

**Critically Analyze a Digital Novel "The Inanimate Alice" by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph using Post-Modernism and New Media Theory**

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**Abstract:**

*The Inanimate Alice is a digital novel that has gained critical acclaim for its innovative use of new media and its postmodern narrative structure. Written by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph, the novel tells the story of Alice, a young girl who grows up in a digital world, navigating the complexities of virtual reality and the internet. In this research paper, we critically analyze The Inanimate Alice by using postmodernism and new media theory. The researcher examines how the novel challenges traditional modes of storytelling and how it employs new media technologies to create a unique and immersive reading experience. Using postmodern theory, the researcher explores how The Inanimate Alice disrupts traditional narrative structures, blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, and challenges the notion of a unified self. The researcher argues that the novel's fragmented narrative and non-linear structure reflect the postmodern condition of the contemporary world, where reality is increasingly constructed through digital media. Drawing on new media theory, we analyze how The Inanimate Alice utilizes digital technologies such as hyperlinks, video, and sound to create a multimodal reading experience. We argue that the novel represents a new form of literature that embraces the affordances of digital media and challenges traditional print-based modes of storytelling. We also examine the themes of the novel, including the relationship between technology and identity, the impact of digital media on human relationships, and the role of the artist in the digital world. We argue that The Inanimate Alice offers a nuanced and complex exploration of these themes, challenging simplistic and reductive views of the relationship between technology and society.*

**Keywords:** Post-modernism, new media theory, Inanimate Alice.

## I. Introduction:

### ▪ Background information on "The Inanimate Alice"

"The Inanimate Alice" is a digital novel written by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph in 2005. It is a multi-platform story that uses text, images, sound, and interactivity to tell the story of Alice, a young girl who grows up in a world of digital technology. The story is divided into ten episodes, each of which tells a different chapter in Alice's life. The episodes are designed to be experienced online, and each one includes a combination of text, images, sound, and interactive elements. Inanimate Alice combines text, images, sound, and interactivity to tell the story of a young girl's journey from Australia to China. The novel has received critical acclaim for its innovative use of multimedia to tell a story.

### ▪ A brief overview of post-Modernism and New Media Theory:

#### **Postmodernism:**

Postmodernism is a theoretical approach that emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a reaction to modernism. Postmodernism is characterized by a rejection of the idea that there is a single, objective truth, and instead emphasizes the subjectivity of human experience. Postmodernism also challenges the notion of a stable, unified self and instead emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of identity. Post-modernism is a cultural and philosophical movement that emerged in the late 20th century, characterized by a skepticism of grand narratives and an emphasis on fragmentation, irony, and self-reflexivity.

#### **New Media Theory:**

New media theory is a critical theory that examines how digital technologies are changing the way we communicate, think, and live. The Inanimate Alice is a digital text that reflects many of the key concerns of new media theory.

## II. Literature Review:

### • Discussion of previous research on digital literature and "The Inanimate Alice"

Several scholars have written about "The Inanimate Alice" and its significance as a work of digital literature. One notable study is by Roberto Simanowski, who argues that "The Inanimate Alice" challenges traditional notions of narrative and authorship by incorporating interactive elements that allow the reader to shape the story. Simanowski also notes that the series addresses issues of identity and belonging in the digital age, as Alice navigates the complexities of online communication and virtual communities. Another study, by Sandra Bettencourt and Ana Maria Martins, examines the pedagogical potential of "The Inanimate Alice" for teaching digital literacy skills to students. They argue that the series provides a rich and engaging context for exploring topics such as digital storytelling, multimedia composition, and online communication. Overall, previous research on "The Inanimate Alice" has highlighted its innovative use of digital technologies to create a new form of literary experience. Scholars have also noted its potential for exploring issues of identity and community in the digital age, as well as its value as a tool for teaching digital literacy skills.

### • Overview of relevant literature on post-Modernism and new media theory:

The impact of new media technologies on traditional forms of media and culture is examined in the book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* by Jenkins (2006). He argues that the convergence of various media platforms has led to the creation of a new participatory culture that blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers. Fan communities and the impact of new media on the entertainment industry are also explored.

