

## PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF METAMODERNISM

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**Abstract:** The beginning of the 21st century was marked by qualitative changes in the world culture and social life, causing the need for new perceptual and conceptual models of cognition to explain them. The paradigm of postmodernism, formed in the philosophy of the 20th century, had previously determined the textual model of culture with the respective semiotic, cognitive, and anthropological criteria. However, the rapid development of the industrial civilization in the early 21st century is defining new requirements for discursive and communicative practices. Metamodernism is one of such new conceptual approaches to cultural phenomena. The authors of the article analyse the works of its main representatives, which have been actively published since 2010, and identify the key elements of the philosophical framework of metamodernism: 1) a strategy for text reconstruction; 2) a representational practice of the "structure of feeling"; 3) an aesthetic precept of "metaxis". It is

difficult to formulate a comprehensive concept of metamodernism based on the analysed works due to their popular presentation style; however, if defined as a critical addition to the well-known paradigms of modernism and postmodernism, metamodernism can be perceived as an alternative worldview model that has emerged in the early 21st century with its own discursive and cognitive structure, aesthetic actualization and rational explication.

**Keywords:** metaxis, metafiction, oscillation, reconstruction.

### 1. Introduction

Almost ten years ago, two Dutch researchers — Timotheus Vermeulen, a lecturer at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, and Robin van den Akker, a doctoral candidate at the Department of Philosophy of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, — published a short essay under a catchy title of "Notes on Metamodernism" in a popular science periodical "Journal of Aesthetics &

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Culture". The introduction to their essay subtly but persistently suggests the emergence of a new cultural discourse over the last decade. The boundaries of this discourse are determined by the tendency to invent sensational scenarios for the future development of culture seen through the lens of post-postmodernism (Mankovskaya, 1999): performism (Dempsey, n.d.), automodernism (Turner, 2011), altermodernism (Bourriaud, 2016), digimodernism (Funk, 2015). Representatives of this critical movement, each in their own way, hurl reproaches at their predecessors for the developments of the end of the last century: fixation on massive scales, cynicism, consumption, virtual substitution of reality, etc.

Amidst this indignant polyphony, the young inventors of metamodernism are distinguished by their attempt to create a new aesthetic theory with a proper ontological and epistemological justification. Realizing the immensity of their task, they declare, "Our description and interpretation of the metamodern sensibility is therefore essayistic rather than scientific, rhizomatic rather than linear, and open-ended instead of closed. It should be read

as an invitation for debate..." (Voegelin, 1990). Moreover, Vermeulen and van den Akker admit that the concept of metamodernism was developed as a continuation of their virtual discussion with Canadian scholar Linda Hutcheon about the successive influence of literary tastes on culture. L. Hutcheon boldly states, "Literary historical categories like modernism and postmodernism are, after all, only heuristic labels that we create in our attempts to chart cultural changes and continuities. Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own..." (Vermeulen, 2015, 181).

Our study is an attempt to answer the question whether today metamodernism has succeeded in becoming a new general cultural discourse that has replaced postmodernism. The impetus for the research was the publication of the Russian edition of the book "Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism" in December, 2019, by the "RIPOL klassik" publishing house with the information support of the "Metamodernism" magazine. The book is a collection of essays on the most debated issues of history, literature and art, edited by R. van den Akker, A.

Gibbons and T. Vermeulen. At the presentation of the book held in Moscow on 10 December, 2019, one of the founders of metamodernism R. van den Akker declared with full scholarly conviction that the global upheavals in the history of the early 21st century had led to a change in the attitude to the concept of postmodern culture (Konstantinou, 2016, 57). Postmodernity gives way to metamodernity with its own discursive, communicative and aesthetic attitudes, which, implicitly or explicitly, have long existed in literature and art (Pavlov, 2018, 8). Strictly speaking, such metamodern concepts as the "structure of feeling", "metaxis" and "reconstruction" provide a philosophical foundation or a new aesthetic form for the new cultural discourse. We undertake an independent study of these concepts in order to find out their methodological applicability for exploring the phenomena of modern culture.

