



Paradigms of Cyberculturalism in Post-postmodernity

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INTRODUCTION

Post-postmodernism is the age of click. As Alan Kirby notes, in postmodernism, one read, listened and watched, while in post-postmodernism, one clicks, surfs and downloads (2006, 1). Thus, the new age is characterized by human–computer symbiosis. Artificial intelligence, which is the simulation of human intelligence, exemplifies such a symbiotic relationship between human and machine. Google Translate services, which instantly translate words, phrases and web pages between over 100 languages, is another manifestation of human–machine collaboration. Moreover, as interactive internet-based technologies, social media mark post-postmodernity by digitalism. Social media entice and invite individuals into themselves, and consequently, day in and day out, more

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people subscribe to social media sites, which are growing in number. With the ever-growing advancement of digital technology, a myriad of different on-demand apps has been introduced for different purposes, helping users to find their favorite or needed services. The apps have affected art and literature, too, and hence, nowadays, digital art and literature are on the frontiers of cyberculturalism. Not all of these are feasible without the internet which is wide-spreading even to farfetched regions. The growth and evolution of the internet, particularly during the last decade, which has advanced to 5G technology and Starlink, bring wider bandwidths by expanding the usage of spectrum resources. In such a cybercultural climate, our life depends on the ubiquitous internet, without which, several features in our personal and working life stop operating.

The United States has had a major stake in creating and shaping the digital revolution. Because of its digital infrastructure and the global role of its technology, as Gabriele Schwab notes, “the United States is a leading country in technologizing and ‘cybernetifying’ the human realm, a process that affects practically all social spheres” (1989, 193). With top American social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, cyberculturalism has also been more pronounced in the United States. However, as a result of the rise of the internet and the expansion of cybertechnologies to other countries, cyberculturalism has exceeded national boundaries and constituted itself as one of the global trends in the twenty-first century. Based on this discussion, I argue that we have moved into a new global, social, media, cultural and economic period, wherein cyberculture reigns at the crossroads of real and virtual spaces and affects our means of communication, economic transactions, literary and artistic productions and publication outlets. In what follows, I elaborate on paradigms of cyberculturalism, including artificial intelligence, multimediality, Twitterature, the omnipresence of social media, cybercommerce and cryptocurrency in art, literature, culture and economics. I also discuss how the paradigms of cyberculturalism create new re-arrangements in the world and affect our perspectives, communications and transactions in post-postmodernity. To show the rapid diffusion of cyberculturalism as a global phenomenon, along with examining several literary works by American writers, I discuss a number of associated literary and artistic works produced by international authors and artists in different parts of the world.

PARADIGM ONE: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MULTIMEDIALITY AND TWITTERATURE

Artificial intelligence (AI) has added to human intelligence in different fields. Through mimicking human cognitive activity, AI handles different situations and carries out some of our tasks without human intervention. For instance, self-driving cars, incorporating vehicular automation capable of sensing their environments with little or no human inputs, are on their wheels on roads. The usage of AI in self-driving cars reduces or even removes the demand for drivers. This is to say that in cyberculturality several jobs totally disappear from the list of employers, and people might not need to acquire those job skills.

The utilization of AI is not confined to industry and business, and it also affects artistic and literary work production. AI enables authors and artists, even amateur ones, to produce art and literature in other ways. For instance, the recent introduction of numerous computer software and programs, generating art with AI-powered applications, enables all people without any background knowledge and experience to create artistic works. At the 2019 launch of AI artists, the Polish artist Dariusz Gross predicted that soon “we will all be AI artists” (qtd. in Rtology 2022). To prove this claim, Natasha Lomas, who is a senior British reporter, has used an art generator app to produce several paintings and exhibited them on the *TechCrunch* magazine. These super-tools in everyone’s arsenal offer plenty of templates and numerous pre-made elements for creating awesome visuals and, thus, enable even beginners to manipulate images, mimic hand drawing and create 3D modeling.

