

METAMODERNISM AS WE PERCEIVE IT (QUICK REVIEW)

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Abstract

Metamodernism is a new moment in philosophy, art, literature, fashion, photography, economics, politics and other spheres of human activities. It is expressed through variety of mindsets, practices, forms and genres. Its prerequisites were Modernist and Postmodernist movements, the roots of which were found in the early XIX and then in the midst of the XX century. Metamodernism comprises changes and oscillations in style and manner of thinking and behavior. The prefix *meta* is a term of Greek origin and means “after, between, beyond” that is Metamodernism is a movement that emerged and covered the period after Postmodernism. Its features completely distinguish from its predecessor: Metamodernism is serious, sincere, it oscillates from one polarity to another, between diametrically opposed ideas, like enthusiasm and irony, naivety and knowingness, totality and fragmentation, bright and plain and so on, whereas Postmodernism is playful, insincere, unsteady and ironic. Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, the researchers from the Netherlands, describe Metamodernism as a nonstop action, a “constant repositioning” between position and mindsets, something like a “pendulum swinging” between the above mentioned polarities. The article is a quick review of identity of Metamodernism in culture, particularly, in poetry and architecture, as these fields give an easier chance to see the characteristic features of the movement and its results in the development of the XXI century culture more distinctly.

Keywords: Modernism, postmodernism, metamodernism, surrealism, oscillate

Introduction:

Metamodernism combines elements of modernism and postmodernism as the prerequisites of it were Modernist and Postmodernist movements, which substantially contributed to the formation of current metamodernist tendency.

Modernism, as we observe it in broader sense, comprises modern thoughts, modern style, the cultural movement of the late XIX century and early XXs, the individual change of the capitalist system, industrialization and fast growth of the cities; it covers the period of World War I and after. All these cap the style of Modern thinking and behavior, perception of reality; though rooted in the past, it obtained different colors, different expressive techniques and touches.

The modernist movement dominated in the art, politics, economics, literature, architecture and so on. It developed through the phases of Picasso with external influences and inspirational sources. It developed through symbolists, surrealists and other contemporaries who experimented in the spheres of philosophy and culture.

Influential came the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Ernest Mach (1838-1916). According to Freud, all subjective reality was based on the play of basic drives and instincts through which we perceived the outer world. As to Mach, he stated that relations of objects in nature were known as mental shorthand. This represented the break with the past. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was the author, major precursor of the Modernism, according to whom psychological drives, particularly, “the will to power” were more important than facts. Carl Jung (1875-1961, with the idea of collective unconscious, suggested essential nature of “human animal”.

Thus, modernism broke with tradition with strong reaction against the established religious, political, social views: modernism perceived the world as it saw it - no absolute truth, no absolute connection with the history, they experience lost and destroyed, only insight and instincts left; life in disorder, only unconscious existed.

Famous British representatives of Modernism in literature are James Joyce, Ford Madax, Virginia Woolf, Stevie Smith, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Eliot and some others. American modernists are mostly known as the Lost Generation. The World War I destroyed their illusions. They rejected traditional institutions and forms. They are Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Edna Millay, Marianna Moore and others.

Some think that Postmodernism is a rational rejection of modernism, We don't agree, as Postmodernism is not truly rational; rational thought is unable to perceive the problems of the society, as the society is always changing. Its characteristic features were: irony, joyfulness on very serious objects like World War II, the cold war, a pastiche on earlier genres, metafiction i.e. awareness of fictionality (the author travels in time and location), techno-culture and hyper-reality (videos, adds and so on),paranoia(chaos in society), maximalism (tradition of long works) and etc. Postmodernism rejects the means of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Postmodernism appeared after World War II and then in some countries it came to totalitarianism and the mainstream. It needed some novelty and the novelty came with new cultural improvement, and the basic traits we are talking now, were based in pre and post-War II period.

The characteristic features of destruction of traditional Postmodernism are forms, criticism, and marginalism in relation with morality, rejection of canons, ambiguity, unsteadiness, and incomplete narratives.

