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“Skibidi toilet” as a representative cultural phenomenon of Generation Alfa

Postmodernism is, of course, the dead end from which hauntology starts - but one of its roles is to denaturalise what postmodernism has taken for granted, to conceive of postmodernism as a condition in the sense of a sickness.

Mark Fisher

Introduction

In the age of a fully digitised new generation childhood lifestyle, there are a lot of experiences that still are a bit obscure for most people. For instance, a Blue Whale Challenge that appeared in 2016 in post-Soviet space, remained a big puzzle for psychologists, pedagogs, humanities observers, etc. The challenge is supposed to be a social network game, where every level can be achieved by completing of certain task, that is suggested by the game administrator that is anonymous. The tasks are initially innocuous before introducing elements of self-harm and ultimately the final challenge requiring the player to kill themselves¹. Such practices were happening unnoticed before another victim of such a game started to be viral on the Internet when before committing suicide. The 17-year-old girl posted the selfie in her Vkontakte's² blog with the words “nya bye”, after she lay down on the rails in anticipation of the train. Notwithstanding that it was happening mostly with the representatives of Gen Z, the rationality of researching and explaining such internet anomalies is obvious. Especially after taking into consideration the fact, that according to Statista only 49% of parents in the United States look at the call records or text messages on a smartphone their child uses³. The survey included kids between 5 to 11 years old, so perfectly fits in the estimated age of Generation Alfa. Exact timeline boundaries for Generation Alfa are not established yet, but every assumption oscillates between early 2010s and mid-2020s.

The essence of postmodernism in such cultural phenomenon as the Skibidi Toilet seems to have reached apotheosis. First of all lack of any more or less explicit meaning of the happenings on the screen, second of all nihilism which is depicted in the form of unconditional violence that just jumps into the eyes of the viewers, third of all the absence of any socio-political context of the endless war between two belligerent fractions simply showing how young generation see the modern

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-39729819>.

² The most popular post-Soviet social network.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/439801/us-parent-interest-child-online-activities/>.

geopolitics which affecting the everyday life of the vast majority of people. All that mixture in an enormously popular cultural miracle seemed to be impossible in the middle of the XX century when modernism and dialectical materialism prevailed in the public discourse. On the one side, postmodernism tools that are consciously or unconsciously applied in the Skibidi toilets give to people who are lost in political processes to express their apathy and feelings of doom, but on the other side postmodernism also expropriates people from tools and capacities of showing a cause-and-effect relationship of the reality, hence possibilities of comprehending and counteracting against unwanted things that makes them unsecured, anxious and depressed. Well-known aphorism “awareness of the problem is the first step to solving it”, seems to be a universal cure to the postmodern impotency that reigns right now in the mass culture

Surprisingly, the relatively new and incredibly popular⁴ phenomenon of the Skibidi toilet remains completely ignored in the cultural studies field of science. Definitely, there is not so much harmful content at first sight, but what can escape our attention is the more global, fundamental and life-term influence of such internet miracles as Skibidi toilet. Of course, it's about ideology, that emanates from the content preferences of kids. What ideology represents the Skibidi toilet? Let's see where the chain of logical implications will institute the answer. The unprecedented virality of those videos caused even more virality, so this autocatalytic reaction led to the enrichment of the YouTube Trends almost immediately, therefore an algorithm was just establishing the Skibidi toilets videos in the recommendations bar, that shows to users in the home page of the website.

Due to the age of the eldest Generation Alfa representatives (14-15 years old), they are not able to consciously create cultural expressions such as memes, video sketches, serials, movies and texts. But digital reality equalizes all human beings in the Internet space, as users despite of age for instance. It means that modern kids can express their broadly understood wishes and ideas by choosing the content that they watch with the same strength as adults⁵. In the Author's perception, this is the way, that can show us the contemporarily unestablished mentality of Gen Alfa humans.

Methodology

In such a specific and fresh topic for research with the question stated in the topic of this project, it looks wise to use the explanatory research method. It includes a collection of distinctive messages and ideas from the content of DaFuq!?Boom! channel on YouTube, and interpretations of them. Also, comments under the videos

⁴ As of November 2023, YouTube videos associated with Skibidi Toilet accumulated over 65 billion views, while on the social media platform TikTok, the "Skibidi Toilet" hashtag is trending and comprises 15.3 billion views, according to the Washington Post.