In literature, writers benefit from AI features and human-machine symbiosis, too. As machine-assisted authoring, AI narrative systems generate stories from scratch. AI story generator tools such as Jasper, Rytr, AI Dungeon, Novel AI, etc. help fiction writers specify the genre, style and length of their stories, create characters, points of view and plots and generate compelling stories. For example, Montreal-based David Jhave Johnston has created *ReRites*, a boxset of twelve poetry volumes. To generate the poems, Jhave used AI, trained to imitate contemporary poetry and then he edited the AI-generated poems into the *ReRites* poetry collections. This means that AI-enabled Jhave to produce one book of poetry per month between May 2017 and May 2018. More recently, in November 2022, San Francisco-based Open AI launched ChatGPT, which is also able to write short stories, fairy tales and poems

based on the provided information and inputs. One can specify the genre, characters, setting, mood, tone, etc. in the chat box and receive the ordered literary work in a couple of minutes. It is worth noting that ChatGPT service, which is freely available to everyone, interacts with users in a conversational way across many domains of knowledge, provides detailed and articulate responses to users' questions, solves problems, writes codes and produces texts such as cover letters and essays promptly based on vast materials found online. With the emergence of AI technologies, we witness post-professional turns in literature and art and transformation in the patterns and practices of literary and artistic works.

In addition to the introduction of numerous generative art and literature software, cyberculturalism provides authors and artists with numerous outlet options to release their works. Multimediality means that artists and authors, who have had difficulty to publish their works with commercial publishers, now have a variety of other means to publish their texts. As I discuss in "Post-postmodernism and the Emergence of Heterolocal Literatures," "in post-postmodernity, writing is no longer about publishing but writing, and owing to diversity of publishing outlets, one can find a publishing venue" (Ghasemi 2022, 23). For example, self-publishing means offering venues to such authors and artists to release their works. According to Indian cyber journalist Piyush Pandey, self-publication reveals that the age of stifled creative expression has ended. As he puts it, "IT platforms have democratized literature, which today has mass appeal and participation, unlike even two decades ago, when monopoly presses or publishers' autocracy stifled creative expression. Each person can now be his own editor, writer and publisher" (Nandalike 2013). It is worth noting that despite a stigma around self-publishing, the Amazon's 2019 review of its Kindle sales reveals that thousands of self-published authors earn a living from their book sales. As an example, after writing his novel *The Martian*, the American novelist Andy Weir was turned down by literary agents. Thus, he opted to publish his book serially on his website. Later, he published the book on Amazon Kindle, and to his surprise, the book rose to the top of Amazon's list of best-selling titles and debuted on the Best Seller list of the *New York Times*. This grabbed the attention of traditional publishers, and eventually, Weir sold the rights to Crown in 2013 (Barron 2022).

Furthermore, cyberculturalism provides the possibility to release literary works on social media platforms. Serialized fiction, released in installments in social media outlets, has surged in popularity, and since

numerous people do not have time or interest to pore over ponderous novels in hard copies, some writers offer their stories in limited character installments on social media platforms. For example, Twitterature enables writers to write and share their stories with readers through the medium of social media in serialized manners. Twitterature has been employed, for example, by the American Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and short story writer Jennifer Egan. She used the Twitter account of *The New Yorker* magazine to tweet her entire short story “Black Box” (2012) as a series of single tweets. By the same token, American musician and writer John Roderick has composed his entire novel *Electric Aphorisms* in 365 transmissions of 140 characters each and disseminated them serially during December 2008 and May 2009. The book’s preface, an introduction by John Hodgman, has also been written in a similar format on Twitter. Similarly, the American poet and novelist, Nicholas Belardes has written his novel *Small Places* based on an imaginative love story in 900 tweets between 2008 and 2010. In this climate of extreme brevity, flash fictions or micro-fictions, a style of writing which involves producing very short pieces of fictional literature, have come into existence. Unlike short stories, which are usually several pages long and can notch up thousands of words, works of flash fiction dribble for, for example, 50-word pieces.

Owing to social media attractions, people spend a lot of time browsing their pages, and their appetite is satisfied by reading short passages of books on those platforms. Alan Kirby claims that “Young people today don’t know about books, don’t understand them, don’t enjoy them; in short, they don’t read” (2009, 67). Unlike Kirby, I believe that young people still read and enjoy reading; however, their modes of reading have changed, and the traditional methods of reading are no longer appealing to them (Ghasemi 2020, 162). In this cybercultural climate, many writers use the potential of social media as public and universal venues to receive or increase their popularity and readership among techno-savvy readers. The publication of literary works in social media outlets makes literature global, and literary works, which are not confined to a single state, are widely read and universally evaluated.

