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## METAMODERNISM AS A CONCEPT OF CULTURAL STUDIES

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### Abstract

The essence of metamodernism as a concept of cultural studies is analysed in the article. The article points out the expediency of conceptualization of the cultural features of the (post) postmodernism era, on the one hand, and the need to develop adequate approaches, different from the traditional ones, for the implementation of a cultural analysis of a new research direction and modern world trends, on the other. The purpose of the article deals with a critical understanding of metamodernism as a contemporary concept of cultural studies. Comparative, analytical, and systematic methods were used to achieve the research objectives. The application of these methods allows us to substantiate the intertextuality of traditional cultural strategies that encourage the creation of a new discursive field; to “read” the changing and unpredictable cultural processes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; to analyse the significant issues of metamodernism in the context of the relevance of the present-day needs. Conclusions. It has been proved that the concept of metamodernism is characterized by the dialectical ambiguity and the mixture of different directions of scientific research. In the scientific discourse of our time, metamodernism is studied as a cultural paradigm, a philosophical trend or a period of the historical development of culture. The essence of metamodernism as a concept of cultural studies is reduced to the so-called language of sensuality, which contributes to the understanding of the aesthetic and cultural advantages of the present and is developed not by studying of the individual, isolated phenomena, but through the continuous studying of trends that dominate in the culture, the combination of styles and conventions of the past with the strategies and passions of the present. It has been emphasized that metamodernism goes beyond the previous paradigms, avoiding deconstruction, irony, relativism, nihilism, trying to revive sincerity, hope, romanticism, the potential for a great narrative and universal truths.

**Keywords:** cultural studies; metamodernism; postmodernism; modernism; oscillation; discourse

## Introduction

The first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are characterized by the rethinking of the existing concepts of cultural studies, the emergence and crystallisation of new ones. Today, the cultural dominant is metamodernism, which, combining the forms, methods, and visions inherent in modernism and postmodernism, creates a new language of sociocultural reality, based on an “open approach to the study of the world” (Rönkkö). Its influence is felt in various spheres of social activity: economics, politics, computer science, culture, art, which makes scientists reflect on the metamodern state of modern culture; to develop tools for the definition and analysis of modern cultural phenomena and trends, on the one hand, and building a holistic cultural theory, on the other hand.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the cultural space was enriched with works where the idea of postmodernism as a cultural period that comes to the end is substantiated: due to various factors, but above all – levelling of historicity, the fading of affect, lack of depth and its replacement with superficiality (Jameson, 2018). Researchers point to the inability of orthodox postmodern theory to describe and analyse modern cultural – primarily discursive – practices (Spivakovskii, 2018, p.197).

It is worth mentioning the research of A. Kroker and D. Cook (*The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetic*, 1986), L. Hutcheon (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 1989), A. Furlani (*Postmodern and After: Guy Davenport*, 2002), A. Kirby (*The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond*, 2006; *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*, 2009), N. Brooks and J. Toth (*The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*, 2007; *The Passing of Postmodernism*, 2010), R. Eshelman (*Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism*, 2008), S. Burn (*Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*, 2011), M. K. Holland (*Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature*, 2013). Thus, A. Kirby justifies the idea that the theory of postmodernism is slowly but steadily departs into oblivion, not reminding of itself in the modern market of culture either in film, music and book industry, or in scientific discourse. “The theory has served its purpose, its cultural movement has faded, its impotence and uselessness are felt... Today, people who produce and consume a cultural product... have abandoned the ideas of postmodernism and its forms” (Kirby, 2006).

At the same time, the scientific space is enriched with alternative concepts aimed at understanding the senses, tendencies and meanings of the contemporary world of culture. The cultural discourse of the late 90s and early 2000s outlines the themes of supramodernism (M. Augé), altermodernism (N. Bourriaud), hypermodernism (G. Lipovetsky), post-postmodernism/performatism (R. Eshelman), neomodernism (A. Zhitenev), automodernism (R. Samuels) or digimodernism (A. Kirby), the beginning of the century/de'but de siecle (M. Epstein), metavirtualism (O. Donska, O. Elkan). However, none of these options has gained popularity and a certain constancy in the scientific community.