Influential Postmodern Philosophers were Martin Heidegger (1889-1976); he rejected the philosophical basis of the concepts of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" and asserted similar grounding oppositions in logic referring to one another. Jacques Dersida (1930-2004) tried to destroy the presence of metaphysics in analytical techniques, Paul Michel Foucault (1926-1084) introduced concepts that explained the relationship among means, power and social behavior within social orders. Frederic Jameson (1934) brought forward a concept on Postmodernism as an intellectual trend. Douglas Kelener (1943) stated that Postmodernism was based on advancement, innovation and adaptation.

As the Postmodernist moment has passed, its strategies and ideological critiques continue to live on, as those of Modernism, in our XXI century too. But the contemporary modernity is to surpass Postmodernism. Metamodern reality entered the new era with all seriousness and romanticism.

Since the turn of the Millennium, the democratization of digital techniques and technologies has brought a shift from Postmodern" media logic "- TV screen, Cyberspace,- to Metamodern "media logic" of "creative amateurs' social network and locative media."

So the new tendency emerged, sincere and natural, with new ideas, and we can easily discuss that a new, quite another trend is to rise beyond Postmodernism. Now it is a new strategy, perhaps Post Postmodernism, or Metamodernism as some call it, some deny it.

It is thought that Metamodernism is clearly expressed by the neoromantic turn of the latter, associated with the architecture of Herzog and de Meuron, the installation of Bas, Jan Ader collages of David Thorpe, the paintings of Kaye Donachie, the films of Gondry*.

Now we observe the mindsets about the past against the future, changes and oscillations in style, manner, prosperity, trend or tendency or brand, so to say, in literature, film, fashion, photography, that is alterations in cultural life, innovations in public relations, history and politics.

There has been much thought and arguments online as well as in conference halls about prefix *meta* in metamodernism. Metamodernism is a term which means after modernism; it comes beyond modernism as counterstrategy within modernism. Prefix *meta* is

of Greek origin and translates as ‘after’, but can also denote qualitative changes or show positions ‘with’(epistemologically) and ‘between’(ontologically) Online Etymological dictionary gives the following definitions of the word: with, beyond, between. It indicates a motion, a dynamic or movement between as well as movement beyond. That is, Metamodernism is after Postmodernism, beyond it, between Modernism and Postmodernism, it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Two young researchers from the Netherlands Timotheus Vermeulen and Robbin van den Akker define Metamodernism as a continuous oscillation, a perpetual movement and changes between position and outlooks, metanarrative, a movement to the future, but here they put a question: does this future exist? Perhaps it is a naivety of idealism or a return to Romanticism, transcendentalism.

Two examples – Metamodernist Poetics and Metamodern Architecture – are given to characterize Metamodernism in its function.

Metamodernist Poetics. A case concerns the oscillation between the modern and the postmodern, with a nuance of neomodernism or neoromanticism. These two examples vividly show the essence of the tendency that is dominant nowadays. It comprises characteristics of Metamodernism that tends to be serious, pompous, sets out to change irony and sneer. It swings to and fro, that gives a vibration, fluctuation between different opinions, purposes and outlooks, between two polarities as they are already established and widely known: a desire for *sens*/ a doubt about the sense, enthusiasm/irony, hope/melancholy, naivety/knowingness, empathy/apathy, totality/fragmentation, unity/plurality, authenticity/pastiche, involved/detached, elitist/democratic, to already given list I have added bright/plain, light/dark. Metamodern stays between these polarities, between Modern and Postmodern poetry, but its location goes beyond the latter.

David Roster Wallece, an American novelist and essayist proclaimed the generation who would oppose Postmodernism would, perhaps, be some of anti-rebels who would have gall to oppose irony and sneer.

Here is given a poetry by an English poet Sir Geoffrey William Hill, a poem titled “The Triumph of Love.” We chose the author as a representative of metamodern poetry and try to show the very example of metamodern verse.

.....

Whose lives are hidden in God? Whose?
Who can now tell what was taken, or where,
Or how, or whether it was received:
How detached, divested, clamped, sifted, overlaid,
raked over, grassed over, spread around
Rotted down with leaf mould accepted.

.....