It is worth noting that the possibility of publishing works in diverse venues has increased the number of literary works in post-postmodernity. In the past, it was possible for a literary critic to read a great proportion of literary works published in a year; however, nowadays, because of the countless number of publications in different outlets, critics limit

themselves to the outputs by a number of well-known publishers. Departments of English and comparative literature departments also stick to their age-old established syllabi, believing that every student should be familiar with a selected number of well-known authors and their masterpieces, and should they decide to replace authors, owing to the limited number of courses offered, they replace them with other well-known ones, who are “routinely celebrated in the press and in the prize awards” (Childs 2005, 274). This way a great number of self-published and digital literary works are left without notice and judgment, and there is uncertainty about their growth and popularity. In such a cybercultural climate, the dissemination of literary works in social media platforms and the publication of e-books, online magazines and journals make libraries less crowded in cyberculturality.

Some authors use their social media pages to ask readers for their opinions about the names of their characters, plot developments and story endings. The British author Miranda Dickinson is an example, who asked for readers’ opinions while writing the second edition of her novel *Take a Look at Me Now* (2020). As her letter to readers at the very beginning of the book reads, the first edition, published in 2013, was a failure, so she decides to rewrite the book, this time with the help of her potential readers: “As I wrote the new novel in a four-and-a-half-week blind panic, I asked for suggestions on social media—a character’s name, an object in someone’s apartment, the name of a shop, and so on. It began as a game to make the writing process more fun and less lonely. But it changed everything” (Dickinson 2020, vii–viii). Her communication with readers in the process of rewriting the book has provided her with an opportunity to benefit from users’ contributions, comments and suggestions. It is worth noting that like postmodernism, which paid attention to readers’ participation in the creation of meanings and process of decodification, cyberculturalism favors the reactions and comments of readers, followers and users. However, unlike social media platforms in cyberculturalism, which allow users’ direct comments, the unilateral pattern of communication in traditional media—such as TV, radio and newspaper—with readers and viewers in postmodernism left little and controlled possibility for the audience to express their comments and criticism (Ghasemi 2016, 67–68).

In social media, users are also able to create, edit and share posts. Since in cyberculturalism the agency is transferred to users, copyright issues are sometimes violated. Users have the possibility to edit forms and contents

of posts they receive and then forward them to other users. This can be seen as the reformation of textuality. In such popular and populated environments, numerous posts are created and sent out, and consequently, receivers have no idea whether senders have originally created the posts, retouched or simply forwarded them. Thus, to live in cyberculturality is to have no sense of ownership for posts and cultural products exchanged in social media platforms, and authorship and copyright issues are usually under question in such outlets.

In these collaborative platforms, several cooperative websites, including “We Are Smarter Than Me” and “Watt Pad,” have been launched for community book writing projects. In these group writing pads, writers from anywhere with any orientations have the possibility to try their hands and contribute to writing stories. The co-authors begin and continue stories, add their own narratives, introduce and name new characters and write endings. In addition, the collaborators mix elements of two or more different works together and create hyper-hybrid works. As co-authors expand on stories based on their imaginations and orientations, they naturally write differently and repeatedly make changes in the directions of works in process. This is not to “treat authorship as a unified phenomenon of culture that emerged in a single historical or theoretical space” (Saunders 1992, 8). This is to say that authorship is not confined to a single stream, setting, perspective, culture and geography. Based on this discussion, the conventional notion of authors as single individuals and creators in charge of their works change in cyberculturalism. The use of digital technologies facilitates co-authoring, providing online environments for multiple authors to work on a shared multi-perspectival manuscript and collaborate to produce multimedia contents.

