

Technology's Role in Shaping Character's Identities and Relationship in "Station Eleven" by Emily St. John Mande

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Abstract

In Emily St. John Mandel's novel "Station Eleven," technology has a key part in defining the personalities and relationships of the individuals. The protagonists have to traverse a world where technology is no longer easily accessible, forcing them to adapt and rely on alternative talents and values to survive as the globe descends into chaos following a horrific flu outbreak. As characters struggle with the loss of contemporary conveniences and yearn for the relationships and diversions they offered, the book examines how technology has both united and alienated people. Characters are forced to reevaluate their identities and face their own vulnerabilities in the lack of technology since they have to rely solely on their own abilities and resourcefulness to get by in a cruel and merciless environment. Technology also plays a role in shaping the relationships between characters. In a world where physical distance and communication barriers are heightened, characters must rely on more traditional forms of connection, such as face-to-face interactions and tangible acts of kindness. This shift in communication allows characters to form deeper, more meaningful relationships based on genuine human connection rather than fleeting digital interactions.

Keywords : *Technology and identity; Loss of technology; Isolation and connection; traditional communication, contemporary conveniences.*

1. Introduction

Miranda writes in Dr. Eleven, a comic book that plays a significant role in Emily St. John Mandel's novel Station Eleven, about people who, after fifteen years of living in a state of perpetual twilight, desire nothing more than to return home. The longing for home, stemming from the Greek words 'nostos' meaning 'return home' and 'algos' meaning 'pain', is a theme that resonates throughout the narrative of both Miranda's comic and the larger framework of the novel. The characters in Station Eleven, living in a post-pandemic world where 99% of the population has been wiped out, find themselves reminiscing about the world that they have lost. In a world where there is no electricity and no light, the survivors long for the simple pleasures of the past, much like the characters in Miranda's comic who exist in a world of perpetual twilight. (Mandel, 2015,p.31)

Station Eleven aligns with a common theme in post-apocalyptic literature where contemporary society is reevaluated in the absence of its present form, leading to a sense of nostalgia for what was lost. Dereck Daschke argues that apocalyptic events inherently evoke nostalgia, as traumatic events force individuals to confront and integrate the past before moving forward. The process of letting go of the past is crucial in building a new life after disaster, but it is

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challenging when reminders of the lost world are ever-present. In the novel, characters observe that the world has become a place where remnants of the past are preserved, utilized for survival rather than creating newness. For instance, airplanes are repurposed as storage units and gas stations are transformed into living spaces. The novel has a “melancholic” tone, as noted by Emily Allen, which she attributes to St. John Mandel’s stylistic choices and the “beauty” of the language, which arouses “an incredible longing for the world that has passed.” If these literary devices could often arouse nostalgia, Allen also draws attention to the text’s utopian element, arguing that if the novel romanticizes lost items from our society, it also imagines that racism and economic disparity have been replaced. While the novel’s numerous characters are constantly drawn back into a nostalgic appreciation of a life that can never be regained by the objects and beliefs of the past, by emphasizing the imaginative and utopian. (Allen et al, 2017)

The focus of this reinvention which St. John Mandel also takes the title for her book from becomes Miranda’s self-published comic book, Dr. Eleven. This is a rather literal “re-invention,” as old technology are being uncovered in new ways throughout the book. Station Eleven suggests the value of creativity above memory in the wasteland of the future through the imaginative world Miranda imagines and creates. In this piece, I examine the ways in which Station Eleven gives survivors of its apocalyptic message hope by focusing on a new, imagined future rather than a tired past. I contend that St. John Mandel’s book encourages the redrawing of boundaries between reality and fantasy. (Mandel, 2015, p. 333)