The most thoroughly developed and promising concept claiming to be an equivalent alternative to postmodernism has become the concept of metamodernism,

which absorbed dialectically ambiguous theoretical concepts. Metamodernism, as the dominant cultural paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is studied by A. Dumitrescu, H. Freinacht, T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, C. Moraru, and others. In 2017, the first academic collection of essays “Metamodernism Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism” was published, in which the authors attempted to understand social changes and summarise the main tendencies in the context of metamodern categories, and in 2018 there was the monographic study of H. Freinacht “The Listening Society: A Metamodern Guide to Politics, Book One (Metamodern Guides 1)”.

In the Ukrainian humanities, there are practically no detailed works devoted to the analysis of metamodernism as an object of cultural studies. The only exceptions are individual articles and discursive materials discussed by the public on the pages of periodicals and individual websites, as well as cultural and artistic events that partially or generally correlate with the metamodern concept (Drozdovskyi, 2013; Liutyi, 2018; Miroshnychenko, 2017, etc.).

#### ■ Purpose of the Article

The purpose of the article is a critical understanding of metamodernism as a contemporary concept of cultural studies. To substantiate the intertextuality of traditional cultural strategies that encourage the creation of a new discursive field; to “read” the changing and unpredictable cultural processes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; to analyse the significant issues of metamodernism in the context of the relevance of the present-day needs. Comparative, analytical, and systematic methods were used to achieve the research objectives.

#### ■ Main research material

The term metamodernism has appeared in the 1970s and is used in philology, art, aesthetics, philosophy, and social sciences (Zavarzadeh, Okediji, Furlani, Dumitrescu, and Dember). However, as a cultural paradigm, it does not attract much public attention until the Norwegian researcher T. Vermeulen and the Dutch scientist R. van den Akker publish their vision of the essence of metamodernism in their work “Notes on metamodernism”, emphasising that the proposed substantiation for the metamodern concept is not derived from the previously published points of view (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Western researchers argue that the historical preconditions for metamodernism were the synergy of such factors as protest and populist movements, terrorist acts, climate changes, computerisation of society, and the global financial crisis. “Everything that is a System has destabilised everything that is Life on a planetary scale, and the metamodern structure of sensuality, with the corresponding logic for it, has become dominant precisely because of these conditions” (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017, p. 6).

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the museum exhibitions (one of the first was the thematic exhibition “Postmodernism – Style and Subversion 1970–1990”, the Victoria and Albert Museum), conferences (“After Postmodernism”, 1997; “Writing History after Postmodernism”, 2009, “Reconstructing Postmodernism”, 2011, and others) have been organized in support of metamodernism as a cultural trend; there

have been issues of periodicals (“Adbusters”, 2010, “American Book Review”, 2013), in which individual contemporary artists and cultural figures were identified as metamodernists (R. Bolaño, D. Eggers, H. Murakami, F. Wallace, others); internet sites and social network pages have been created (<http://www.metamodernism.com>, <https://metamodernism.wordpress.com>, <https://www.ignant.com>, <https://metamoderna.org>, <https://biggggidea.com>, etc.), which enabled an active dialogue between various participants of the cultural process.

“Notes on Metamodernism” by R. van den Akker and T. Vermeulen prompted the English artist L. Turner to publish the official “The Metamodernist Manifesto” (Turner, 2011) in 2011. The Manifesto calls for liberation from modernist ideological naivety, cynical postmodernism insincerity, and inertia as their common consequence. L. Turner states that metamodernism is, first of all, “the mercurial condition *between, among and beyond*: irony and sincerity, educational naivety and understanding, relativism and truth, pragmatic idealism and moderate fanaticism, optimism and doubts, in the pursuit of numerous disparate and elusive horizons. We must go forth and oscillate!” (Turner, 2011). The essence and objectives of the metamodern project are developed by L. Turner in the article “Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction” (Turner, 2015) and on the website “metamodernism.com” (founded in 2009 by R. van den Akker and T. Vermeulen), co-editor of which is the British artist.