Novelling (2016), an online novel, is another recent example of collaborative cyberliterature. The work, which has won the Coover Award, is a generative system that algorithmically arranges fragments of text, video and sound in six-minute cycles, and the interface changes every 30 seconds; however, readers have the possibility to click at any time to change the page. As Inderjeet Mani notes, “stories can now easily embed multimedia information, allowing a mix of writing, audio, images, and video, which can be presented and animated to create works like never before” (2010, 177). In addition to being a digitally synthesized work, *Novelling* is the fruit of a collaboration between the Australian author Hazel Smith, writing the text, the American digital media artist and writer Will Luers, conducting video and coding, and the Australian composer

Roger Dean, producing sound. Andrew Bennett refers to such works as “collaborative and multiple authorship” (2005, 98), which makes us take distance from “solitary authorship” (95).

Wikipedia is another example where everyone can create a page, edit and/or translate the existing pages into other languages. In such collaborative atmospheres, multiple anonymous writers hammer main ideas based on their mindsets and knowledge. Naturally, the impersonality of collaborators happens, simply because the locus of attention moves away from creators to works. Additionally, joint projects with collaborators from different locations have reached their zenith. With the use of educational apps and social media, teachers and learners, scholars and researchers benefit from the connectivity feature of social media, and they can easily communicate and share a level of global knowledge with each other. Nowadays, in joint multidisciplinary projects, co-authors create Google Drive files and write their texts together at the same or different times from different locations. Likewise, in Zoom and Teams, several parties have the possibility to simultaneously work on a single file, write, edit, add, trim, comment and move forward, and no one possesses the sole ownership of documents. International online courses, seminars and conferences as well as surgeries conducted by several surgeons from different parts of the world reveal how close we stand in cyberculturalism.

PARADIGM TWO: OMNIPRESENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The omnipresence of the social media has turned societies into mediatized spaces in post-postmodernity. Images of people, who always have their cellphones in hand and browse or flick through their social media pages, signify a media-saturated society. These are platforms, wherein all peoples, regardless of their ranks, races, religions and other orientations, can sign/log in and use. Thus, presidents and ordinary people, educated and illiterate, haves and have-nots, famous and unknown, have the possibility to share their views with others. In these outlets, one can see and read posts about almost everything. However, this is not to say that these platforms stand all views, and they block those posts which are against policies set by both themselves and their governments. Despite this, compared to traditional mass media, social media pads are less at the peril of censorship. As a cyberspace, Elaine C. Graham sees social media as “a populist and dynamic realm, free of centralized or bureaucratic control” (2002, 160). Ephemerality, however, is applied to them. For example, posts as

well as text and voice messages that one receives today in social media can be deleted by receivers and senders. Moreover, because of lacking permanent identifiers, several internet pages and weblogs visited today might vanish tomorrow. Accordingly, researchers, who cite them in their research outputs, usually insert the dates they retrieved materials from them.

The ubiquity of social media and their key parts in our life have affected fiction writing, too. A survey shows that numerous contemporary literary works ooze social media. For example, in *How I Became a W Finn: A Noveramatry*, I employ a character, or as I call it “figment,” named “The Social Media.” The figment always accompanies the main figment, called The Dean’s Sweetie, and converses with her. The Dean’s Sweetie opens all valves of her heart to The Social Media, and in return, it comments, advises and even urges The Dean’s Sweetie to (re)act on some occasions throughout the noveramatry. For instance, The Dean’s Sweetie informs:

The Dean’s Sweetie

The head of de|part|men|t and OUR uni.versity staff were always for me. Now everybody knew knows who I am was. Every day I receive lots of friend requests in my social media and I have numerous friends there.

The Social Media

Right. I love you. You’ve created a marvelous page ☺ Suffice to post a picture of your BIG toe and receive 100 Likes and 10Comments. Other PhD students didn’t receive more than 10 Likes and 1 Comment for their great academic achievements! (Ghasemi 2017, 5–6)

Later, The Dean’s Sweetie notifies The Social Media of her relationship with The Boyfriend:

The Dean’s Sweetie

My parents wanted me to keep our relationship dark until after he gets a promotion. It was really hard not to post any of our pics on my social media.

The Social Media

True! It’s really hard not to inform The Social Media of your thoughts, events, plans and activities. I’m an integral part of your daily life.

The Dean’s Sweetie

I tell you a secret but promise to keep it dark. Ok?