⁵ Apart from the fact that adults can express themselves in other ways.

on YouTube will be taken into consideration, in order to extract some sort of feedback and reflections that will depict viewers' attitudes toward the content. The selection of criteria for comments includes high engagement levels (likes and comments), content relevance to the Skibidi theme, and diversity in the geographic representation of commenters. The process will involve using YouTube's API or manual collection methods. Data will be collected and stored securely, with restricted access. All names, places, and data about the time of leaving comments will be hidden, to ensure the impossibility of detecting them on YouTube and therefore deanonymization of users. The study will employ purposive sampling of the most prominently informative and eloquently showing the relations to the topic comments, in order to yield insights into the research question. The study also intends to use contextual analysis which means that comments will be analyzed not only for their textual content but also within the context of the video. This involves understanding the impact of visual elements, hashtags, and the general sentiments of reactions.

Besides, the project will include journalists' reports on the topic of the Skibidi toilet in order to increase the range of incoming information for analysis. The trustworthiness⁶ of the selected sources will not be taken into consideration due to very low interest in bias and misinformation that can appear in more politicized topics.

All gathered data will be directed into the effort to attempt to answer two following questions: "What narratives and messages carry the Skibidi Toilet phenomena?" and "How accurate is the claim that the Skibidi Toilet can represent some kind of wishes and ideas of Generation Alfa?".

The Skibidi Toilet

The creator of the Skibidi toilet is 25-year-old Alexey Gerasimov self-made animator and graphic designer, who developed "the biggest online phenomenon of the year"⁷ because his age seems to be not so disconnected from the Generation Alfa. Some collateral facts, that claim his active participation in Discord servers on Roblox game's topic, which is another popular mass cultural thing which is highly popular among modern kids as Minecraft was during the childhood of the youngest representatives of Generation Z. This information can give some sort of insight how Alexey managed to contextually and ideologically aim so precisely his prodigal (from a technical point of view) animation works.

The main plot of the Skibidi toilet series is a conflict between singing human-headed toilets – the titular "Skibidi Toilets" and humanoids with CCTV cameras, speakers, and televisions in place of their heads. In a half-destroyed, constantly in-fire megapolis setting, the Skibidi Toilets and their leader G-Man

⁶ Read: eminence.

⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/10/skibidi-toilets-you-tube-children-internet/>;

(G-Toilet) allegedly threaten humanity. This is basically all that can be stated in the matters of the meaning background that is depicted in all 73 (sic!) episodes. But the only two soundtracks that appear in the permanent cacophony of lasers, rockets, broken heads, and deadly sound waves that erupt those entities in order to annihilate each other give us distinctive semantic hints, that allow us to understand the meaning behind all these postmodern references' concoction to Half-Life, Counter-Strike and TikTok.

A mashup of the songs "Give it to Me" by Timbaland and "Dom Dom Yes Yes" by Bulgarian artist Biser King, created by a TikTok user, appears in each episode as the theme of the Skibidi Toilets. The other song that appears in some episodes is "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Tears for Fears which is present in some episodes as the theme of the robots forces. The titles of these songs are represented in the design of research as symbols of thesis-antithesis dialectics that materialize in the endless war between toilets and machines. In the personal interpretation of happenings introduced in episodes Skibidi Toilets' party which is depicted as the enemy in the whole serial narrative represents the working class in real life that submerged to the neck in the toilet as a metaphor of the enthralled socio-economic reality built and maintained by capitalistic power structures. Robots' party, in turn, is shown as "good guys" due to the two collateral reasons, given in the show. First of all, the most powerful argument in the case of the proposition above is that the viewer is personified as a robot that participates in the hostilities against Skibidi Toilets. So in that way, we as observers identify ourselves as a part of the robots' side, because toilets attack us as viewers (throughout the whole serial "our" robot is killed several times but we always reincarnate in the body of others). Carl Schmitt's friend-foe distinction in application⁸. Last of all, after the victory over Skibidi Toilets robots always show each other thumb-up signs as a symbol of victory and appreciation of mutual help in the battle. This small trick is also trying to humanize robots against the backdrop of the unconditionally evil toilets with people's heads. But the essential part of understanding the concept of robots' party, and catching the metaphor that will make more sense to the viewer what is going on on the screen, lies in the anthropomorphic nature of their bodies. They have humanoid bodies but instead of heads, they have everything that represents means of imposing cultural hegemony and invigilation in our society. Televisions and speakers are embodiments of mass media weapons that deliver in the minds of the masses ideas, beliefs, attitudes and wishes that are desirable for the established *status quo*. Cameras, in turn, symbolize the role of invigilation of the power structures, which prevents probable riots of opinions and actions and creates the feeling of permanent observation, that limits and suppresses the freedom not even our bodies but our minds, due to systemic terrorizing and cancelling people, that are in the act of doubt or contestation.

⁸ Schmitt, C. (1996). *The concept of the political*. University of Chicago Press.

