



## STRUCTURE OF FEELING AND DIGITAL ALIENATION: CULTURAL MATERIALISM IN OKKY MADASARI'S NOVEL *KERUMUNAN TERAKHIR* *Struktur Perasaan dan Alienasi Digital: Matrealisme Budaya dalam Novel "Kerumunan Terakhir" Karya Okky Madasari*

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze Okky Madasari's novel *Kerumunan Terakhir* (2016) through the concepts of cultural materialism and Raymond Williams' (1977) structure of feelings in order to reveal the dynamics of digital alienation and identity precarity experienced by urban subjects in the social media era. This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive-analytical approach. The data are in the form of textual units, including dialogue excerpts, internal monologues, and narrative descriptions, sourced from the novel as the main data source. Data collection was carried out through a literature study with repeated reading techniques and corpus recording, while the analysis used the triple hermeneutics method that integrates literary analysis with critical media studies and affect theory. The results show that Madasari's narrative articulates the structure of emergent feelings through the duality of the novel's characters: Jayanegara, who is a nobody in the real world, transforms into @Matajaya, who is adored on social media; and Noname, who lives in a remote village, transforms into the influential @Akardewa, a manifestation of digital alienation, the precarity of virtual identity, and the subject's inability to separate their real self from their digital persona. This study concludes that Indonesian fiction functions as an archive of digital social experiences that have not been formally articulated and demonstrates the transnational relevance of Williams's theory in the context of the Digital Global South.

**Keywords:** digital alienation; virtual identity; kerumunan terakhir; identity precarity; structures of feeling

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis novel *Kerumunan Terakhir* (2016) karya Okky Madasari melalui konsep materialisme budaya dan struktur perasaan Raymond Williams (1977) guna mengungkap dinamika alienasi digital dan prekaritas identitas yang dialami subjek urban di era media sosial. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Data berupa satuan tekstual mencakup kutipan dialog, monolog internal, dan deskripsi naratif yang bersumber dari novel sebagai sumber data utama. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui studi pustaka dengan teknik pembacaan berulang dan pencatatan korpus, sedangkan analisis menggunakan metode triple hermeneutics yang mengintegrasikan analisis sastra dengan kajian studi media kritis dan teori afek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa narasi Madasari mengartikulasikan struktur perasaan emergen melalui dualitas tokoh-tokoh novel Jayanegara yang bukan siapa-siapa di dunia nyata menjelma menjadi @Matajaya yang dipuja di media sosial; Noname, yang hidup di perdesaan terpencil, menjelma menjadi @Akardewa yang berpengaruh sebagai manifestasi dari alienasi digital, prekaritas identitas virtual, dan ketidakmampuan subjek memisahkan diri nyata dari persona digitalnya. Studi ini

menyimpulkan bahwa fiksi Indonesia berfungsi sebagai arsip pengalaman sosial digital yang belum terartikulasikan secara formal dan mendemonstrasikan relevansi teori transnasional Williams dalam konteks *Global South Digital*.

**Kata-kata kunci:** alienasi digital; identitas virtual; kerumunan terakhir; prekariat identitas; struktur perasaan

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## INTRODUCTION

Without realizing it, most aspects of human life today have been heavily influenced by the development of social media. One of the most noticeable impacts is the ability to construct and display identities in virtual spaces or social media platforms. Communication patterns have undoubtedly been the primary change since social media entered our lives. However, this seems insufficient, as the way people evaluate themselves and relate to others has also changed. This is because in the social media era, everyone has multiple faces and identities. Numerous new identities emerge, distinct from their real-world identities. This issue appears to give rise to problems or negative habits for many individuals. These negative impacts include digital alienation, the need for social recognition, and the instability of virtual identities. This phenomenon or issue was previously discussed by Raymond Williams (1977), who referred to it as the concept of the structure of feeling. This concept encompasses the social and emotional experiences that emerge in people's lives over a period of time.