The Social Media

Sure. I never tell anybody. You can choose “Only Me” option, so no 1 will learn about it. (7)

As the above passage shows, The Social Media is fully aware of the main figment’s secrets, plans and desires and has become a close associate of hers. As Christopher K. Brooks notes, in cyberspaces, “nothing is private in spite of the efforts to undo the Patriot Act, as millions of people willingly reveal their innermost thoughts and provide detailed accounts of their most mundane routines” (2013, 150). It is worth noting that the noveramatry challenges the definition of the term “friend” used in social media. It shows that despite having numerous friends in social media platforms, one can be lonely. Real friends, as we all admit, know each other, frequently meet face to face and have strong bonds. However, social media has minimized real and physical human interactions and changed the meaning of friend even to those whom we have never met but received and accepted their friendship requests. Accordingly, as Brooks writes, “people are *friendded* and *unfriendded* in the click of a mouse, are told of the end of their love affairs by text message, find intimacy in computer chat rooms, and link their pasts to their presents via *Facebook*” (150; emphases in original). Furthermore, because of the great impact of the social media in our lives, we have embraced cyberculture even in our writings, and for instance, the use of emojis and associated dictions are prevalent not only in the above excerpts but also in our daily written communications, including text messages, emails, etc.

As another example, *Don’t Read the Comments* (2020) by American contemporary author Eric Smith draws upon social media from another perspective. It represents both the joys and concerns of social media usage. The novel depicts the life of Divya Sharma, known as DIV online. She is a teen girl who has gained many followers because of her video game stream. She financially supports her mother, who is under economic pressure, through the sale of products she receives in exchange for doing sponsorships and advertisements on her popular channel. Despite this, her mother is irritated by insulting messages and comments that her daughter receives every day. The novel begins with these lines:

“Mom. We’ve been over this. Don’t read the comments,” I say, sighing as my mother stares at me with her fretful deep-set eyes [...]. Wrinkle lines

trail out from the corners like thin tree branches grown over a lifetime of worrying. I wish I could wash away all of her worries, but I only seem to be causing her more lately.

“I’m just not comfortable with it anymore,” my mom counters. “I appreciate what you’re doing with...you know, your earnings or however that sponsor stuff works, but I can’t stand seeing what they’re saying about you on the Internet.”

“So don’t read the comments!” I exclaim, reaching out and taking her hands in mine [...].

“How am I supposed to do that?” she asks, giving my hands a squeeze. “You’re my daughter. And they say such awful things. They don’t even know you. Breaks my heart.” (Smith 2020, 1)

This short conversation reveals some of the ethical ills in social media environments. Users with digitally generated fake and real identities and alternative subjectivities have the possibility to share their feelings with other users, and in this multilateral open climate, some of them feel free to insult others. In these virtual environments, Divya Sharma, who gains fame and earns money feels defenseless against cyber harassment, and her only strategy is to avoid reading nasty comments. Smith shows that women are more vulnerable in such environments and are usually insulted in sexist manner. The anonymity of electronic communication provides the ground for some male users to bombard women with sexual comments, belittling them or asking them for sexual favors. The novelist also shows that the dependency on social media makes users addicted and turn the prodigious social media users into mediaholic, and since they spend more time on social media platforms, they find less time to do their studies, works and their associated assignments. In *Don’t Read the Comments*, Aaron’s mother wishes that her son studies hard and becomes a doctor; however, Aaron has zero interest in becoming a doctor, and he spends his time on social media and writes games for a local developer. As the novel illustrates, social media is distractive, too. New messages and notifications frequently distract the attention of characters and even detour them from their main assignments, since they offer an impetus to constantly check their pages, devices, emails and messages.