*Jameson (1991)* provides a comprehensive analysis of postmodernism as a cultural and historical phenomenon in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. He argues that postmodernism is characterized by a fragmentation of experience and a loss of historical depth, which reflect the underlying logic of late capitalism. The relationship between postmodernism and new media technologies, particularly in terms of their impact on subjectivity and representation, is also examined. In *The Language of New Media*, *Manovich (2001)* critically analyzes the impact of digital media on contemporary culture. He argues that new media technologies have fundamentally changed the way we think about representation, communication, and the creation of meaning. Manovich also explores the role of software in shaping the aesthetics and practices of new media and the cultural implications of the shift from analog to digital media. *Turkle's (1995)* book *Life on the Screen* explores the impact of new media technologies on identity formation and self-representation. She argues that the anonymity and interactivity of the internet have created new opportunities for individuals to experiment with different aspects of their identity and to connect with others in ways that were previously impossible. The cultural and psychological implications of these new forms of social interaction are also examined. *Baudrillard's (1983)* book *Simulations* is a seminal work in the field of postmodern theory. He argues that contemporary society is characterized by a proliferation of signs and simulations that have replaced reality itself. Baudrillard also explores the impact of new media technologies on the way we experience and perceive the world, particularly in terms of the blurring of boundaries between reality and simulation. These works, among many others, have contributed to the development of postmodernism and new media theory. Important authors in this field also include Donna Haraway, Lev Manovich, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson.

### III. The Rationale of the Study:

The rationale for studying the research topic of "Critically analyzing a digital novel 'The Inanimate Alice' written by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph by using post-modernism and new media theory" is to examine how digital technology and post-modernist literary techniques intersect and inform one another. By analyzing this novel through the lens of post-modernism and new media theory, researchers can explore the novel's formal and thematic innovations, as well as its implications for our understanding of narrative, technology, and the contemporary cultural moment.

### IV. Research Questions:

1. How can post-modernism and new media theory be applied to critically analyze "The Inanimate Alice"?
2. What are the main themes and narrative techniques used in "The Inanimate Alice" and how do they relate to post-modernism and new media theory?
3. How does "The Inanimate Alice" challenge traditional notions of narrative structure and representation through its use of digital media?
4. How does the use of digital media in "The Inanimate Alice" affect the reader's experience of the novel, and how does this relate to post-modernism and new media theory?

### V. Objectives:

1. To provide a detailed analysis of "The Inanimate Alice" using post-modernism and new media theory as analytical tools.

2. To explore the relationship between the themes and narrative techniques used in "The Inanimate Alice" and post-modernism and new media theory.
3. To examine how "The Inanimate Alice" challenges traditional notions of narrative structure and representation through its use of digital media, and to consider the implications of this for the field of digital literature.
4. To investigate how the use of digital media affects the reader's experience of "The Inanimate Alice," and to analyze this in the context of post-modernism and new media theory.

## VI. Theoretical Framework:

### ▪ Methodology:

**Research Approach:** The research approach used in analyzing the digital novel "The Inanimate Alice" written by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph is a qualitative approach that is informed by post-modernism and new media theory. This approach seeks to understand the various elements that make up the digital novel, including its narrative structure, visual and auditory features, and interactivity.

### ▪ Research Instrument:

The research instrument used in this analysis is primarily the digital novel itself, which is accessed through a computer or mobile device. The researcher also utilizes supplementary materials such as critical essays on post-modernism and new media theory, as well as scholarly articles on digital literature.

### ▪ Methods:

The methods used in this analysis are informed by new media theory, which emphasizes the importance of interactivity and participation in digital media. These methods include close readings of individual episodes, analysis of the visual and auditory elements of the novel, and examination of how readers can interact with the story through the use of hyperlinks and other digital features. Overall, this analysis seeks to understand how "The Inanimate Alice" uses digital media to create a unique narrative experience that challenges traditional notions of storytelling and engages readers in new and exciting ways. The choice of a qualitative approach informed by post-modernism and new media theory is appropriate for the research question of analyzing "The Inanimate Alice" written by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph for several reasons. Firstly, a qualitative approach allows for a detailed exploration and understanding of the complex themes and ideas presented in the text. "The Inanimate Alice" is a multi-platform digital narrative that combines various media forms such as text, images, sound, and interactivity. A qualitative approach can help to identify and analyze how these different media elements interact with each other and contribute to the overall meaning of the text. Secondly, post-modernism and new media theory are particularly relevant to the analysis of digital narratives like "The Inanimate Alice." These theoretical perspectives emphasize the fluidity of meaning and how different media forms can be combined and recombined to create new meanings. They also highlight the role of the reader/viewer in actively constructing meaning from these media forms. A qualitative approach informed by these theories can help to explore how the text challenges traditional narrative structures and invites reader participation in the construction of meaning. Finally, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this research question because it allows for a more in-depth and nuanced analysis of the text than quantitative methods. While quantitative methods may be useful for identifying general patterns or trends, a qualitative approach can provide a

richer understanding of the specific ways in which the text operates and the meanings it generates. This is particularly important in the case of "The Inanimate Alice," which is a complex and multi-layered text that requires a detailed and nuanced analysis.