The cherry on the cake will be the semantic application of the inherent to every fraction soundtracks that were mentioned before. In the case of robots, it's quite more obvious, that the song "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" which is used as a main theme of their side reveals the class belonging to them in the real world class struggle. Analysis of the title gives all reasons to interpret robots' political goals in this seemingly non-sense war in a way, that they already seized the power some time ago, and they are not going to share it with someone else. Their intentions could be expressed in the sentences: *"We know, that you want to seize the power in order to make our world more just, but we don't want to lose our positions in the society. To petrify changes we invented a lot of weapons and technologies and we are going to use them against you."*

Skibidi Toilets' theme appears to be a mashup of the song "Give it to Me" and "Dom Dom Yes Yes", if we take into consideration all that was said before, debunking the real attitude of the Alexey Gerasimov to the power structure that reigns in our real world in the moment. The words "give it to me" depict the political goal of the Skibidi Toilets, which are trying to seize power in the Skibidi world, because in the serial this is the main and the only object that can be inferred based on the context of what is happening. The "Dom Dom Yes Yes" song is mostly associated with a TikTok influencer under the nickname @yasincengiz38, in a way another phenomenon of TikTok due to his number of followers (15.6 million) and likes (210.6 million). The user is obese and most of his videos⁹ are about ordering and eating an enormous amount of Turkish food and performing something like the Bellydance to the beat of the Bulgarian singer's "Dom Dom Yes Yes" during the whole chronometric of the videos. The mixture of these meanings shows us the ridicule of the author who shows the desire of the working class to take power into their own hands and ridicules its nincompoopiness and metaphorical gluttony, hinting to us that nothing good will happen for society when this happens. Those prejudices demask neoliberal political preferences of the creator of the show, directed to attempt to maintain the myth of the impotence of a socialist revolution alternative.

The most interesting comments from the point of view of relevance to the topic look following:

- *"Blud destroyed a whole generation with skibidi toilet, I mean I hear kids all day screaming 'skibidi' or something 🧠"* – one of the most frequent occurring comments under all videos;
- *"The views are more than my country's population 🧠"* – scale of popularity of the show;
- *"Skibidi toilet series: it's alright nice series ㄟ(ˉ▽ˉ)ㄟ. Kids who turned it it into kids show and ruined it: 🤪"* – not only Gen Alfa watches the show;
- *"The skibidi toilets evolved way too much and they've become invincible I fear. Cameramen gotta step up their game"* – undoubtful rooting for the robots' fraction;

⁹ Including the most popular one, that summarily collected 788 millions of views.

- “*Seriously though, the thought of being in his position is truly terrifying.* 🤖 🤖” – the effect of ‘being there’ achieved by the viewer’s incarnation in the robot’s body. Possibly, one of the causes of the popularity of the show;

Apart from the numerous articles admiring Alexey’s success, some Indonesian journalists report about various video uploads showing children imitating the Skibidi Toilet movement, including facial expression, which rests on unnatural moving in the left and in the right eyes and singing already mentioned mashup. “*Some videos even show the child getting into the basket or other place that looks like a toilet*”¹⁰. Such behaviour was already unofficially labelled as a “Skibidi Toilet Syndrome”.

This postmodern masterpiece is constructed in such a difficult and implicit way, that the superficial mind would probably claim that it is too demanding for young Generation Alfa to comprehend the ideology that stays behind this show. But it's not a big secret to cultural studies associates, that even unconsciously people absorb and apply the ideas that are sealed in every cultural object. For instance, the popular cartoon SpongeBob was restricted by more than 120 countries due to violence and foul language¹¹. It would seem that what is wrong with SpongeBob? Another example of the Simpsons that are also restricted by the vast majority of the countries, is by acquisitions of “violence, humiliation of family values, disorderly behaviour, and insulting public figures and countries”¹². If such meagre things inspire the banning of some episodes that show those harmful behaviours, then dehumanization, glorification of the arms race¹³, unprecedented violence, and most of all encouraging people to join the oppressor (by the depiction of robots as a good side), should cause those in power to block the entire show or at least motivate aware parents to ban the Skibidi Toilets for their kids.

Of course, we should not mitigate the material circumstances, that are blatantly going on right now in economic and political dimensions and make such imaginary post-apocalyptic, half-destroyed Skibidi Toilets’ worlds relevant in the eyes of the growing generation. The ruling class of every nation, which occupied all decision-making positions slowly but surely bringing all of us closer to the civilisation abyss, and we, as metaphoric Skibidi Toilets have to unite and counteract.

Artur Kharchuk

¹⁰<https://jateng.tribunnews.com/2023/08/07/waspada-bahaya-sindrom-skibidi-toilet-pada-anak-segera-arahkan-ke-konten-positif#>;

¹¹ <https://brightside.me/articles/13-popular-cartoons-that-are-banned-in-some-countries-388160/>;

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Another crucial pile on which the whole plot of the show stands.

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