In a similar manner to Smith, British author Nikesh Shukla demonstrates some of the disadvantages of social media in his novel *Meatspace*

(2015). The novel depicts typical daily life of Kitab Balasubramanyam as follows:

The first and last thing I do everyday is see what strangers are saying about me. I pull the laptop closer from the other side of the bed and press refresh on my inboxes. I have a Google calendar alert that tells me I have no events scheduled today, an assortment of Twitter and Facebook notifications, alerting me to 7 new followers, a favourite of a tweet thanking someone for liking my book, an invite to an event I'll never go to, spam from Play and Guardian Jobs [...]. Amazon recommends I buy the book I wrote [...]. I think about tweeting 'will write copy for food' but decide against it. There's an email from my dad. He doesn't usually send me emails; he prefers text messages. It's a forwarded message from a woman on a dating website [...]. I tweet:

"Feet hurt. Too much bogling last night. #boglingrelatedinjuries"

This is a lie. I was in bed by 10 last night. I had 4 beers on an empty stomach, felt pissed and irritated, shouted a lot in our front room. (2015, 1–2)

The passage shows how one's life can be controlled by social media. Kitab, who is a writer, starts and ends his days with what people write about him, and in-between, he is either tweeting or messaging or checking his plans on his Google calendar. The novel shows how one can be so obsessed with and defined by their online persona. In addition, decisions over relationships are made based on people's profiles, including photos, videos and provided information, on dating apps. To look seductive on their manipulative profiles, users modify their photos via some apps, enabling even amateur users to edit, filter, upscale and enhance image and video qualities. Accordingly, what people see in someone's profile as their personal photos might be totally different from what they see in reality. This is to say that people's and places' virtual identities might be different from their real identities. As Kitab discloses, people tell lies in such environments and even he himself does so. This is to say that because of their plural users with the possibility of content creating and sharing, a conduit for lies, pretentious claims, misleading and false information recurs in social media. Like Shukla, the American author Jessi Kirby shows in her novel *The Other Side of Lost* (2018) that telling lies is part and parcel of social media environments. Kirby portrays the life of Mari, a popular social media influencer, who shares posts with her fans on

Instagram and YouTube and infiltrates even secrets of her life. She tells lies about her boyfriend—another social media star—who is not in any relationship with Mari. Later, when Mari gets real about her life, and the truth is revealed, she suddenly loses her fans, showing how fame in social media can be like a flash in the pan.

The Hive (2019), co-written by the American author Barry Lyga and his wife Morgan Baden, also conveys that the improper use of social media in cyberculturalism can ruin one's credit and position in their communities and even in the whole world. In this story, set in the near future, users are held accountable for their online activities. Right after users turn 13, they receive a social media ID, and their online misconducts are reported to the Hive mob via phone notifications. In the novel, Cassie McKinney joins the Hive mob to penalize perpetrators such as a man who has written an anonymous post against his family:

He'd humiliated his family in public by writing an anonymous blog in which he'd detailed his ambivalence about his relationships with his wife and his children. Honesty on social media was admirable, but there were limits. After a particular post with the confession that his response to his wife's cancer diagnosis was to tell her he didn't love her anymore, his blog went viral, and the usual doxx gangs quickly uncovered his identity. His Dislikes and Condemns skyrocketed [...]. Overnight, Hive Justice was declared, and #publicjunk was agreed to be an appropriate sentence. So justice would be served, right here, right now. As punishment for his indiscretion, he'd be forced to parade around town naked, with the words "World's Worst Husband and Father" written on his chest. (15)

The novel reveals the high speed of virality in social media and how one's viral posts, photos or commentaries affect their lives. It also shows that no one can create fake identities and fictitious profiles on social media as before, and users and their activities are rated by the number of Likes and Dislikes they receive from other users. In a similar manner, American writer Dave Eggers discusses the transparency of users' identity in his dystopian novel *The Circle* (2013). In the novel, which paraphrases George Orwell's *1984*, the Circle, which is the world's most powerful social media company, devises a system, called "the Unified Operating System," which combines users' social media profiles, payment systems, email accounts, usernames and passwords. The system obliges everyone to have one single account, identity, password and payment system. Even

users' names are engraved on the back of their tablets and phones. Thus, users are unable to mask their real identities. As the novel reads,

The era of false identities, identity theft, multiple usernames, complicated passwords and payment systems was over. Anytime you wanted to see anything, use anything, comment on anything or buy anything, it was one button, one account, everything tied together and trackable and simple, all of it operable via mobile or laptop, tablet or retinal. (28)