The first two decades of the 21st century witnessed a radical transformation in how Indonesian urban subjects construct, display, and stake their identities in digital spaces. The presence of social media platforms has not merely transformed communication practices but has fundamentally restructured what Williams (1977) called "*structures of feeling*," the sum of the affects, values, and ways of feeling that exist beneath the surface of formal ideology. Amid this surge of scholarship on digitality, a critical gap persists: the application of Williams's cultural materialism framework to Indonesian literature, specifically to explore *digital alienation* and the *precarity of identity*, remains very limited. Most existing studies either apply Western sociological frameworks without adaptation to the Indonesian context or engage with Williams only partially, without integrating his concept of structures of feeling with contemporary digital alienation theory and identity performativity theory within a unified analytical model (Abuaniza, 2015).

This article fills this gap by systematically applying Williams's integrated theoretical framework of structures of feeling, cultural materialism, and mobile privatization alongside Dean's (2009) communicative capitalism, Fuchs's (2021) digital labor, and Butler's (1990) identity performativity to Okky Madasari's novel *Kerumunan Terakhir* (2016). Previous studies of this novel have explored various dimensions. Habsari (2022) highlights the spatial trialectomies and heterotopias of social media that shape the digital crowd in the narrative. Rachmawati et al. (2024) identify the pathology of social life as a consequence of digital logic. Devilito et al. (2016) analyze the millennial identity crisis from a psychological perspective. Dermawan (2024) reads the novel through the lens of the millennial worldview and generational fragmentation. However, analyses that specifically use Williams's cultural materialism lens in an integrated manner connecting structures of feeling with digital alienation theory and identity precarity as living, affective experiences are absent from the scholarly record. This constitutes the research gap that this study addresses.

The novel follows the protagonist, Jayanegara, a young man who is fearless, unemployed, and has no clear dreams in the real world. His only friend is his girlfriend, Maera.

In the real world, he is a nobody, but in the digital space, he constructs a new persona called "@Matajaya," a figure who is brave, has desires, and is adored on social media. This duality, Jayanegara, a nobody in the real world, and @Matajaya, an influential figure in the digital world, is the heart of Madasari's narrative. Surrounding Jayanegara are other characters who also experience a similar duality: Maera (@Maerasari); Noname, a resident of a remote village who transforms into the admired @Akardewa; and Karin (a 17-year-old teenager), who appears as @Bungabuana. This narrative resonates strongly with recent studies on digital alienation and the condition of subjects trapped in the logic of the digital crowd (Dean, 2009; Han, 2017)

Williams's relevance to this study extends beyond thematic parallels. As Wang (2022) argues, his cultural materialism offers a framework that avoids both Eurocentrism and cultural relativism by grounding analysis in the material conditions of cultural production. The concept of mobile privatization that Williams (1974) developed for television, a fusion of public mobility and domestic privacy, has strong resonance with the logic of social media: a space that feels personal and intimate while also structurally being both public and commercial (Subijanto, 2024).

In line with the discussion above, the main theoretical foundation used in this research is Raymond Williams's concept of the structure of feeling. This concept is used to understand social and emotional experiences that emerge within society during a particular historical period, including experiences shaped by the development of contemporary digital life. Williams also argues that culture cannot be separated from the material conditions and social changes surrounding it. In this regard, Wang (2002) explains that Williams's cultural materialism can be used to examine the relationship between culture and the material conditions of society without being trapped in Eurocentric or cultural relativist perspectives. In addition, Williams's concept of mobile privatization (1974) is used to understand social media as a space that appears private, intimate, and secure, while simultaneously functioning as a public and commercial space (Subijanto, 2024). Through these concepts, the experiences of the characters in the novel can be understood as representations of contemporary digital society.

The novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, it systematically applies Williams's concept of structures of feeling in an integrated manner, along with digital alienation theory (Dean, 2009; Fuchs, 2021) and identity performativity theory (Butler, 1990) to Indonesian novels. Second, this research reveals the affective dimension of virtual identity precarity, which has been overlooked in conventional sociological studies of Indonesian social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Moran, 2015; Nur, 2023; Rusli & Fatra, 2025). Third, this research demonstrates that Kerumunan Terakhir is not simply a work of urban-digital fiction, but rather a social document that articulates generational experiences unrepresented in formal academic discourse.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Cultural Materialism and the Structure of Feelings by Raymond Williams**

This research is grounded in cultural materialism, which views cultural products not as mere passive reflections of economic conditions but as material practices that actively shape social relations. The central analytical concept is *structures of feeling*: lived experiences that are in the process of formation (in *solution*) and often not yet formally articulated within dominant institutions or ideologies (Williams, 1977). In this research, the concept is operationalized as a *diagnostic tool* to identify and interpret the affective textures embedded in Madasari's narrative, specifically, the pre-ideological, emergent experiences of digital alienation and identity precarity that characters feel but cannot yet fully articulate.