Having analysed scientific works and generalised approaches to the definition of the concept of “metamodernism”, we can say that the latter is studied as a cultural paradigm, philosophical tendency and historical period.

*Metamodernism as a cultural paradigm* and cultural logic of the Internet era is imbued with contradictions, tensions, ideological oppositions and ambiguous achievements. It partly coincides with postmodernism, partly arises from it as a reaction to postmodern fragmentation, individualism, analyticism and specialisation, and is based on the idea of the numerous interrelations of contemporary cultural phenomena (Dumitrescu, n.d.b). It is developed not by studying separate, isolated phenomena, but through the continuous studying of tendencies that dominate the culture, the combination of styles and conventions of the past with the strategies and passions of the present (Akker R. van den, Vermeulen T., 2019).

Metamodernism is the creation of the language of sensuality (O. Dumitrescu defines this trait as “cultural sensitivity” or “cultural metamorphosis”), which contributes to the understanding of aesthetic and cultural advantages of present (Akker R. van den, Vermeulen T., 2019). To explain this idea, metamodernists use the concept of “oscillation” as a form of individual experience that is not inherent in other cultural epochs. Oscillation is reduced to the destruction of stable states, stimulation of the sense of continuity of movement, constant fluctuations and shakes of the already familiar and established: metamodernism dynamically fluctuates between irony and enthusiasm, sarcasm and sincerity, eclecticism and purity, the processes of destruction and creation (Akker R. van den, Vermeulen T., 2019).

However, both the use of the concept of “oscillation” and its interpretation are perceived by various scholars quite critically and ambiguously. In particular, O. Dumitrescu emphasises that the core aspect in this process is, first of all, not fluctuation, but the ethical aspect (Dumitrescu, n.d.a). At the same time, most scholars agree

that the society of metamodernism is a society of complex and numerous relations formed under the influence of doubts, hopes, deep searches and dynamic changes (Savoiskii, 2016).

*Metamodernism as a historical period* changes the era of modernism (the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and postmodernism (the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and describes the processes of human functioning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (values, aspirations, life dreams, achievements, motives of the individual). As R. van den Akker notes, “metamodernism is only a phase in the development of western capitalist society ... and, of course, is not its final stage” (Syundyukov, 2017). H. Freinacht is convinced that the perception of metamodernism as a historical stage of development, and not just as a cultural paradigm, makes it more powerful and universal tool for understanding the changes that are taking place in the contemporary world, because “metamodern people ... function differently ... they intuitively see the world differently than their modernist and postmodern fellow citizens” (Freinacht, 2018). However, this movement is hindered by a person’s lack of understanding of how he wants to see his future and what narrative tools to use to approach it (Syundyukov, 2017).

*Metamodernism as a philosophy and intellectual alternative* to modernism and postmodernism reflects “a clear but ultimately open position on life, science, reality, spirituality, art, society, and man” (Freinacht, 2018), trying to define “what is the true reality” (Freinacht, 2017). Metamodern philosophy, which, according to R. van den Akker, was originated in the continental philosophy and the Western tradition of Marxism (Syundyukov, 2017), is to be, at the same time, subtly ironic and unshakably sincere, idealistic and Machiavellian, responsible for the creation of man as a personality; able to recognize the inconstancy of things and phenomena, because life is a continuous variable flow, the process of emergence, development, immanence and inevitability of decline; able to give priority to playfulness in life, “which requires us to be extremely serious, due to extraordinary opportunities for untold suffering and bliss” (Freinacht, 2018). This integration as a core feature of metamodernism is substantiated in the work of Feldman (Feldman, 2003, p. 297): he analyses metamodernism as a paradigm of thinking; a worldview that forms the perception and orientation of a person in this world. This integrative ability of metamodernism gives grounds for some scholars to state that in the near future there will be the formation of Homo Integralis – “a man of integrity, equidistant from the guilt of modernism and the shamelessness of postmodernism, able to solve his spiritual and evolutionary problems” (Savoiskii, 2016).