Meanwhile, the company's range of other sophisticated technologies, named "SeeChange," including portable cameras worn by people all day long, put them under constant surveillance. In such a highly surveillance-oriented society, the use of VPN to change or disguise one's online identities, IP addresses and geographical locations are impossible for users. It is worth noting that in virtual environments, fake and real are so mixed that it would be hard to distinguish them. Some techniques and apps are used to alter real videos and deceive the viewers. For instance, in one video clip, two cats generously offer a dish of food to each other with their paws; however, the original video shows that the cats pull the dish toward themselves with hostility. Through reversing the video and decreasing its normal speed, the editor has totally changed the reality, showing that we are in alter-reality age. This shows that "cyberspace is indeterminate," and "it suspends 'normal' conventions of body, space, time and place" (Graham 2002, 170).

PARADIGM THREE: CYBERCOMMERCE AND CRYPTOCURRENCY

The world has become saturated with commercial advertisements in the cybercultural era. With the application of AI technologies, marketing teams have automated certain cognitive tasks to identify their audiences, classify them based on myriad variants, including their interests, demands, surfing behaviors, searching histories on the internet, languages and territorial locations and send them advertisements. In this light, advertisements have become an integral part of every program we listen to or watch. The frequent use of commercials between TV and radio programs, YouTube videos as well as Facebook, Instagram and Telegram posts cause interruptions, and since they disrupt the joy of watching and listening, they become annoying. In addition to their reappearance on TV, radio

and social media, they are also on billboards in streets, on buses and trains and in almost all public places. The repetition of advertisements shows that consumerism and capitalism cultures have become more prevalent in post-postmodernity.

Companies, which seek for more visibility to increase their sales and profits, also use social media to advertise their services and products, and sometimes they use it as a weapon against their rivals. In one clip, a “customer” appears in front of his cellphone camera and opens a fish tuna can, and to his surprise, he finds a dead cockroach in it! The video, which is later revealed to be made by a rival company, is seen widely in social media platforms, and the sales of the victimized company drop overnight. Like companies, some countries use social media as a weapon against each other. Their cyber teams actively create contents to attack their enemies’ values, highlight their weak points and address the areas that make the existing rifts wider among different groups and communities in those nations. Wrong decisions and actions of their governments are bold out and harshly criticized. Thus, people of the counter-countries are bombarded with negative videos and pessimistic posts, and some people who are unhappy with their governments or ruling systems eagerly forward or share the posts with other users on social media. This creates a sense of disappointment and frustration among members of target nations. In parallel, the attackers’ cyber teams create contents to magnify their own merits, cherish hopes and build self-confidence in their own people. This is to say that social media deeply affect peoples’ self-esteem.

In the cybercultural era, cell phones are multifunctional. They have also become our company at all times and places. People create videos, audios and other products and offer them in social media like Tik Tok and YouTube, and depending on the number of views they receive, they earn money, showing that in cybercommerce physical offices can be replaced by virtual environments. In such virtual environments, influencers use different ways to increase or maintain their followers. Thus, viewers are of high significance, and influencers and content producers fetishize them. To attract them, they must always be active and follow what their followers’ desire. They even reveal their private life to appeal to followers and increase their views. To this end, they use different techniques, just like fishermen who use attractive baits. Some use appealing names for their videos, while others even use deceit. They think of each viewer and follower as money and fame, and even negative comments, which add to the baskets of their feedback and improve their status. To

verify their accounts, several social media activists buy followers, simply because more followers make one's account more credible, and credibility attracts more advertising sponsorship. Hackers are the other cyber groups, who utilize phishing tactics—a form of social engineering where cyber-criminals deceive people into revealing sensitive information via fraudulent communications, malware installation, etc.—to achieve financial gains in post-postmodernity. In the past, robbers stole money from banks and their armored vehicles. The criminals used weapons to threaten and even physically harm bank staff and customers. However, in cyberculturality, hackers use different approaches to trick people and break into their bank accounts. This is another form of transition from physicality to virtuality in cyberculturalism.