Williams (1977) distinguishes between *dominant*, *residual*, and *emergent* affect structures. In the context of this novel, these three categories serve as analytical lenses: the

*dominant* structure corresponds to the logic of platform visibility and validation (likes, followers, retweets) as the primary measure of social existence; the *residual* structure captures the characters' lingering attachment to the offline world of physical labor and face-to-face sociality; and the *emergent* structure maps the nascent critical awareness still half-formed and individually articulated that platform logic is, in the protagonist's own words, making them "shackled" rather than free. Williams's concept of *mobile privatization* (1974), a fusion of public mobility and domestic privacy originally theorized for television, is further used to analyze how social media platforms produce a space that feels intimate and personal while structurally extracting public and commercial value from users' affective labor (Kay, 2021; Subijanto, 2024).

### Digital Alienation and the Attention Economy

Individuals' social lives and emotional states have undergone significant changes in their daily lives. Various digital activities, including uploading photos and liking other people's posts, have become commonplace. These are the characteristics or habits of today's digital society. Social media is more than just a communication tool; it has become a place to seek attention, recognition, and validation from others. Through the concept of communicative capitalism explained by Dean (2009), we can see that individuals on social media do not engage in truly meaningful communication. This indicates that individuals simply seek to vent their emotions and strive to be present in the digital space. Seeking attention by continually sharing activities and opinions, even personal lives, is a constant pursuit for social media users.

To analyze alienation in the digital age, this study operationalizes Dean's (2009) concept of *communicative capitalism*, which holds that participation in digital networks sharing content, commenting, and liking more often serves as an affective outlet than a meaningful communicative act. In the novel, this concept is applied to interpret why characters such as Maera and Jayanegara pursue digital recognition compulsively despite gaining no substantive fulfillment from it. Fuchs's (2021) framework of *digital labor* is used to analyze how platform architectures extract value from users' affective labor: every post, interaction, and persona-building act constitutes unpaid labor that profits the platform while deepening user dependency. Together, these two frameworks explain the *structural* dimension of alienation in Madasari's narrative, showing that characters' compulsive behaviors are not individual psychological failures but systemic effects of platform design (Berlant, 2011). Poell (2018) extends this analysis through his concept of *platformization of cultural production*: the penetration of platform logic into cultural practice, transforming how subjects produce and evaluate themselves and their cultural outputs.

The concept of *digital visibility* (Huang et al., 2025) is operationalized here to analyze the scarcity logic of attention: in the novel's digital crowd, visibility is a contested resource that characters compete for actively. This competition produces *identity precarity* (Khamis et al., 2017), a condition in which self-validity is perpetually at stake and contingent on the unpredictable responses of others, which this study maps onto specific scenes of digital crisis in the narrative.

All of the individual conditions mentioned above slowly give rise to alienation in society, a phenomenon known as digital alienation. An individual's dependence on responses on social media can lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation. Over time, individuals may feel active and connected. Truly meaningful emotional relationships cannot be guaranteed, even despite close and intense social media connections. This condition or state is understood as the concept of digital alienation in modern society. The experiences of all the characters in the novel "*Kerumunan Terakhir*" can be analyzed using this concept. This analysis reflects the alienation of modern individuals amidst the rapid development of social media.

## Performativity of Identity and Virtual Persona

In today's digital space, an individual can create a new identity. Individuals will instantly construct their own identities according to their own desires. There is a marked difference between identities on social media and in real life. New identities are constructed through posts and writing, and digital interactions are made as appealing as possible to be accepted by other users. To examine this phenomenon, researchers will utilize Butler's (1990) concept of identity performativity and Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management. These two concepts are used to understand how an identity is constructed and presented in digital life. According to Butler, identity is constantly changing and shaped through digital actions. According to Goffman, an individual fulfills social desires by projecting a certain image to others.