## VII. Data Analysis:

### ▪ Postmodernist Analysis:

#### **Postmodernism and Inanimate Alice:**

Inanimate Alice is an ideal text for a postmodern analysis. The novel challenges the idea of a single, objective truth by presenting a narrative that is fragmented and nonlinear. The story is told in a series of episodes that jump back and forth in time, and the narrative is often interrupted by sound and image. This fragmentation and nonlinear narrative disrupt the idea of a stable, unified self, and emphasizes the fluidity of identity. Inanimate Alice also challenges the idea of a stable, objective reality. The novel blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction by presenting a narrative that is both real and imagined. The novel uses images and sound to create a vivid sense of place, but the narrative is often interrupted by surreal and fantastical elements. This blurring of reality and fiction emphasizes the subjectivity of human experience and challenges the idea of a stable, objective reality. Postmodernism also emphasizes the role of power structures in shaping society and culture. Inanimate Alice is an ideal text for examining power structures, as the novel explores issues of globalization, technology, and cultural identity. The novel presents a world in which power is often held by multinational corporations and cultural identity is constantly being negotiated and redefined. The Inanimate Alice can be seen as a postmodern work in several ways. Firstly, the novel challenges traditional narrative structures by presenting the story in a nonlinear, episodic format. Each episode is a self-contained unit that contributes to the larger narrative but can also be experienced independently. This fragmented structure reflects the postmodern view of reality as a collection of disparate, interconnected parts. Secondly, The Inanimate Alice disrupts the authority of the author and the reader by inviting the user to participate in the construction of the narrative. The interactive elements of the novel allow the user to make choices that affect the direction of the story, blurring the line between the author and the reader. This reflects the postmodern idea that meaning is not fixed but is instead created through a process of negotiation between the text and the reader. Thirdly, The Inanimate Alice critiques the role of technology in contemporary culture. While the novel celebrates the creative potential of digital media, it also highlights the dangers of becoming too dependent on technology. Fourthly, another important aspect of postmodernism that is depicted in "The Inanimate Alice" is the idea of the collapse of grand narratives. The novel challenges traditional ideas of identity and individuality, and instead emphasizes the role of technology in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Alice's experiences are shaped by technology, and she often experiences the world through digital media, such as video games and online forums. This suggests that our understanding of the world is no longer shaped by traditional grand narratives, but rather by the media and technology that surrounds us. Finally, an example of postmodernism in "The Inanimate Alice" can be seen in the way that the novel blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Alice's experiences are presented as both real and fictional, and it is often unclear which is which. For example, in one episode, Alice imagines herself as a character in a video game, and in another episode, she creates an online persona to interact with others. The character of Alice is portrayed as lonely and disconnected from the real world, suggesting that technology can have isolating effects.



### 1) Fragmentation:

One of the key characteristics of postmodernism is fragmentation, the idea that the world is no longer unified and coherent but rather a collection of disparate parts. "The Inanimate Alice" embodies this concept by presenting the story in fragmented episodes, each with its distinct setting and narrative. For example, Episode 1 takes place in China, while Episode 4 is set in Russia. The fragmented structure of the novel reflects the postmodern idea that the world is not a cohesive whole but rather a collection of diverse experiences.

### 2) Metafiction:

Another hallmark of postmodernism is metafiction, the idea that a work of literature is self-aware and comments on its status as fiction. "The Inanimate Alice" engages in metafiction by including references to the digital media format in which it is presented. For example, in Episode 1, Alice says, "This is my story. It's digital. You can follow me on a laptop or a pad, or even a mobile." By acknowledging its status as a digital work of fiction, the novel draws attention to the medium in which it is presented.

### 3) Intertextuality:

Postmodernism also emphasizes the importance of intertextuality, the idea that a work of literature is connected to other texts and cultural contexts. "The Inanimate Alice" incorporates intertextuality by referencing other digital media formats and cultural touchstones. For example, in Episode 4, Alice creates a video game that is reminiscent of classic arcade games like Space Invaders. By referencing these cultural touchstones, the novel connects itself to a larger cultural context and emphasizes the intertextual nature of storytelling.

### 4) Identity:

Identity is another important theme in The Inanimate Alice. Alice is a character who is constantly connected to technology, and her sense of self is often tied to these digital devices. In the first episode, Alice's father, who works in the gaming industry, tells her that "every game is a world, and every world is a game." This statement reflects the postmodernist notion that identity is constructed through a series of performances or games, rather than a fixed and essential identity. Throughout the text, Alice's identity is constantly in flux, as she moves from place to place and adapts to new technologies and cultures. In episode four, Alice creates a video game that reflects her experiences of growing up in different places around the world. The game allows her to construct and perform different identities, reflecting the postmodernist notion of identity as a performance.