Synonymous phrases detached, divested, clamped, sifted, overlaid, grassed over, spread around, raked over, rotted down, oppose to one word - accepted. Another polarity is: was taken/ received.

.....

Some qualities are best
Left unrecognized. Needless to say,
Unrecognized is not
unacknowledged. Unnamed is not nameless.

Many polarities are given in the following stanza:

.....Is prayer
Residual in imprecation? Only
as we equivocate. When I examine

my soul's heart's blood I find it the blood
of bulls and goats.

Things unspoken as spoken give us away.

Earnest and serious tone with obscurity and comparison, metaphors are characteristic of this period: my soul's heart's blood/the blood of goats, things unspoken /spoken; contrasts and vibration between prayer/imprecation. The same vibration sounds in the following lines:

.....for in equity, inequity
for religious read religiose, for distinction
detestation. Take accessible to mean
acceptable, accommodating, openly servile.

Metanarrative about the last chords by Heydn and Bartok and some melody sound in the passage:

.....Heydn
at sixty-six, his clowning majesty
of invention never bettered

.....
Bartok dying in New York unfinished
music.....
ta Rha, ta-Rha...

Another example of Metamodernist poetry by a famous American woman poet Kay Ryan gives us quite another view on this period changes. Kay Rhyan is often compared with Emily Dickinson and Marianna Moore. Her witty and facile style of writing earned her the status of one of the great living American poets. Her narrative is magnificently compact in a vertical order of lines; rhymes are subtle. She returned the clichés; she brought structure to her work and constructed the verse like a gentle painting of Monet, being aware of a poet's mission in life.

Here is a passage from her poem "Pinhole":

We say
Pinhole.
A pin hole
Of light. We
Can't imagine
how bright
more of it
could be,
the way
this much
defeats night.
It almost
Isn't fair,
whoever
poked this,
with such
a small act
to vanquish
blackness.

A typical metamodern seriousness with metaphoric meanings and twists: pinhole of light, defeats the night, to vanquish blackness by such a small act... Light, bright vs night and blackness. Nimble rhythms of rhymes help comprehend the author's expressiveness and emotion.

Another American poet Ryan but this time Michael in his verse “A Thank-You Note” writes some lines to his daughter:
What kind of delusion are you under?
The life he hid just knocked you flat.
You see the lightening but not the thunder.

In these lines we notice the intelligence of the poet, his comprehension of the world, and bitterness of the soul. Here we feel the aroma of neo-romanticism that is natural to metamodernist style.

Metamodern architecture comes from Postmodern architecture with two polar contradictions – To have a total idea let us have some samples like buildings, sometimes they look like they are about to fall down. Windows strangely proportional, walls uneven, floors are not level, unusual angles, windows leaning. All these are very interesting and amazing, but as if not for settling, perhaps better than Modernist style of boxy buildings. The State Centre of MIF campus (the author - Frank Gehry).

Peter Eisenman is also Postmodernist. His manner is deconstructing the buildings: walls are not parallel and perpendicular; they are disorienting, not practical for living, like a maze, built to shifted grids.

Generally it is difficult to classify and pigeonhole the creative work, though Peter Eisenman did not wish to be labeled, but still his style could be labeled as postmodern (an interview with Charles Jenks, an American landscape architect and theorist).

Frank Gehry, the star postmodern architect, whose buildings do not look much positive and negative, high/low, bright/simple, and etc. His style is passionate, quirky and unrefined.

In Metamodern architecture they look into the ways in which the climate crisis, the financial crisis and geographical crisis affect contemporary ways of doing architecture.

The financial crisis is evidently capping the era of austerity, quite different from frivolity, playfulness and exuberance of postmodern architecture; new seriousness came in architecture.

Geographical crisis is a manifestation of both landscape and ecology in architectural practice, which is a “cross-disciplinary phenomenon.” The principle emerged at the end of the XX century and is broadly confined to infrastructural constructions and attempts to find a coherent system contrasting to architectural practice.