Favorable impressions are built through digital activities such as uploading photos and choosing words in responses to others. A similar situation can be seen in the characters in Okky Madasari's novel "Kerumumnan Terakhir." The difference in identity between reality and the virtual world is clearly evident in the characters' lives. A sense of alienation coexists with a visible sense of closeness and connectedness.

Mobile privatization (Williams, 1974) shares a similar line of thought with the phenomenon discussed. While social media is public and open, it also has a more private and intimate feel. Interactions that lack emotional ties often feel intimate in the digital space. This concept will examine the experiences of these characters as a reflection of digital life and contemporary society.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative, descriptive-analytical study using a *close reading* method grounded in Raymond Williams's principles of cultural materialism. The research object is Okky Madasari's novel *Kerumunan Terakhir* (2026). The data scope is limited to the primary text of the novel; secondary sources (academic articles, theoretical monographs) are used solely for analytical triangulation and are not treated as data.

The data consist of twelve textual units (*satuan tekstual*) comprising narrative descriptions, internal monologues, and character dialogues selected through *purposive sampling* on the basis of three selection criteria: (1) direct relevance to one or more of the three theoretical categories (structures of feeling, digital alienation, and identity performativity); (2) representativeness across the novel's narrative arc (early, middle, and late chapters); and (3) thematic density, i.e., passages in which affective tensions are explicitly rendered in the text. The complete corpus of selected data is presented in Table 1 below.

Data collection was conducted in four stages. Stage 1 (Initial Reading): The novel was read in its entirety three times to achieve an overall interpretive grasp of the narrative structure, character system, and thematic architecture. Stage 2 (Theoretical Mapping): A data corpus sheet was constructed with five columns: data code, page number, textual unit, preliminary theoretical category, and analytical notes to systematically identify candidate passages. Stage 3 (Purposive Selection): Candidate passages were screened against the three selection criteria above; passages that did not explicitly engage with at least one theoretical category were excluded. Stage 4 (Corpus Finalization): Twelve data units were finalized and coded (D1–D12) for systematic reference in the analysis.

Validity was established through three procedures. First, theoretical triangulation: each datum was interpreted through multiple theoretical lenses (Williams, Dean, Fuchs, Butler, Ahmed) to ensure that analytical conclusions were not artifacts of a single theoretical perspective. Second, *peer debriefing*: draft analyses were reviewed by a scholar specializing in Indonesian literary studies and a researcher with expertise in critical media studies, whose

feedback was incorporated into the final interpretation. Third, member checking against prior scholarship: findings were cross-referenced with existing studies on the same novel (Dermawan, 2024; Habsari, 2022; Ningtyas, 2018; Rachmawati, 2024) to verify consistency and identify points of productive divergence.

Data analysis was conducted using the *triple hermeneutics* method, a three-level interpretive framework developed for the integrated analysis of literary texts within their socio-theoretical contexts. The three levels are: (1) First-level hermeneutic (Textual-Experiential): interpreting the characters' affective experiences in digital space as rendered by the narrative, what they feel, desire, fear, and suffer in relation to their virtual personas and digital crowds. This level is grounded in affect theory (Ahmed, 2014) and Goffman's (1959) interactional frameworks. (2) Second-level hermeneutic (Authorial-Representational): interpreting Madasari's representational strategies, narrative choices, focalization, irony, and structural juxtapositions in presenting the dynamics of virtual identity. This level draws on narratological close reading and critical discourse analysis to identify how form and content jointly produce meaning. (3) Third-level hermeneutic (Socio-Theoretical Synchronization): synchronizing the first- and second-level findings with Williams's (1977) theoretical framework of cultural materialism and structures of feeling, Dean's (2009) communicative capitalism, Fuchs's (2021) digital labor, and secondary frameworks from platform studies (Gillespie, 2013; Van Dijck et al., 2018) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2014; Baym, 2015; Lupinacci, 2021). This level produces the theoretical contribution of the analysis: demonstrating how individual affective experience in the novel is structurally produced by the material conditions of platform capitalism.