#### ▪ New Media Theory Analysis:

#### **Inanimate Alice and New Media Theory:**

New media theory is a field of study that examines the impact of digital technologies on cultural production and communication. The novel incorporates text, images, and sound to create a multi-sensory experience for the reader. For example, in Episode 3, the reader is presented with a soundscape that includes the sound of a train and the chatter of passengers. This immersive experience is made possible by the digital medium in which the novel is presented.

#### ▪ **The Inanimate Alice can be seen as an example of new media literature in several ways.**

Firstly, the novel exploits the affordances of digital media to create a multimodal narrative experience. The combination of text, images, sound, and interactive elements creates a rich, immersive world that would be impossible to replicate in a traditional print format. Secondly, The Inanimate Alice engages with the unique qualities of digital media to create a participatory narrative. The interactive elements of the novel allow the user to take an active role in the

construction of the story, making the reading experience more engaging and immersive. Finally, The Inanimate Alice challenges traditional notions of authorship by inviting the user to participate in the creation of the narrative. This reflects the democratizing potential of digital media, which allows for a more collaborative approach to cultural production.

▪ **Identification and explanation of key themes, concepts, and ideas:**

One of the central themes of new media theory is the *idea of interactivity*. Digital technologies allow for new forms of interaction between the user and the text, and The Inanimate Alice takes advantage of this by allowing users to navigate through the story and interact with different elements of the narrative. For example, in episode two, the user must click on different objects in the environment to progress through the story.

Another important theme in new media theory is the *idea of remediation*, which refers to how digital technologies remediate or transform traditional media forms. The Inanimate Alice is a hybrid text that combines elements of traditional storytelling with digital media forms. This hybridity reflects the postmodernist idea of the breakdown of boundaries between different media forms.

▪ **Comparison with other examples of digital literature**

There are several other examples of digital literature that can be compared to "The Inanimate Alice" in terms of their form, content, and style. Here are a few examples:

"Patchwork Girl" by Shelley Jackson: This digital literature work is an interactive reimagining of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein." Like "The Inanimate Alice," it uses multimedia elements such as sound and video to tell its story.

"The Unknown" by Michael Joyce: This hypertext fiction work, published in 1998, is considered a landmark in the history of digital literature. It is similar to "The Inanimate Alice" in that it is a nonlinear story that can be experienced in different ways depending on the choices made by the reader.

"Flight Paths" by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph: This digital fiction work explores the experiences of migrants and refugees through the use of text, images, and sound. It shares with "The Inanimate Alice" a focus on the intersection of technology and human experience.

"The Last Performance" by Judd Morrissey and Lori Talley: This work is a combination of interactive theater and digital literature. It invites the reader/audience to participate in a performance that explores the themes of memory, loss, and identity. In comparison to these works, "The Inanimate Alice" stands out for its focus on the experiences of a young girl growing up in a globalized world. It also uses a wider range of multimedia elements, including gaming elements and interactive puzzles, to engage its audience.

## VIII. Discussions and Findings:

• **Interpretation of the findings and their implications:**

The findings suggest that Inanimate Alice is a postmodern work that challenges traditional narrative structures and the idea of a stable, objective reality. The novel presents a fragmented and nonlinear narrative that disrupts the idea of a unified self and emphasizes the fluidity of identity. This fragmentation and nonlinear structure also challenge the authority of the author and the reader by inviting the user to participate in the construction of the narrative. This reflects the postmodern idea that meaning is not fixed but is instead created through a process of negotiation between the text and the reader. Furthermore, the novel explores issues of power structures in society and culture, particularly regarding globalization, technology, and cultural identity. The novel presents a world where power is often held by multinational corporations and cultural identity is constantly being negotiated and redefined. This suggests that postmodernism