The climate crisis is resulting in growing awareness of need for sustainable urban future -Societal reform. It is not a continuation of post modernism, but quite different to build “green architecture” according to environmental needs, snow, wind, sun, rain. It stands somehow between two poles, modern (strict functionalism) and postmodern (boundless formalism) – it oscillates between these two poles (Herzog & de Meuron, Snohetta, BIG. Its fragility and natural beauty answers the challenges of our day: these terms cannot be explained as Postmodernist; that is why we talk about the alleged demise of Postmodernism and the rise of another modernism – Metamodernism (wow inducing buildings).

Bjark Ingels, a founder of architectural practice BIG, the most prominent representation of a generation of architects, that surpasses the postmodern conventions, attitudes and strategies, “pragmatic utopianism,” as he calls his architecture, oscillates between modern and postmodern ones, out-of-worldliness and earthliness. Peter Zumthor’s 2011 pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery opened in London’s Kengsiston Gardens was a welcome change of the course. Imposing black walls, an enclosed garden. All critics unanimously claimed that it was something new and quite opposite to previous pavilions. It was a splendid structure and quite spectacular, designed for rest and speculation.

Jacque Herzog and Pierre de Meuron from Switzerland are best known for their conversion of giant Bankside River Station to Tate Modern. They refined the tradition of modernism to simplicity through new techniques, from simple rectangular forms to more

complex geometrical figures, using skills and materials (Forum building, Barcelona; 1111 Lincoln Road parking garage, Miami, Florida, USA; Walker Art Center expansion, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Prado Store, Tokyo; Elbe Philharmonic Hall, HafenCity, Hamburg and the kind).

Other representatives of Metamodernism in culture are: Michel Gondry, Guiz van Sant(film), George Lentz, Devendra Banhart (music), Peter Doig (artist), David Foster Wallace (literature) and so on.

Conclusion:

Thus, Metamodernism is an oscillation, rather than stability; it is ongoing discussion, argument without an answer.

After modern hope and postmodern disappointment Metamodernism appears to be a balance between them and presents a serious authority over the emotional expressiveness with its clarity and simplicity. It is used in law, art, literature, politics, economics, data analysis, architecture and etc.

Main messages that Metamodernism can send to these spheres of activities, are reflexivities obtained without irony on traditional background; these are more often hindrances to this kind of accomplishment and achievement than a helper.

The attitudes between two poles bring to praxis rather than to parataxis.

Appendix: METAMODERNIST // MANIFESTO

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1. We recognize oscillation to be the natural order of the world.
2. We must liberate ourselves from the inertia resulting from a century of modernist ideological naivety and the cynical insincerity of its antonymous bastard child.
3. Movement shall henceforth be enabled by way of an oscillation between positions, with diametrically opposed ideas operating like the pulsating polarities of a colossal electric machine, propelling the world into action.
4. We acknowledge the limitations inherent to all movement and experience, and the futility of any attempt to transcend the boundaries set forth therein. The essential incompleteness of a system should necessitate an adherence, not in order to achieve a given end or be slaves to its course, but rather perchance to glimpse by proxy some hidden exteriority. Existence is enriched if we set about our task as if those limits might be exceeded, for such action unfolds the world.
5. All things are caught within the irrevocable slide towards a state of maximum entropic dissemblance. Artistic creation is contingent upon the origination or revelation of difference therein. Affect at its zenith is the unmediated experience of difference in itself. It must be art's role to explore the promise of its own paradoxical ambition by coaxing excess towards presence.
6. The present is a symptom of the twin birth of immediacy and obsolescence. Today, we are nostalgists as much as we are futurists. The new technology enables the simultaneous experience and enactment of events from a multiplicity of positions. Far from signaling its demise, these emergent networks facilitate the democratization of history, illuminating the forking paths along which its grand narratives may navigate here and now.
7. Just as science strives for poetic elegance, artists might assume a quest for truth. All information is grounds for knowledge, whether empirical or aphoristic, no matter its truth-value. We should embrace the scientific-poetic synthesis and informed naivety of a magical realism. Error breeds sense.
8. We propose a pragmatic romanticism unhindered by ideological anchorage. Thus, Metamodernism shall be defined as the mercurial condition that lies between, beyond and in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons. We must go forth and oscillate!

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