Moreover, in cyberculturalism, working policies and systems further alter, and the lifelong permanent contracts, which are prevalent in post-modernity, are mostly replaced by temporary ones. Accordingly, people are hired for a short period of time, and they frequently need to change their jobs. As a result, many people try their hands in different jobs and acquire experience in miscellaneous fields, related or unrelated to their studies and interests. One who was a secretary in a law company yesterday serves as a city librarian today and might become an influencer tomorrow. The AI tools also assist job seekers to learn about open positions and apply for them. This transitory condition enhances people's mobility, as they need to change their locations according to their workplaces. The constant movement and relocation create rootlessness, disintegration and poly-consciousness. People who know that based on their short-term contracts are going to work in a workplace for a short period of time do not thoroughly invest to make connections. It also offers them a plurality of identities, as their roles, positions, salaries, co-workers, managers, nature of work, clients and neighbors repeatedly change. Thus, in addition to ever-shifting or multi-perspectival settings, their experiences and identities are not monolithic.

It is impossible to write about cyberculturalism without taking stock of new trends in global economics. For example, the introduction of digital currencies, such as Bitcoin, Ethereum, Tether, Binance, Cardano, etc., operating free of full control of governments, has caused several challenges to the authority of world banking systems and the monopoly of some dominant currencies. Almost all countries first declared all transactions involving Bitcoin and other virtual currencies illicit and stepped up

strong campaigns to block the use of “unofficial” digital money. Accordingly, they banned all their citizens from handling cryptocurrencies in their transactions. Even though such cryptocurrencies have never been backed by banks and governments, they have now and after more than a decade become part of the world economic systems. Eventually, some governments, including the United States, Canada, the EU, etc., have declared them legal. After the partial success of the existing virtual currencies, several other currencies have been introduced to the world trade. This is to say that, in cyberculturality, any measures, which aim to create unification in the world, are doomed to failure.

For the same reason, TV companies that found their industry in decline in cyberculturalism have decided to make TV sets smart and equipped them with different digital systems and tools to maintain their age-old established positions in households. It is worth noting that while TV as a prevalent telecommunication medium in postmodernity has been a group device, and there has been usually one in every household, the cell phone as a common ubiquitous medium in post-postmodernity is a lone device, and every member of the household has a cell phone through which they also use social media. Thus, unlike TV programs or movies watched by members of a family in postmodernity, cell phones and social media push people toward loneliness and isolation. Unlike the TV, the cell phone is a private device, and one needs passwords or other personal biometric authentication methods, including fingerprints, face and voice recognition, hand geometry, retinal identification, keystroke dynamics and handwritten signature, to use it.

To sum up, as a boundless phenomenon, cyberculturalism has transformed the artistic, literary, social and economic worlds. Despite the United States’ pioneering move in creating and promoting cyberspace, cyberculturalism has rendered territorial boundaries obsolete soon after its emergence and rapidly changed the international landscape, allowing everyone—users and programmers—to benefit from cybertechnologies. In cyberculturalism, our world is on the cusp of human–machine collaboration and AI expansion, and consequently, a proliferation of literary, artistic, cultural and economic neo-trends occurs within the existing dominant systems. The rapidly evolving and culturally expanding neo-trends of digital literature, including Twitterature, provide authors with a plethora of new ways to express their arts and literary skills and interact with the world. Authors and artists, professional and amateur, academic and non-academic with different backgrounds produce works, and their

products make art and literature polyolithic. This trend manifests that, like other fields, art and literature conventions in our digitally mediated world do not remain untouched. Accordingly, it is impossible to cram cybercultural arts and literatures into a single unit, as it is not feasible to confine social media platforms, firms, publication venues, currencies and companies to one. Writers, who usually have difficulty breaking into print by commercial publishers, find miscellaneous outlets, including social media platforms and self-publishing means, to release their literary and cultural products. As a result, the number of writers and artists grow, and their works gain popularity via social media. Moreover, cyberculturalism provides the ground for collaborative works, and hence, co-authors sometimes replace a single author, and their works, produced in collaborative atmospheres, include different outlooks and vantage points, showing that authorship and its products are prone to change. The widespread of digital literature has also created unprecedented possibilities to diversify (plat)forms of reading. Thus, readers are not confined to reading merely books' hard copies but have plurality of reading loci, including reading on their cell phones, laptops, etc. Additionally, the diversity of such multi-module and interactive tools, signifying cyberculturalism per se, facilitates communication, socialization, education, business transaction and news transmission.

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