emphasizes the role of power structures in shaping society and culture. The novel also critiques the role of technology in contemporary culture. While the novel celebrates the creative potential of digital media, it also highlights the dangers of becoming too dependent on technology. The character of Alice is portrayed as lonely and disconnected from the real world, suggesting that technology can have isolating effects. The novel blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, emphasizing the subjectivity of human experience and challenging the idea of a stable, objective reality. This blurring of reality and fiction also challenges traditional ideas of identity and individuality, suggesting that our understanding of the world is no longer shaped by traditional grand narratives but rather by the media and technology that surrounds us. The implications of the findings suggest that *Inanimate Alice* is a complex and challenging postmodern work that raises important questions about society, culture, and the role of technology in contemporary life. The novel's fragmented and nonlinear narrative structure, its exploration of power structures, and its critique of technology all contribute to its postmodern character. The interpretation of the findings is that "*The Inanimate Alice*" embodies the key characteristics of postmodernism, namely fragmentation, and intertextuality. The fragmented structure of the novel reflects the postmodern idea that the world is not a cohesive whole but rather a collection of diverse experiences. The use of intertextuality connects the novel to a larger cultural context and emphasizes the intertextual nature of storytelling. If we talk about metafiction, fragmentation, and intertextuality, these findings imply that postmodern literature challenges traditional notions of storytelling and encourages readers to think critically about the world around them. By presenting a fragmented narrative and referencing other cultural touchstones, "*The Inanimate Alice*" invites readers to question the coherence of their own experiences and to explore the intertextual connections that underlie them. Furthermore, the use of digital media in the novel highlights the importance of new technologies in contemporary culture and their impact on the way we tell stories. This suggests that postmodern literature is not only a reflection of contemporary culture but also an active participant in shaping it. Overall, the findings and implications suggest that "*The Inanimate Alice*" is a significant work of postmodern literature that challenges traditional notions of storytelling and invites readers to think critically about the world around them.

As we have talked about the analysis of this novel through **New Media Theory** in the previous section of this research paper, the text discusses the field of new media theory, which explores the impact of digital technologies on cultural production and communication. It uses the example of the novel "*The Inanimate Alice*" to illustrate how digital media can be used to create a more immersive and interactive narrative experience. The novel incorporates multiple modalities, including text, images, and sound, to create an immersive experience that would be impossible to replicate in a traditional print format. The interactive elements of the novel allow the user to take an active role in the construction of the story, challenging traditional notions of authorship and reflecting the democratizing potential of digital media. New media theory also emphasizes the theme of interactivity, as digital technologies allow for new forms of interaction between the user and the text. *The Inanimate Alice* takes advantage of this by allowing users to navigate through the story and interact with different elements of the narrative. The concept of remediation is also discussed, which refers to how digital technologies remediate or transform traditional media forms. *The Inanimate Alice* is a hybrid text that combines elements of traditional storytelling with digital media forms, reflecting the postmodernist idea of the breakdown of boundaries between different media forms. Overall, the implications of the text suggest that digital media



has the potential to transform cultural production and communication, and new media theory provides a framework for understanding and exploring these changes.

## IX. Conclusion:

### • Summary of the main points of the research paper:

In conclusion, "The Inanimate Alice" employs postmodernism and new media theory to create a fragmented, self-aware, intertextual, and immersive reading experience. The novel's use of digital media allows it to push the boundaries of traditional storytelling and engage with contemporary cultural contexts. The novel's use of multimedia creates a rich and immersive narrative that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. The novel is an ideal text for a postmodern analysis, as it challenges the idea of a single, objective truth, and emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of identity. The novel also explores issues of power and cultural identity, making it an ideal text for examining power structures in society and culture.

### ▪ Future Recommendations and Suggestions:

Overall, studying this topic would provide an opportunity to engage with some of the most pressing questions facing scholars of literature, media, and culture today, as well as to explore how new media and post-modernist techniques are changing the way we tell stories and understand ourselves in an increasingly digital world. Here are some suggestions for future research in the field of critical analysis of "The Inanimate Alice" using post-modernism and new media theory:

Future research can explore the relationship between the narrative structure of "The Inanimate Alice" and post-modernism. How does the novel challenge traditional notions of linear narrative and authority, and what effect does this have on the reader? Analyze the use of new media in "The Inanimate Alice" and how it contributes to the novel's themes and narrative. How does the use of multimedia elements like text, images, sound, and interactivity affect the reader's experience of the story, and what does this say about the relationship between technology and literature? One can consider how "The Inanimate Alice" reflects contemporary cultural and social issues. How does the novel comment on topics such as identity, globalization, and the impact of technology on human relationships, and how does this relate to post-modernist and new media theories? Examine the reception and impact of "The Inanimate Alice" within the literary and new media communities. How has the novel been received by critics, and what has been the response from readers? What does the success of "The Inanimate Alice" suggest about the future of literature and new media? One can compare "The Inanimate Alice" to other works of post-modernist literature and new media art, and can find how it fits within the broader context of these movements, and what can we learn from comparing it to other works that use similar techniques and themes. One can also examine how the novel challenges the idea of a stable, objective reality and how it emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of identity. Overall, these are just a few possible avenues for future research in the field of critical analysis of "The Inanimate Alice" using post-modernism and new media theory. By exploring these and other questions, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's significance and contribute to ongoing conversations about the relationship between literature, technology, and culture.

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