The semantic emphases of metamodernism are reflected in its principles, thoroughly developed by S. Abramson (2015; 2016). Among them: syncretism, dialogicity, paradoxicality, comparison, remote collapse, multiple subjectivity, collaboration, simultaneity and generative ambiguity, optimism, interdisciplinarity, reconstruction, efficiency and influence, no obstacles and boundaries between real and abstract structures, flexible intertextuality.

As we can see, the essence of metamodernism is not reduced to general metanarratives, a clearly defined idea, ideology or theoretical concept. However, the principles of the metamodern concept are aimed at creation of positive changes both

in separate communities and around the world (Abramson, 2015). In general, the ethics of metamodernism is manifested in the revival of responsibility for nature and the future, which significantly distinguishes it from the current trend of dominance over nature (Dumitrescu, n.d.a).

It is impossible to ignore works containing criticism of metamodernism as such, which has not proved its theoretical ability and is characterised by unreasoned statements, unfounded socio-philosophical generalisations, ideological “superficiality” and “content infertility” (Zhitenev, 2012; Pavlov, 2018; Sednin, 2017) and is, in fact, a “fantasy of a new cultural paradigm” (Kardash, 2019). The transformation of metamodernism into the leading concept of our time is hindered by a superficial study of the Internet influence on the evolution of popular culture; the fragmentation and “selectivity” of “metamodern thought”; metamodernists’ inattention to social problems (Pavlov, 2018). “Until metamodernism states something about the epoch in its totality at the proper level of theoretical and socio-philosophical generalisations, we can’t talk about its indispensable hegemony” (Pavlov, 2018).

O. Dumitrescu is convinced that the term “metamodernism”, in the meaning proposed by Vermeulen and Akker, has a rather generalised approach to the description of cultural and artistic events and phenomena, and the lack of a single organizational principle/principles does not allow characterising contemporary cultural processes as purely metamodern (Dumitrescu, n.d.a). Dutch scholars’ representation of metamodernism as a paradigm of dialogue does not protect them from complete ignoring of other points of view regarding the use of the concept of “metamodernism” (Dumitrescu, n.d.a). After all, most aspects of the definition of metamodernism in the works of Vermeulen and Akker reflect recent events of postmodernism and postmodern sensuality rather than postulate a new sensuality (Dumitrescu, n.d.a), and the concept of oscillation is used as a “typically postmodern thesis”.

## Conclusion

The dialectically ambiguous theoretical system of metamodernism attracts the attention of the scientific community thanks to the works of T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, the manifestos of L. Turner and M. Epstein, the works of S. Abramson, O. Dumitrescu, H. Freinacht, St. Feldman, and others. The metamodern discourse is characterised by a mixture of different directions of scientific research – cultural research, artistic reviews, economic forecasts and sociological statistics, philosophical, religious and psychological reflections. The critics of metamodernism as a concept of cultural studies insist on the conventionality and palliativity of the term, the limited and superficial study of the new theoretical system; the wandering of thoughts between epistemological and ontological descriptions of the theoretical foundations of the new concept.

Metamodernism is studied as a cultural paradigm (the so-called language of sensuality, which contributes to the understanding of the aesthetic and cultural advantages of the present), a philosophy of culture (as an intellectual trend that can integrate the best achievements of modernism and postmodernism), and a historical period (which is the next stage of social development). Metamodernism goes beyond previous paradigms, avoiding the “naïve” ideological positions of modernism and



deconstruction, irony, relativism, postmodern nihilism, trying to revive sincerity, hope, romanticism, develop the potential for a great narrative and the confirmation of universal truths. Instead of studying existing, established phenomena (modernists) or non-existent, imaginary ones (postmodernists), metamodernists focus the attention of a person on the process of formation a phenomenon.

The conducted research does not limit the range of scientific issues, on the contrary – it calls for the updating of the discussion on theoretical and practical issues that are waiting for urgent coverage. After all, significant changes in cultural practices and discursive formations of the present prove significant differences of the world perception between modernism and postmodernism.