The emergence of metamodernism as a cultural trend of the 21st century was announced by *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *The London Evening Standard*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and Russian magazine *Metamodern*. In 2017, in an effort to capture the public attention, R. van den

Akker, A. Gibbons and T. Vermeulen published the above-mentioned collection of essays written by several European art critics, literary scholars and philosophers who shared their beliefs. With their common discursive approaches to "historicity", "affect" and "depth", they offered a critical interpretation of the current narratives on history (R. van den Akker), cinema production (J. MacDowell), literature (J. Toth, L. Konstantinou, N. Timmer), theory of criticism (I. Huber and W. Funk), Philosophy (J. Heiser, A. Gibbons and T. Vermeulen), politics (S. Browse), photography (P. Eshelman), and the artisan crafts, or mannerist "virtuosity" (S. van Tuinen). In the epilogue of the book, J. Elkins profiles the modern narrative of the metamodern culture at the intersection of philosophy, literary fiction, historical reality and the author's autobiography. As an example of such a multifaceted narrative, he analyses reflections on photography in Roland Barthes's "Camera Lucida" (Barthes, 1997, 96).

For metamodernists in the 21st century, the postmodern discourse is becoming a thing of the past, referred to in negative terms of irony, "deconstruction and parataxis"

(Voegelin, 1990); it is a story with a promised end (Fukuyama). In culture, it gives way to the metamodern discourse of the present and the future with its own optics of displaying reality and new pictorial forms, which are colourfully embodied by O Eliasson, G. Rubsamen, D. Attoe and A. Boehm. In the new aesthetics, a work of art is perceived as an event of some personal history with the Romantic inclination toward the tragic and supernatural. Such unusual narrative, as a part of a painting, interior or exterior design, installation, media art project, music video or a film, sparked the interest of English artist L. Turner. In 2011, he published "The Metamodernism Manifesto", in which he presented his vision of art in 8 statements, with a special accent on the following: "essential incompleteness", "coaxing excess towards presence", enactment of event narration online "here and now" and even an effort of questing for truth like science (Toth, 2010). Today the following artists more or less share such views and express them in their works: Sh. LaBeouf, R. Watts, H. Diamond, J. Franco, D. Glover, L. Del Rey and W. Anderson.

## 2. Research Methods

Our primary research statement is that the subject of our study is not an independent philosophical or aesthetic discourse, but with a critical discussion on the discourse that took shape in the culture of the 20th century. This discourse on discourse is delivered with a thematic reclamation of a controversial concept of "metamodernism". A disputable point of view is affirmed that one cultural narrative (postmodernism) has ended, and another narrative is coming to replace it. The nature of this discussion determines our choice of the comparative and structural-semiotic method.

In the compositional design of the metamodern discourse on culture, philosophy plays the role of a tool for creation and explanation of concepts with the own "autopoiesis" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1998). One of the concepts of a general philosophical framework for the metamodern discourse is *reconstruction*. The term expresses a multilevel critical strategy involving in its operation a plurality of other auxiliary concepts, including "structure of feeling", "metaxis", "authenticity" and "oscillation". Let's make a reservation right away that, since almost the entire metamodern discourse is highly eclectic,

we consider that any researcher of this phenomenon is allowed some freedom in interpreting a number of borrowed concepts if their meanings have not been previously specified.

### **Reconstruction Method**

The background for the practical application of reconstruction was the situation of a gap between the historical reality and the symbolic order of culture in the period of late capitalism, as described in detail by F. Jameson. As a result of universal reification in a traded commodity, cultural symbols completely absorb reality, acquiring their own being as simulacra. The resulting symbolic structure is not determined by historical events, which leads cognisors to dissynchronization with the present and past experience (Jameson, 2019, 88). The founders of metamodernism see the main task in incorporating the historical significatum into the linguistic structure of modern cultural narratives, restoring their lost "depth" in differentiation between present and past, internal and external, true and false, etc.

In the 1960s, an attempt at a cultural reconciliation of the structural and historical approaches was once undertaken by L. Sebag in his books

"Marxism and Structuralism" (1964) and "Myth: Code and Communication" (1965). The French structuralist, relying on dialectical materialism, outlined the ways of forming the historical structures in which social reality and linguistic practices will be interdependent and functionally determined: "The Marxist analysis always presupposes the possibility of tracing the languages constructed by men back to their foundation, which is the source of every true human creation" (Eco, 1998, 324). However, he never succeeded in achieving such a union of universal symbolic structures and the material rationality of the historical process, exploring only the formal differences of structural thinking. The only exception is the myth, where sacralisation of reality is always accompanied by a profound emotional experience. A subjective feeling, inspired by a mythological plot, can self-structure depending on changes in the reality it reflects: "the sensual, reverting to itself, exposes the structures in which it outgrows itself" (Eco, 1998, 326). Later R. Williams in his book "Marxism and Literature" (1977) translated the perspective of the "structure of feeling" to the historically established social relations depicted in

literature. The temporal dimension of the "structure of feelings", expressed in an artistic form, enriches them significantly in terms of historical implications, practicality and communicative interest. Moreover, all structured modalities of the affective tone of sensations in consciousness not only convey the practical meaning of the present, but also determine their understanding: "We are talking about the characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but the thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (Scott, 2006).