## DISCUSSION

This part will discuss the social and emotional experience of the characters in the novel *Kerumunan Terakhir* by Okky Madasari concerning social media life and digital space. Next will be discussed the need for social recognition, the formation of virtual identity, and digital alienation experienced by the characters in the novel through the concept of structure of feeling, Raymond Williams. It will also be shown in the final part of this discussion how social media influences the way individuals build social relations and understand their existence in the contemporary digital era.

### Digital Crowds as Affective Spaces: The Promise of Recognition

#### *Joining the Crowd: The Hope of Existence*

*Kerumunan Terakhir* powerfully articulates the most characteristic emotional structure of the social media era: the need to be recognized, to exist in the eyes of others through a digital presence. Madasari describes the euphoria felt by Maera Jayanegara's girlfriend when her first Facebook post went viral. She handed Jayanegara her phone and said:

#### Data 1

"Lihat! Lihat ini! Ia menyodorkan HP-nya padaku. 'Itu tulisan pertamaku di Facebook. Lihat lebih dari 500 orang langsung memberikan tanda jempol, lebih dari 50 orang menyebarkan ulang tulisan ini. Lihat ini... Ini sudah diretweet lebih dari 100 kali dan masih terus bertambah.'" (Madasari, 2016, p. 225)

This passage captures what Dean (2009) calls the *drive of communicative capitalism*, not simply a desire to communicate, but an affective circulation that yields temporary satisfaction without substantive fulfillment. Numbers like 500 thumbs-up and 100 retweets are not simply measures of reach but ontological markers for Maera: proof that she exists and counts. That Maera physically hands her phone to others to verify the numbers reveals the social dimension of digital validation: virtual recognition only feels real when witnessed by others in

the real world. This resonates directly with Williams's (1974) argument about mobile privatization: an inherently private experience (numbers on a screen) only becomes meaningful when shared publicly. In Williamsian terms, this is an *emergent structure of feeling*: an affective logic that is new, not yet institutionalized as a formal ideology, but already deeply felt and acted upon. Lupinacci (2021) calls this condition *compulsory sociality*: the structural imperative to be constantly present and visible on a platform.

This dynamic is further developed through Data 2, which depicts the labor of building a virtual persona:

**Data 2**

*"Tak disangka, Akardewa memperhatikan dan membalas jempol yang kuberikan. Ia membuka halaman Facebook-ku, memberi tanda jempol pada berbagai fotoku—bahkan foto yang sudah kuunggah sejak setahun sebelumnya. Tentu saja aku besar kepala." (Madasari, 2016, p. 126)*

The phrase “big-headed” (*besar kepala*) is not merely a psychological description; it is a sign of what Fuchs (2021) calls “*digital labor*”: years of uploading photos, building profiles, and maintaining an online presence, ultimately rewarded not with wages but with validation from admired figures. Virtual personas are the product of intensive affective labor, and a single gesture of reciprocation from those in power can alter the value of a person’s entire digital archive. In Williams’s framework, the means of cultural production platform infrastructures and their logics of popularity determine how subjects produce and evaluate themselves (Subijanto, 2024). But this hard-won persona is always fragile: “Be careful, there are many people who want to ride on the wave of fame” (Madasari, 2016). The accusation of sensation-seeking is a form of symbolic violence typical of the digital space: it attacks the legitimacy of one’s persona and questions the authenticity of one’s motivations.

***Crowds as Spaces Without Solidarity***

The novel’s central paradox and the paradox of digital alienation are that joining the crowd does not produce real togetherness. This dimension is most clearly articulated in Data 3:

**Data 3**

*"Di zaman seperti ini, kita hanya dianggap ada jika kita tercatat dan punya jejak. Kita dinilai dari apa yang kita katakan dan apa yang kita tampilkan." (Madasari, 2016, p. 123)*

This statement is the most explicit philosophical articulation of ontological precarity in the digital age: existence is no longer a given but must be continually produced and proven through digital traces. Williams (1977) defines alienation as a condition in which social relations are no longer perceived as shared but as a foreign force facing the subject from the outside. In the platform logic described by Madasari, the crowd is a force that judges a person's existence based on what is displayed, not who they really are. This is the alienation typical of the social media era: not alienation from the product of work, but alienation from oneself through the never-ending process of self-presentation.