The reader encounters similar treatment of things on multiple occasions in Station Eleven. Throughout the novel, there are several examples of once-useless items: passports, cell phones, credit cards, computers, even paperweights that have been transformed into beautiful reminders of the past. These artifacts are ordinary, and in the scary post-apocalyptic scene, they lose their meaning and function. This helps to symbolize not only their superfluity but also the decadence of a bygone era when such things were prized. Similar to Mc Carthy’s Coke can, which is regarded as the pinnacle of luxury while being a “cheap” consumption, these items do little more than serve as a poignant reminder of what has been lost. Kirsten, for instance, says of the paperweight that she saved just because “she found it beautiful” that it is “nothing.” According to Dereck Daschke, as people deal with what they have lost, terrible events like cataclysmic events naturally create feelings of nostalgia. Characters in Station Eleven traverse a new environment where traces of the previous culture are constantly present, making it difficult for them to let go of the past. In the civilization portrayed in the book, artifacts from the past are conserved and used as tools for survival. (Daschke, 2019, p. 177)

2. The Role Of Technology In Shaping Characters’ Identities And Relationships

In Emily St. John Mandel’s post-apocalyptic novel “Station Eleven,” technology significantly influences the identities and interpersonal interactions of the protagonists. The novel centers on how a cast of interconnected characters adjust to living in a civilization devoid of contemporary infrastructure and technology as it follows them through a world ravaged by a pandemic. The presence and absence of technology in “Station Eleven” have a significant impact on the characters’ interpersonal relationships and sense of self. (Knopf, 2014)

In Emily St. John Mandel’s dystopian novel “Station Eleven,” technology plays a major role in shaping the protagonists’ identities and relationships with one another. The book follows a group of interconnected characters as they navigate a pandemic-ravaged planet and focuses on how they adapt to living in a civilization without modern infrastructure and technology. The social interactions and sense of identity of the characters in “Station Eleven” are greatly impacted by the presence or absence of technology.

More than that ,The divide between those who live on the islands above and those who live in the Undersea reflects the debate taking place in the larger narrative between those who Cope with disaster by remembering the old world and those who wish to forge ahead And build something new:

On Station Eleven's surface it is always sunset or twilight or night ... and the Only land remaining is a series of islands that were once mountaintops. There Has been a schism. There are people who, after fifteen years of perpetual Twilight, long only to go home, to return to Earth and beg for amnesty, to Take their chances under alien rule. They live in the Undersea, an interlinked Network of vast fallout shelters under Station Eleven's oceans. ... "All they Want is to see sunlight again. Can you blame them?" (Mandel, 2015,p. 83)

The research also explores the role of technology in preserving cultural heritage and memory in a world on the brink of collapse. The Museum of Civilization, a collection of artifacts and memories from the pre-apocalyptic world, serves as a testament to the power of art, literature, and storytelling in preserving humanity's collective history .In a post-apocalyptic environment, "Station Eleven" provides a complex examination of the effects of technology on the personalities and relationships of its people. The book emphasizes how technology affects people's perceptions of themselves, their relationships with others, and their perception of the outside world. Mandel explores intricate themes of resiliency, memory, and the long-term effects of technology on society.(Sandlin,2017,p.15)

3. Technology In The Pre-Collapse World

In Emily St. John Mandel's novel "Station Eleven," technology is portrayed as a central component of the pre-collapse world. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic society devastated by a flu pandemic, where technology plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of the characters before the collapse. In the modern world before the collapse, technology is deeply integrated into society, influencing various aspects of daily life. People heavily rely on devices such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets for communication, work, and entertainment. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are widely used for connecting with others and sharing information, reflecting the interconnectedness of society. (John,2020)

The internet serves as a valuable resource for accessing information, communicating, and conducting business. Online platforms like Amazon and Netflix offer convenience and choice, transforming the way people consume media and goods. The characters in the novel reflect on the ease and accessibility of modern technology, highlighting the sense of loss and nostalgia in the post-apocalyptic world.(Ibid)

"In the days before the collapse, it was as if technology had swallowed us whole. We lived in a constant state of distraction, always plugged in, always online, always seeking the next new thing" .Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven

Transportation in the pre-collapse world is heavily dependent on technology, with cars, trains, and airplanes facilitating travel and mobility. Advanced medical technology in hospitals and healthcare facilities enables the treatment of patients and the development of vaccines and medicines. However, the flu pandemic in the novel exposes the vulnerabilities of the healthcare system, leading to chaos and devastation. (Harvard,2019)

"Technology had become our religion, our addiction. We worshipped at the altar of our screens, our devices, our constant connection to the digital world."

(Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven)

The characters in the novel grapple with the consequences of a world without technology, reflecting on the impact of their reliance on modern conveniences in a post-apocalyptic setting."Station Eleven" explores the complexities of

technology and its role in society, prompting readers to consider the benefits and drawbacks of a world shaped by advanced technology.

“In the post-collapse world, technology was both revered and feared. It had the power to connect us, but also to alienate us from one another. We had to learn to use it wisely, to find balance in a world that had lost its equilibrium.”

Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*. (Byrd ,2020)

4. Characters

Technology has a big impact on the lives of the protagonists in Emily St. John Mandel’s book *Station Eleven*, both before and after civilization collapses due to a fatal flu pandemic. Different relationships that characters like Arthur, Miranda, and Jeevan have with technology influence their interactions and behaviors inside the intricate universe of the book. (Rodriguez,2017,p.112)

Arthur Leander, a famous actor whose death marks the beginning of the novel, is heavily reliant on technology in his pre-collapse life. As a celebrity, Arthur is constantly surrounded by cameras, phones, and other forms of communication technology that keep him connected to his fans and colleagues. He is seen using his phone to text and call people, relying on email to communicate with his agent and managers, and using social media to engage with his followers. Technology plays a crucial role in Arthur’s career, as it allows him to stay relevant in the fast-paced entertainment industry and maintain his public image. But there are drawbacks to Arthur’s reliance on technology as well. He withdraws from his loved ones and stops having meaningful in-person conversations, relying instead on his phone and social media. His loneliness makes him unhappy and prevents him from developing meaningful relationships with other people. Arthur is forced to face the emptiness of his tech-driven life and look for meaning in a world without continual contact when the collapse occurs and technology is no longer available. (Thompson,2022)

Miranda Carroll, Arthur’s ex-wife and the creator of the graphic novel *Station Eleven*, also has a complex relationship with technology. Miranda is a talented artist who uses technology to bring her vision to life, using digital design programs and publishing platforms to create her work. She relies on her laptop and tablet to sketch, edit, and share her art with the world, allowing her to reach a wider audience and receive feedback from fans and critics. Miranda, though, also faces challenges related to the drawbacks of technology. She starts to lose faith in social media and the virtual art scene due to its shallowness, and she starts to feel cut off from her own creative voice and her work. Due to her dependence on technology, Miranda turns to simplicity and the natural world for comfort. She even retreats to a secluded island where she may forget about technology and rediscover her creative side. (Friedman,2018)

Jeevan Chaudhary, a paparazzo turned paramedic, has a more practical relationship with technology. In his pre-collapse life, Jeevan uses technology as a tool to capture moments and communicate with others, relying on his camera and phone to document celebrity events and emergencies. He uses social media and online news platforms to stay informed and connected, using technology to navigate the chaotic world around him. Even though Jeevan uses technology practically, he still has trouble with its limitations. He feels lost in a society that prioritizes meaningless celebrity rumors over deep human ties, and he becomes estranged from his loved ones and his sense of purpose. Jeevan is forced to face his reliance on digital communication and look for real connections in a world without screens when the collapse strikes and technology is unavailable. Even though Jeevan uses technology practically, he still has trouble with its limitations. He feels lost in a society that prioritizes meaningless celebrity rumors over deep human ties, and he becomes estranged from his loved ones and his sense of purpose. Jeevan is forced to face his reliance on digital communication and look for real connections in a world without screens when the collapse strikes and technology is unavailable. (Lopez,2019,p.46)