The structural unification of consciousness and reality through feeling from the aesthetic perspective outgrows the author's intentions or praxis of a realistic novel taken separately. When literature and life are equated, the "structure of feeling" is equally relevant for both the author and the reader. The readers' interest in those authors who, through their characters, can look into the readers' souls and thus create a magnificent piece of art, will never fade away. In the modernist works by M.

Proust, S. Beckett, J. Joyce, A. Bely and other authors, literature, through the author's subjective experience, turns itself into an event of reality, sometimes even to the detriment of its own form. As noted by M. Proust, "Real life, life finally uncovered and clarified, the only life in consequence lived to the full, is literature" (Ricoeur, 2000, 156). Subsequent generations of writers treat it ironically and create numerous images of pathological, though extraordinary, characters who are in irreconcilable conflicts with reality and society (H. Hesse, H.L. Borges, P. Süskind, V. Sorokin and other postmodernists). Scenery of the past or well-known quotes are recursively embedded in incoherent postmodern narratives (Davies, 2018). Metamodernism emerged when readers got tired of postmodern repetitions, and the pendulum returned us to modernism through the realism of the "structure of feeling". Of course, this is not involution, and such modern writers as D. Wallace, R. Eggers, M. Danielewski and some others, demonstrate it by creating positive, reflective "true-life" characters and, at the same time, going to the other extreme with their condemnation of the society around them. The appeal of the new prose lies in the comprehensiveness

of ideas, merciless realism and author's revelations that plunge the reader into the affect and provoke dialogue. Today the metamodern "structure of feeling" allows reconstructing literary events in reality, while staying beyond the text limits.

Reconstruction, in a broad sense, is an operation of authentication. Authenticity as "being in itself" (Baudrillard, 2000, 85) is firmly rooted in time and, when restoring an event or circumstance of the past (Scott, 2006), it should be expressed in an updated copy as accurately as possible. The task set by metamodernists is even more challenging — they seek to carry out a "reconstruction" of authenticity in a work of contemporary art. It is supposed to establish not so much the authorship as the possibility of its external representation. Considering the mimetic paradoxicality of contemporary art as a fiction narrative, the metamodern critical reconstruction does not strive for factual substantiation, but to oscillation — metaxis — between the real and the fictional, and the fiction is not a falsification of facts or a fake, but "something simulated" (Iser, 1999, 189). As the fiction is typical for the literature of resonating replenishment of the

desired or replacement of what is absent in reality (Sass, 2015), metaxis can be treated as the reader's position on the border of ambiguity, tragic conflict and temporal uncertainty (Timmer, 2010,76). In this regard, the reconstruction result is the reader's self-identification in the process of a free search for the truth of their existence here and now in a direct contact with the text: "...we propose to define in general terms the term "reconstruction" as a form of involvement caused by oscillation in a work of art — the involvement that calls for true responsibility of the reader in their contact with the text" (Voegelin, 1990). The symbolic character of all postmodern culture imparts this reconstruction of a dynamic dichotomy with something more than just an artistic meaning.

Reconstruction in literature, as acquiring the authenticity of existence, is more characteristic of modernist writers. The starting point for such author's representation is S. Mallarmé's motto: "Everything in the world exists to end up in a book" (Ricœur, 2000, 27). A book becomes an event of understanding, clarification and interpretation of reality. Impressions, memories and daily life of the author are waiting to get onto the

book pages in order to find there a new spatio-temporal form and get out of the shadow of the past. Immersion in the past is a movement by touch, by ear, by the smell of something that is no longer there but acquires a new space of existence when illuminated by the language. This is the "structure of feeling" — the desire to be sincere with oneself and the understanding that the only guide to the truth can be the first judgement-free impressions, especially as illustrated by the end of a book and the end of a life. "After finishing the book I was depressed, as it seemed to me I wrote something overly frank and tearful, overflowing with blood, sentiment and pure sadness for those who died" (Eggers, 2007). Thus American writer D. Eggers justifies the creation of his autobiographical reconstruction in his book "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius" written as early as the very beginning of the 21st century. In the preface to the book, a young merry fellow is ready to share with everybody the secret of writing genuine stories and to teach how to "stop time". D. Eggers graciously receives the applause during the Pulitzer Prize ceremony and, without feigned irony, genuinely suffers, when telling a touching story of the tragic life