## **Identity Precarity: When the Self is at Stake** ***Existence as a Digital Footprint***

The most distinctive dimension of identity precarity in the novel is how the protagonist internalizes the logic of the platform as the logic of existence itself. The same statement from Data 3 functions here as Data 4, examined through the lens of identity performativity:

### **Data 4**

*"Di zaman seperti ini, kita hanya dianggap ada jika kita tercatat dan punya jejak. Kita dinilai dari apa yang kita katakan dan apa yang kita tampilkan." (Madasari, 2016, p. 123)*

Ahmed (2014) calls this the *affective economy*: affective value does not reside in the self but circulates and attaches to the digital traces one leaves behind. The phrase “we are judged by what we display” connects directly to Butler’s (1990) concept of performativity: identity is not what one possesses but what one displays. What is most significant in Williamsian terms is the position of this statement: it is not delivered as a critique but as a description of the world with which the protagonist *agrees*. This is a structure of feeling in Williams’s (1977) most precise sense: values and ways of viewing the world that have become so deeply ingrained that they no longer feel like ideology but rather as reality. Rusli & Fatra (2025) confirm that the construction of digital identity in Indonesian cities has indeed entered a stage where digital presence is perceived as a social prerequisite, not simply an option.

## ***The Collapse of the Persona: A Virtual Identity Crisis***

Madasari presents the most dramatic moment of identity precarity when the protagonist’s virtual persona suddenly collapses:

### **Data 5**

*"Kamu sudah jadi berita di mana-mana. Matajaya si bintang media baru ditangkap polisi karena menfitnah profesor Sukendar. Ternyata bapaknya si Matajaya adalah Sukendar." (Madasari, 2016, p. 313)*

The irony Madasari constructs here is one typical of the digital condition: Matajaya’s virtual persona collapses not because of the content he produces, but because the previously hidden context is suddenly revealed. Goffman (1959) analyzed *impression management* as a universal strategy in social interaction, but in social media, backstage and frontstage are never truly separate: digital archives and social networks always threaten to bring hidden contexts to the surface. More significant in Williamsian terms is the collapse of the entire virtual identity—a persona constructed to escape origins and become “someone” in the digital space—back into an inextricable biological-familial identity. This demonstrates that the precarity of digital identity is also rooted in a deeper social precarity: platforms do not provide the freedom they promise (Padmasari, 2023).

## ***The Paradox of Visibility and Absence***

Madasari also captures the paradox typical of the social media era: the more visible one is digitally, the less present one feels:

### **Data 6**

*"Dengan pengeras suara yang kupegang dan sorot mata kekaguman dari banyak orang, kepercayaan diriku bangkit dan membuatku mengoceh panjang tanpa peduli apakah itu salah atau benar, didengar atau membuat orang bosan." (Madasari, 2016, p. 109)*

This passage captures what might be called the *visibility trap*: the visibility gained in the digital public space produces not authority but compulsivity. Han (2017) argues that the digital crowd creates a pressure to continue producing and presenting that has become detached from considerations of substance. The phrase “without caring whether it is wrong or right” is a sign of alienation from the production of meaning itself: the subject has become alienated from the content he produces, which now only serves as a means of maintaining visibility (Dean, 2009)

### **The Generational Structure of Feelings: Millennials Between Two Worlds** ***Alienation from the Offline World***

The novel articulates a distinctive generational structure of feeling: a young urban subject who feels that the offline world is not real enough without digital mediation:

#### **Data 7**

*"Aku sering curiga jangan-jangan semuanya itu tak nyata. Pekerjaan tak bisa didapat hanya dengan pencet-pencet keyboard seperti ini. Pekerjaan hanya ada di luar sana, di tempat-tempat yang harus benar-benar didatangi, berdiri berbaris di antrian panjang orang-orang yang membawa map berisi ijazah dengan pakaian rapi dan sepatu mengilap." (Madasari, 2016, p. 96)*

This passage captures the tension between two opposing logics within the protagonist: a digital logic that offers convenience and accessibility versus an offline logic that is more believable because it is more concrete and physical. The suspicion that digital activities are “unreal” is an expression of a typical *emergent structure of feeling*: the awareness that something is wrong with the new way of life, but the inability to fully detach from it. In Williams’s (1977) framework, this is the tension between a *residual* structure of feeling (the trusted physical work world) and an *emergent* one (the appealing but not fully trusted digital world).