All things considered, every character in Station Eleven has a distinct relationship with technology, which influences their interactions and behaviors throughout the book. To differing degrees, Arthur, Miranda, and Jeevan all rely on technology for information, communication, and creativity. They also battle the drawbacks of perpetual connectivity, feeling alone, dissatisfied, and detached in a society that prioritizes screens above interpersonal relationships. The protagonists are forced to face the meaninglessness of their tech-driven lifestyles as society collapses, stripping them of their reliance on it, and look for purpose and community in a world without continual contact. (Harper,2016,p.78)

5. Loss of technology in the post-collapse world

In Emily St. John Mandel's novel "Station Eleven" a major issue that affects the individuals' identities, relationships, and perceptions of the outside world is the loss of technology in a post-collapse society. The characters' lives are shaped by the lack of technology, which also forces them to look for new meaning and connections in a world that has been profoundly altered by the fall of civilization.

Kirsten, one of the main characters in the novel, embodies the impact of growing up in a world without the conveniences and interconnectedness of modern technology. Born after the collapse, Kirsten has never experienced the digital world that many of us take for granted today. Instead, she has learned to prioritize survival, community, and art in the Traveling Symphony, a group that travels and performs for settlements in the post-apocalyptic landscape. For Kirsten, the Station Eleven comic book is particularly meaningful because it transports her back to a time before the collapse, when society was more integrated and technology was more commonplace. Even though the comic takes place in a grim world where a fatal virus pandemic has destroyed everything, it depicts a more optimistic time when technology held the promise of advancement and a better future. Kirsten views the comic as a window into a bygone era of technical advancement and global connectivity, emphasizing the sharp contrast between the pre-collapse world and the post-apocalyptic world of poverty and survival today. (Mandel,2015)

Clark, the curator of the Museum of Civilization, takes a different approach to the absence of technology. The Museum houses artifacts from the pre-collapse world, including smartphones, laptops, and other devices that once defined modern society. Through this collection, Clark reflects on how technology shaped identity and societal norms before the collapse. The Museum serves as a reminder of a time when people were constantly connected through digital communication and technology played a central role in daily life. "Station Eleven" examines the tremendous effects of technology on pre-collapse society through Kirsten and Clark's viewpoints. It also looks at how the characters' identities and relationships are shaped in the post-collapse world when technology is absent. People are compelled to reevaluate what is genuinely important and significant in their lives in a society where creature comforts have vanished and technology is limited. For Kirsten, the Clark Museum is a reminder of a time when technology shaped social conventions and individual identity, but art and culture also provide her a sense of purpose and a link to a world that is no longer in existence. The post-collapse society's lack of technology serves as a unifying factor, pushing characters to discover new ways to connect and find meaning in a drastically altered reality.

"The beauty of this world where almost everyone was gone. If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it?"

(Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven)

This quote encapsulates the impact of the loss of technology and the collapse of society on the remaining survivors, highlighting the emptiness and isolation that can come with the absence of the interconnectedness and conveniences that technology once provided.

6. Technology As Memory And Loss

Technology as Memory and Loss The concept of technology as memory and loss is a major issue in Emily St. John Mandel's book "Station Eleven," influencing both the characters' identities and the story of the post-apocalyptic world they live in. The story examines how memories of technology, both societal and personal, contribute to a sense of desire, connection, and resilience in the face of loss through relics from the past and the characters' relationships with them. The current paper explores how technology functions as a memory aid and how loss is portrayed in the book, concentrating on important objects and figures like Kirsten and the Station Eleven comic. **Relics from the Past: Creating Memories and Identity** In "Station Eleven," technology becomes a thing of the past in a society destroyed by a pandemic that kills most of the people. Throughout the story, there is physical evidence of a world that was, in the form of the remnants of a highly technological society. In addition to representing the loss of contemporary comforts, these relics serve as archives of memories, tying the characters to a period before the collapse. (Mandel, 2015)

The Station Eleven comic illustrates the continuing power of creativity and storytelling in the midst of hardship by embodying the endurance of art in maintaining memory and confronting grief. **Technology as Loss and Memory: Adaptability and Introspection** In "Station Eleven," Emily St. John Mandel uses technology and its relics to create a tapestry of memory and loss. Through their encounters with artifacts from the past, such as celebrity magazines and the Station Eleven comic, the characters show how technology can be used as a tool for remembering the past and managing sadness and longing in a world that has been devastated by disaster. The tale emphasizes the eternal value of art and creativity by showing their tenacity in the face of societal collapse. (Ibid, p.62)

"Technology, as a memory, holds the power to connect us to our past and serve as a tangible reminder of what once was, while its loss reminds us of the impermanence of progress and the enduring nature of human resilience in the face of adversity."