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## ■ МЕТАМОДЕРНІЗМ ЯК КУЛЬТУРОЛОГІЧНА КОНЦЕПЦІЯ

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### ■ Анотація

У статті аналізується сутність метамодернізму як культурологічної концепції. Відзначається доцільність концептуалізації особливостей культури доби (пост)постмодернізму з одного боку, та необхідність опрацювання адекватних підходів, відмінних від традиційних, для здійснення культурологічного аналізу нового дослідницького напрямку й сучасних світових трендів – з іншого. Мета дослідження полягає у критичному усвідомленні метамодернізму як сучасної культурологічної концепції. Для досягнення завдань дослідження використано компаративний, аналітичний, системний методи. Їхнє застосування дозволяє обґрунтувати інтертекстуальність традиційних культурних стратегій, що спонукають до творення нового дискурсивного поля; «прочитати» мінливі й непередбачувані культурні процеси XXI ст.; проаналізувати значущі положення метамодернізму в контексті релевантності потреб сьогодення. Висновки. Доведено, що метамодерністична концепція характеризується діалектичною неоднозначністю та сумішшю різних напрямів наукових пошуків. У науковому дискурсі сучасності метамодернізм вивчається як культурна парадигма, філософська течія або ж період історичного розвитку культури. Сутність метамодернізму як культурологічної концепції зводиться до так званої мови чуттєвості, що сприяє розумінню естетичних і культурних переваг сьогодення й набуває розвитку не шляхом вивчення окремих, ізольованих одне від одного явищ, а завдяки неперервному прочитанню домінуючих в культурі тенденцій, поєднанню стилів і умовностей минулого із стратегіями та пристрастями сучасності. Наголошується на тому, що метамодернізм виходить за межі попередніх парадигм, уникаючи деконструкції, іронії, релятивізму, нігілізму, намагаючись відродити ширість, надію, романтизм, потенціал для великого нарративу та універсальних істин.

■ **Ключові слова:** культурологія; метамодернізм; постмодернізм; модернізм; осциляція; дискурс

## ■ МЕТАМОДЕРНИЗМ КАК КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ КОНЦЕПЦИЯ

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### ■ Аннотация

В статье анализируется сущность метамодернизма как культурологической концепции. Отмечается целесообразность концептуализации особенностей культуры эпохи (пост)постмодернизма с одной стороны, и необходимость разработки адекватных подходов, отличных от традиционных, для осуществления культурологического анализа нового исследовательского направления с учетом современных мировых трендов – с другой. Цель исследования заключается в критическом осознании метамодернизма как современной культурологической концепции. Для достижения задач исследования использованы компаративный, аналитический, системный методы. Их применение позволяет обосновать интертекстуальность традиционных культурных стратегий, побуждающих к созданию нового дискурсивного поля; «прочитать» изменчивые и непредсказуемые культурные процессы XXI в.; проанализировать значимые положения метамодернизма в контексте релевантности потребностей настоящего. Выводы. Доказано, что концепция метамодернизма характеризуется диалектической двусмысленностью и синтезом различных направлений научных поисков. В научном дискурсе современности метамодернизм изучается как культурная парадигма, философское течение или исторический период развития культуры. Сущность метамодернизма как культурологической концепции сводится к так называемой чувственности, что способствует пониманию эстетических и культурных преимуществ настоящего и которая развивается не путем изучения отдельных, изолированных друг от друга явлений, а благодаря непрерывному изучению доминирующих в культуре тенденций, сочетанию стилей и условностей прошлого со стратегиями современности. Подчеркивается, что метамодернизм выходит за пределы предыдущих парадигм, избегая деконструкции, иронии, релятивизма, нигилизма, стараясь возродить искренность, надежду, романтизм, потенциал для большого нарратива и универсальных истин.

■ **Ключевые слова:** культурология; метамодернизм; постмодернизм; модернизм; осцилляция; дискурс