### ***The Crowd as an Affective Community***

Another dimension of this generational structure of feeling is how digital crowds operate as affective communities capable of mobilizing collective action even if that action itself is temporary and fragile:

#### **Data 8**

*"Besok kita temani Juwi!" "Save Juwi. Save Juwi!" Suara @Akdewa menggaung dan dipantulkan ke mana-mana. Dari atas panggung dengan hanya modal kata-kata, ia bangun pasukan. Siapapun yang ada di kotaku akan berkumpul bersama-sama besok, di kantor polisi untuk berdemonstrasi." (Madasari, 2016, hlm. 188)*

This passage reveals the most ambiguous dimension of the digital crowd: it possesses real mobilizing power, an army formed solely from words—but this power relies entirely on the individual authority of charismatic figures, not on structurally grounded solidarity. Lim (2017) analyzes how social media in Indonesia enables rapid mobilization but also produces affective tribes vulnerable to manipulation. The phrase “echoing and being reflected everywhere” illustrates the affective circulation that Williams (1977) emphasized as a characteristic of structures of feeling: it moves beneath the surface of formal institutions, through invisible networks of affection and trust. This aligns with Halpern & Gibbs (2013)

findings on how digital platforms facilitate political expression while creating vulnerable echo chambers.

### ***Moment of Awareness: Technology as Tool or Prison***

Most significant in Williamsian terms is the moment when the novel presents a critical awareness of the relationship between subject and technology:

#### **Data 9**

*"Teknologi ada untuk kita jadikan alat, untuk kita gunakan sesuai kesenangan kita. Apa lagi guna teknologi kalau malah bikin susah dan terbelenggu seperti ini?" (Madasari, 2016, p. 299)*

This statement is an articulation of emergent critical awareness in Williams's most precise sense: an awareness that is beginning to crystallize about the subject's relationship with technology but is still formulated within an individual-utilitarian framework (for us to use as we please). The subject begins to realize that technology has reversed its position from tool to prison, but the imagined solution remains within the logic of individual choice, not yet reaching an awareness of the structural conditions that make "shackled" more than just a personal failure. Williams (1977) wrote that structures of feeling are "social experiences in solution": this passage is the precise moment when experience is in the process of forming awareness but has not yet finished crystallizing into a complete structural critique.

### **Digital Alienation and the Material Power of Platforms**

#### ***Compulsivity as a Structure of Feeling***

Following Williams's argument about infrastructure as a material force that shapes the subject, the novel depicts how the digital crowd generates affective compulsion that cannot be controlled individually:

#### **Data 10**

*"Hampir tengah malam, kerumunan orang tak juga berkurang, bahkan semakin membesar. Selama berjam-jam aku sama sekali tak menggeser tempat dudukku. Mataku tak boleh berpaling sedikit pun. Aku tak ingin ketinggalan setiap hal yang sedang terjadi." (Madasari, 2016, p. 101)*

This passage captures what Lupinacci (2021) calls "*compulsory sociality*" as a structure of feeling on social media, the social obligation structurally embedded by platform logic to always be connected, always present, never to miss out. The phrase "my eyes must not look away for a moment" is an affective expression of *liveness*: the temporal pressure characteristic of social media, the feeling that digital events are happening now and must be witnessed now. In Williams's framework, platform infrastructure as a means of production not only regulates what is produced but actively restructures the rhythms of time, attention, and the subject's presence. Van Dijck et al. (2018) reinforce this by showing that platform logic makes connectivity a seemingly irresistible public value.

#### ***The Power of Digital Words: Influence without Accountability***

Madasari also illustrates how platforms generate new forms of power that operate through non-institutionalized personal authority. This power is analyzed through the figure of Akardewa:

**Data 11**

"Akardewa selalu punya kekuatan untuk memengaruhi dan membuat orang percaya. Setiap yang dikatakannya adalah kebenaran. Tanpa diminta, orang-orang dengan sukarela menyebarkannya dan memercayainya." (Madasari, 2016, p. 123)

This passage articulates what Marwick & Boyd (2011) call *reversed context collapse*: instead of a single message reaching diverse audiences, Akardewa becomes the point of gravity that draws multiple contexts into a single affective orbit. The phrase "everything he says is the truth" is a sign of what Gillespie (2013) calls *algorithmic authority*, but a more primordial version: before platform algorithms, there were already social mechanisms that generated absolute trust in charismatic digital figures. In Williams's framework, Akardewa personifies the *dominant structure of feeling* that promises certainty amidst the uncertainty of the digital age.

