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METAMODERNISM – A CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

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Abstract

The study takes into consideration the existing dynamic relationship between modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism as interpretive systems and philosophical currents successive in time, but overlapping. Providing benchmarks for their synchronic and diachronic approach, we support the idea that none of these currents does not exclude the others and does not deny their specific contribution to ensuring the overall development.

Mainly, we suggested: an attempt for the conceptual foundation of the metamodernism and providing pragmatic benchmarks by quantifying certain aspects in a map of the attitudes which are generated by each doctrine, highlighting the weight of each of them.

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1. Introduction

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."
(Albert Einstein)

It's been a few years since it was introduced, especially in the humanistic area, a new concept, post-modernism, a concept that was not defined uniformly and operationally yet. "The term "postmodernism" first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979, with the publication of "The Postmodern Condition" by Jean-Franois Lyotard [10]. Although we cannot speak of unanimity, in the conceptualisation of postmodernism and in epistemological and philosophical debates another concept of higher complexity has emerged - metamodernism.

The term of metamodernism, although it was introduced in 1975 by Zavarzadeh who considers it as an emergence from the aesthetics field, it has not been sufficiently substantiated yet. Recently, respectively in 2010, the concept of metamodernism was (re) introduced in use by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker [11], making references to the same field.

The first question that arises is whether this concept is only proper for aesthetics domain, or we could foresee a possible applicability and relevance in other areas, including the philosophical one. Some adjacent questions could be:

Why is it necessary to introduce a new concept, a new philosophical vision on the fundamentals of existence and of the world? What else could this bring in addition to what exists at the moment as a philosophical reflection on the essence of the universe and the evolution of the contemporary world? Is it really necessary a new philosophical vision to build a new interpretative system about the Universe? Is this concept different from postmodernism or just a new philosophical concept artificially introduced, one which will not leave traces? All these justified questions require an answer, an initiation/achievement of interpretative analysis and a construction of interpretative systems.

Before trying to expose our view on this problem, we propose a semantic-pragmatic analysis about postmodernism.

2. What is postmodernism?

Trying to define the term is like fighting windmills, therefore, it is often said: if one formulated a definition, a postmodern philosopher might wish to deconstruct it too.

To achieve a primary argumentative analysis without trying to enter in a postmodern debate, we will resume this concept as it is explained in the Oxford Dictionary and Encyclopaedia Britannica.

- "Postmodernism, also spelled post-modernism, in Western philosophy, is a late 20th-century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power" (Encyclopaedia Britannica) [12].

- Postmodernism, "a late 20th-century style and concept in arts, architecture and criticism, which represents a departure from modernism and is characterized by self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, a mixing of different artistic styles and media and a general distrust of theories" (Oxford Dictionaries) [13].

If we relate all the key terms introduced by definitions above, postmodernism is characterized by "skepticism", "subjectivism", "relativism", "mixture of different artistic styles and media", and a "general distrust of theories". Therefore, the postmodern man is characterized by existential and epistemological doubt and skepticism as a mental attitude in general, being a person with attitude towards life characterized by distrust, skepticism, subjectivism, doubt, conflictual situations, negativism.

In this case, we can formulate the next questions: If postmodernism means accepting multiple ideas and diverse explanatory horizons, what can we say about:

- the conceptual foundation of postmodernism;
- the way the postmodernism itself is perceived from the postmodernist perspective;
- the rigorous, ambiguous and unique character of approaches, definitions, conceptualizations.

These are questions that nobody could answer or there could be as many answers as people are.

Perhaps a more legitimate question could be: What happens after postmodernism?

According to the mathematical logic, if we multiply a mathematical entity with a minus sign by another entity with the same sign, the result is a mathematical entity with the plus sign. Thus, if postmodernism represents a plus brought to modernism, then the conflict between postmodern and postmodern or negation of negation, it should offer us a plus.

This is our postmodern logic, with metamodern tendencies which pushes us to extract that plus within postmodernity – the added value, to seek and find what comes next after the conflict between modern-postmodern, postmodern-postmodern. In this regard, the following actions are relevant:

- the establishment of the positive and negative connotations of this conflict;
- the relative quantification of the magnitude and causality of these implications;
- the awareness of negative implications of the conflict in general;
- the maximal valorisation of the positive implications.

A special interest is in the positive implications of the conflict, generating added value and general evolution in fact. This plus/addition, the positive desirable result of the conflict from the existential debate is the metamodernism itself.

3. What is metamodernism?

In our view, metamodernism is not just a simple reaction to postmodernism and does not remain only at the stage of conflict, of ongoing denial or question about concepts or theories. Metamodernism is that trend which attempts to unify, to harmonize and to settle the conflict between modern and postmodern by supporting the involvement in seeking solutions to problems and the desirable positioning towards existing theories, not only combating or questioning them.

When T. and R. Vermeulen Akker [11] refer to the prefix meta, they retain as connotation the ancient Greek meaning of "with", "between" and "beyond". We propose the extension of its meaning, adding new and current significances such as change, transformation, metamorphosis [15] and the sense used in informatics "about".

