visible content, or tangibly shape narrative development. Digimodernism ... brings a new textual form, content, and value, new kinds of cultural meaning, structure, and use...” [Kirby, p. 275]. There are certain dominant features of digimodernist texts, which differentiate them from postmodern narratives. Onwardness, according to Kirby, means that digimodernist texts exist here and now. The digimodernist text is incomplete without the aim to reach a final form. The reader is able to join the narrative that has no beginning and possibly will have no end. A further feature that is called as haphazardness by Kirby suggests that the digimodernist text maintains the permanent possibility that it might go off in multiple directions. The digimodernist text therefore is fluid and such text does not endure. It is very hard to capture and archive digimodernist textual products. Digimodernist texts do not even seek to be reproduced or archived. The author is often unknown. There may be multiple authors or the text itself can be a product of ad hoc contributors. Kirby states that authorship in digimodernist texts becomes multiple and is scattered across obscure social pseudocommunities. Digimodernism abolishes the assumed singularity of authorship [Kirby p.281]. Authorship is always plural here, perhaps innumerable [...] The digimodernist author is mostly unknown or meaningless or encrypted. The digimodernist text is fluid-bounded, which means that such texts do not provide clear structures. Kirby states that a traditional text has clear limits, its physical proportions are correctly determinable (and ideally frozen), i.e. the number of pages! Digimodernist texts may be endless, swamp any act of reception/consumption. Digimodernist texts are systematic bodies of recorded meaning, which represent acts in time and space and produce coherently intelligible patterns of signification [Kirby p.281].

The visual side of the digimodernist culture introduces the concept of the apparently real. This concept is, however, rather irritating and disturbing in connection to the documentary genre. The very concept of a documentary film is rooted in depicting the real, the truth and the factual; something that can be documented, archived, analysed and processed as reliable information. How can

we overcome the tension that arises when we see a fully animated film that demands the title of being called a documentary? Kate Nash in 2014 offered the concept of the ‘expanded realm of the real’. Karin Nash defines the new documentary as a genre that might become: non- linear, multimedia, interactive, hybrid, crossplatform, convergent, virtual, immersive, 360- degree, collaborative, 3- D, participatory, transmedia or something else yet to clearly emerge. With such a wide range of possibilities this genre might be the manifestation of a new and fascinating concept that have the potential to become the continuation of the postmodern in the 21st century [Nash 2014].

Animation is not a new phenomenon in documentaries. The authors of various documentary films have long used animation – analogue or digital – to show objects and scenes that are not possible to film: molecular constructions of nanostructures, distant so far invisible phenomena in the cosmos, prehistoric animals, reconstructed ancient buildings of the once thriving civilizations or the procedures that go on in our conscious and unconscious mind, or the simulation of the consequences of a nuclear apocalypse. All these elements are taken as illustrations of proven facts and have the capacity to expand our understanding of the contemporary or once existent reality. These illustrations do not go beyond the role of being an educational or instructive tool. Annabell Honess Roe [Honess Roe 2013], suggested an audiovisual work (produced digitally, filmed, or scratched on celluloid) can be classed as an animated documentary if it fulfils the following criteria: “(i) it has been recorded or created frame-by-frame; (ii) it is about *the* world rather than *a* world wholly imagined by its creator; and (iii) it has been presented as a documentary by its producers and/or received as a documentary by audiences, festivals or critics” [p. 176].

For this paper, the most important point of this definition is (ii) that states that an animated film is about the world rather than a world wholly imagined by its creator. If we accept Honess Roe’s definition than the following considerations might be valid in connection to digimodernist documenting. Digimodernist films, including documentaries, are supposed to depict the reality that is considered real by the author and by the viewer. The depicted events reflect a common belief that manifests itself on the screen and satisfies the needs of the observer. These may be based on real scientific and documented events and facts, but not necessarily true in the profane meaning of the word. The digimodernist documentary is the result of the communication between the author/authors and the viewers and shows rather the metaphysical element of truth rather than the factual element that is measurable, documentable and possible to archive.

Documentary films have become the integral part of our life. We watch the for educational purposes or just as a spare time activity. We, however, have to accept the fact that the narrative of these documentaries and the visuals presented by the authors have the potential to create an intermediate layer of reality, which can be defined as the minimum acceptable level of reality in the communication process between the author/authors and the viewer/viewers. It is also important to

underline that documenting in the 21st century may be a community product, less authoritative than the classical documentary films with direct voice-over and presenting expert opinions and analysis. Documentaries in the digimodernist era go beyond the classical interpretation and explanation of reality. Digimodernist documentaries create and recreate reality which, however, goes beyond the subjective interpretation of postmodern and create the real of the apparently real – the realm which is acceptable by the producer and by the viewer, too. The concept of digimodernism therefore have the potential to replace or at least expand the postmodern interpretation of reality that is relativistic and subjective.

Literature

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Summary

This paper discusses the aspects of digimodernism; how modern technologies contribute to the creation of the apparently real – a concept that has the potential to substitute postmodern relativism and subjectivism. Documentary films have undergone dramatic changes and recently there have been produced postmodern documentaries that fulfill digimodernist criteria, too.