***The Price of Digital Existence: Between Recognition and Manipulation***

Ultimately, the novel depicts the dialectic between the desire to exist and the dangers of an existence that is too easily manipulated:

**Data 12**

"Kekaguman yang akhirnya membuatku nekat menyeruak kerumunan orang, naik ke panggung utama yang sedang ditempati Akardewa." (Madasari, 2016, p. 106)

The act of breaking through the crowd and ascending the stage is an apt metaphor for the logic of the competition for visibility in the digital age: to be seen, one must actively and recklessly encroach on the space of others who are more famous. This is not an act born of free agency, but rather one imposed by structure: in a platform logic where only the visible counts, breaking through is the only option for the "nobody" subject. Hwang et al. (2019) show that social capital on digital platforms is unequally distributed and tends to favor those with initial visibility; thus, for the "nobody," the only recourse is reckless action like that of the protagonist. Zuboff (2019) argues that surveillance capitalism produces a condition in which users must constantly produce themselves to survive in the attention economy. This passage depicts this condition in its most personal, affective dimension: admiration breeds courage, but true courage is a response to structural pressures.

Taken together, the analysis of D1–D12 demonstrates that Dermawan's (2024) reading of millennial fragmentation, Habsari's (2022) analysis of digital heterotopia, and Rachmawati's (2024) account of social pathology are not competing interpretations but complementary layers—each of which this study deepens by showing that fragmentation, heterotopia, and pathology are not neutral conditions but are produced by the *exploitative material logic of the platform*. This is what makes Williams's framework of cultural materialism not merely additive but *analytically essential* (Andreassen et al., 2017).

**CONCLUSION**

This study analyzed Okky Madasari's *Kerumunan Terakhir* (2016) through an integrated framework of Raymond Williams's cultural materialism (structures of feeling, mobile privatization), Dean's (2009) communicative capitalism, Fuchs's (2021) digital labor, and Butler's (1990) and Goffman's (1959) identity performativity. Through close reading of twelve textual units analyzed via triple hermeneutics, the study demonstrates four principal findings.

First, the virtual crowd in the novel functions as an *affective space that promises recognition* while simultaneously producing deeper isolation. Characters seek digital validation

compulsively (D1, D2) but find that the crowd judges existence by digital traces rather than by who one truly is (D3). Second, *identity precarity* emerges when the subject's ontological validity becomes contingent on platform logic: existence must be continually performed and proven (D4), virtual personas are always vulnerable to collapse (D5), and hypervisibility paradoxically produces alienation from the production of meaning (D6). Third, a distinctive *generational structure of feeling* is articulated through the millennial subject's oscillation between residual (offline, physical) and emergent (digital) modes of existence (D7, D8), culminating in a nascent but structurally incomplete critical awareness of platform captivity (D9). Fourth, *digital alienation* is produced by platform architecture as a material force: compulsory sociality restructures the subject's rhythms of time and attention (D10), charismatic digital authority operates without institutional accountability (D11), and the competition for visibility imposes reckless behavior as the only option for the "nobody" subject (D12).

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that Williams's concepts of mobile privatization and structures of feeling originally developed in the context of British television possess substantial analytical power for examining *social media* and the urban subject of the Global South. Digital alienation in Madasari's novel is not merely an individual psychological condition but a *material condition produced by specific cultural relations of production*: this is the most relevant core insight of cultural materialism, and this study demonstrates its transnational applicability.

Methodologically, this study contributes a replicable analytical model, the triple hermeneutics framework integrated with purposive corpus selection and multi-theory triangulation, that can be applied to other Indonesian novels engaging with digital experience. Practically, the findings suggest that Indonesian fiction serves as a valuable, underutilized *archive of digital social experience* that has not yet been formally theorized in academic discourse, an archive of direct relevance to digital literacy education and mental health policy in the social media era.

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