- Meta- = relating to change: used with some adjectives, verbs and nouns;
- Metamorphosis = the process of changing into something completely different;
- Metalanguage = a form of language or set of terms used to describe or analyse another language.

By adding these new meanings, we can say: metamodernism represents the trend that characterizes contemporary societies, being the expression of a new philosophical vision to the existential problems, a vision that leaves its mark on their approach and resolution.

In terms of historical evolution, metamodernism is a stage that comes after postmodernism, because it is not possible to set a clear spatio-temporal boundary between them.

Metamodernism is the stage where one gives up to the skepticism that is specific to postmodernist thinking, proposing the pacification and reconciliation between modernity and post-modernism, and of the postmodernism with itself. It is the phase when not the critic and the problematization is the key, but the constructive effort to find solutions to societal issues. It promotes an anticipatory and proactive thinking, "how will it be in the future if", "what can we do to ..." a positive, meditative, reflective, logical, active and proactive thinking.

4. Metamodern vision – an analysis example

For a better understanding of a metamodern vision, we will try to give as example a case analysis, where the main "character" is the Internet.

The modern vision defines Internet in a very short manner, almost unequivocally, not leaving space for too many interpretations. This definition is approximately the same in all dictionaries.

"Internet: a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols." (Oxford Dictionary) [16].

In the postmodern view more data is offered, a more detailed explanation about what Internet is, without using only one definition. References to the Web, users, etc. are made too. In fact, embedding more terms is an approach to explain the concept of Internet. We give as example:

"It is worth highlighting that in case of the Internet it is not the architecture of technical infrastructure that becomes the most important aspect for social sciences but the ways in which it is harnessed by users, and as a result the roles users assume in the course of their activity in the Web." (Marcin Komanda, 2013, p. 338-344) [6], [18].

A metamodern perspective on the Internet could be an attempt to unify both definitions/ existing views, to analyze new or old theories or research from other sciences such as cybernetics [19], the scientific study of how people, animals and machines control and communicate information, to reconcile what exists, to appeal to a meditative/ reflective, imaginative thinking. This way, appealing to imagination too, one can make some predictions about what Internet will mean in the future.

Based on the research of Stefan Odobleja, "Psychologie consonantiste" published in Paris by "Librairie Maloine" (vol. I in 1938 and vol. II in 1939) [8], of Norbert Wiener [9], published 10 years later, in 1948 Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine, and on the present development of Internet, we propose to analyze the next specific case.

We know that at the moment the amount of information doubles every five years, thus making more arduous its optimum use, therefore it is necessary to find new ways of organizing and capitalizing more efficiently the entire Internet system, with everything it implies, physical network, information, web etc.

Perhaps, for a better use of information, at a specific moment Internet should be reorganized like the human brain, the computers of the global network coverage behaving like neurons of a human brain which has the capacity to store, share and process stimuli and "information". The power of the human brain thinking occurs when neurons are working together to solve a problem.

Nowadays one can observe that cloud computing is developing, thus meaning that there is a place where one can access apps and services and where data can be safely stored.

What we assume in this scenario is that large clusters of computers will be formed in the future, namely, very large areas where information will be stored. The real power of these points will emerge when in certain areas one will work only with the same type of information. For example, if we have hundreds of Hubble telescopes, all their information will be stored only by a certain area of the Internet. In this area no other information is stored, and so, if one need to access the best information in the shortest time, all computers will work complementary and will join forces to decide which is the best information to be transmitted for a decision. Therefore, it is not necessary any more to choose between the useful information and the information which has nothing to do with what is requested to that cluster.

In such a network many specialized clusters will exist, processing only a certain type of information. The real potential for solving complex problems will be exploited when each cluster sends the best information to an area of analysis.

Is it possible that such an Internet, at some point, will start to think independently? Will we have a new form of the Internet? Something like a Cluster Neuronal Net (CNN)? Only time will tell ...

Of course, this analysed case is perhaps only a revolt against the current definitions for Internet, a postmodern thinking ... or maybe just imagination, an utopia, a screenplay for thinking outside the box ... in a meta world, a meta-modern one ...

"Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere." (Carl Sagan).

Conclusions

Through a diachronic analysis about the evolution of philosophical reflections related to the existential problems, we can identify three interpretative systems and philosophical trends, which are naturally scheduled and partially overlapped: modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism – as it can be seen in the following figure:

Table number 1 – The map of the attitudes for modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism

Attitudes	Modern	Postmodern	Metamodern
Reflexive attitude	√	√√	√√√
Interrogative attitude	√	√√√	√√
Metacognitive attitude	√	√√	√√√
Proactive and projective attitude	√	√√	√√√
Critical attitude	√	√√√	√√
Optimistic, positive and open attitude	√√	√	√√√

In our view, each of the three trends has a specific contribution in the creation of the interpretative/explanatory systems of societies' problems. At the same time, we support the idea that none of these trends excludes the presence of the others two and denies their specific contribution to the ensuring of the general development.

To capture the dominants of these three trends, we have identified six common characteristics, with differentiated emphasis from one another. In a primary attempt of quantification, we have elaborated in tabular form a map of the attitudes that each trend holds, highlighting the weight of each.

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