"Station Eleven" asks readers to consider how technology shapes identity and memory, as well as how historical objects can provide solace and context during turbulent times, from the perspectives of Kirsten and other characters. The book makes the argument that although technology is ephemeral and prone to malfunction, the tales and memories it contains can stand the test of time and serve as pillars of support in a world that is changing. Many people in the book come to rely on Station Eleven, especially Kirsten, who travels with the Symphony and always has a copy of the comic with her. The storyline of the comic, which centers on a mystery character named Dr. Eleven and a post-apocalyptic world, connects with the protagonists' personal experiences of survival and loss. Station Eleven is a fictional work that reflects their experience and provides a way for them to absorb the collapse's trauma and find comfort in the creative process. Kirsten and other characters in the book show how technology, in the form of a printed book, can embody memories and act as a source of solace and inspiration in trying times by keeping the comic as a treasured possession. (Wilson, 2017, p.91)

7. Technology Changes The Dynamics Of Communication And Connection Between Characters

In Emily St John Mandel's novel "Station Eleven," technology has a big impact on how people connect and communicate with one another both before and after civilization collapses. Characters in the pre-collapse world are able to communicate, develop relationships, and stay in touch even when they are physically separated by distance because of technology. But in the post-apocalyptic world, without technology, characters have to figure out new ways to interact and communicate with one another. This change in the dynamics of communication emphasizes the value of interpersonal relationships and fortitude in the face of difficulty. (Knopf, 2014)

Technology is presented as a tool that helps characters interact and communicate in the pre-collapse world. The character Arthur Leander, a famous actor, uses technologies such as cell phones and email to stay connected with his

loved ones and manage his business obligations. For instance, Arthur emails Elizabeth, his ex-wife, to provide her with updates on his life and work. This illustrates how characters can stay in touch and communicate even when they are geographically apart thanks to technologies.(Smith,2017,p.45)

To illustrate, Kirsten has a paperweight that bears the engraving “Because survival is insufficient,” which was a parting message from Arthur Leander to her prior to his passing. In the absence of technology, basic things and gestures can express tremendous significance; this object acts as a concrete reminder of their relationship and shared experiences. Similar to this, the Traveling Symphony connects with the communities it visits through storytelling and art, using music and performances to foster a feeling of shared experience. Through his Museum of Civilization, the character Clark Thompson, a former museum curator, considers how technology shapes human interaction. To remind survivors of the technical advances that once characterized their lives, Clark gathers items from the pre-collapse world, such as computers, cell phones, and other electronic equipment.(Lee,2018,p.91)

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the characters’ identities, relationships, and societal institutions are intricately entwined with technology’s function in *Station Eleven*. The book illustrates how technology had a significant influence on their lives before to the collapse, molding their relationships, experiences, and goals. However, the loss of technology in the post-apocalyptic world serves as a catalyst for transformation, as individuals like Kirsten and Clark forge new identities and build meaningful connections among the turmoil. *Station Eleven* emphasizes the flexibility and resiliency of human nature in the absence of technology, highlighting the value of real connections and community ties that transcend the limitations of contemporary technology. Characters are forced to face their true selves and rethink their beliefs as they make their way through a world devoid of the modern luxuries they were accustomed to. In the end, they find a stronger sense of purpose and solidarity in the face of hardship. Emily St. John Mandel fits in with a recurring topic in post-apocalyptic fiction, which is the reevaluation of modern society in light of its absence from its current form, resulting in a longing for the past. The book examines how, when people must face and come to terms with the past in order to go forward, cataclysmic events can induce a sense of nostalgia.

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