of his family and the entire American Generation X. However, this biographical reconstruction has a dark side in it. From the beginning to the end of the novel, readers constantly feel a close presence of death: powerlessness in the face of death (parents' illness), fear (AIDS) and futile efforts to overcome them (cheerful scenarios for the show). The author compensates for his helplessness by caring for his brother, telling with a feigned irony about his current problems and with a fragile hope — about his future projects (Eggers, 2007). Lee Konstantinou finds this novel to be post-ironic. The author, telling the story of his personal life, remained ironic but sincere, even when he wanted to abandon irony entirely (Mankovskaya, 1999, 236).

The main question when considering the cultural significance of an autobiographical novel can be narrowed down to clarifying the role of language in describing reality. If we admit that language is more than a means (lexis) (Genette, 1998, 284) of expressing the writer's worldview, the literary form of autobiographies leads to doubts that they are true to life. For example, American critic P. de Man states that autobiographies are



monuments with false epitaphs, and the search for the origins and goals of the life formation with the help of rhetoric is defacement (Ricoeur, 2000, 74). With the ambiguity of interpretations, it is impossible to animate the past with prosopopeia, or to revive the past with author's representation.

This issue is also discussed in another work covered in "Metamodernism" collection of essays — "Spectres de Marx" (1993) by J. Derrida, which revives the topic of ghosts in modern philosophy and literature, where, as Hamlet said, "time is out of joint". For Derrida, the ghost is always on the other side of existence, visiting the present from the past as a being of the absent — a spirit without body, an idea without thing. Whether it is the ghost of Hamlet's father calling for vengeance, or the philosopher M. Blanchot, who announced his funeral in the hope of resurrection in new appearance, they will not save the doomed hero of the present. Derrida enthusiastically joins the linguistic game, opening multiple secret places in the texts of Marx and releasing new ghosts that inhabit the books by F. Fukuyama, P. Valéry and M. Heidegger (Derrida, 2006b, 45). Derrida, as if

dissatisfied with just reshaping voiceless texts, brings the spectres of Marx in theatrical costumes on stage, enjoying his own production of "Marx & Sons" (Derrida, 2000). Without this spice of criticism, the "dish" created by the writer would be too bland. But the reader who has to collect scraps of texts into new plots loses their historical interrelation.

This is the reason for the protests of metamodernists, who, in turn, try to attract the reader's attention with their metafiction, such as the novel "Beloved" by T. Morrison, in which the daughter killed by her mother (with the best of intentions) appears to her in the body of a living person. This plot, often found in literature, is regarded as an example of "historioplacticity" (Rudrum, Stavris, 2015, 87), amending the situation with the time "out of joint" in the fictional narrative (Van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen, 2019, 122). Metamodern literary critics go beyond literary analysis and argue that realism and historicity are gaining increasing popularity in the entire modern culture.

### **Metaxis as a method of critical study in literature and art**

This is evidenced by another concept of metamodern reconstruction

— metaxis. R. van den Akker borrowed the term from the book "Anamnesis" by political philosopher E. Voegelin. E. Voegelin considers that recalling ideas (*ἀνάμνησις*), as the introduction of a cognising person to the divine in Plato's dialogue "Phaedrus", is the basis of any reasoning on humanism, "If man exists in 'metaxy', in the tension 'between god and man', any construction of man as a world-immanent entity will destroy the meaning of existence, because it deprives man of his specific humanity" (Malabou, 2004, 104). E. Voegelin defines "metaxy" as the relationship between the idea and the material world and as the inverse dependence of thingness on the "consciousness of being". The etymology of the word originates in Plato's dialogue "Symposium". *Μεταξύ* (between) is met in the following phrase: "He [Eros] was also midway *between* wisdom and ignorance" (Plato, 2001, 269). Eros is the image of tragic co-presence of the divine and the human, the sublime and the low, the ideal and the objective, logos and doxa. It is impossible to separate one half of Eros from the other without something reminding a deep-going cut between them. In art, it resembles the border between the form and the matter. It can

be a discriminating route of penetrating from the external to the internal or gazing into the gaping contours of antipodes strewn on the surface.

In the 21st century, the polysemantic paraphrase of Plato's dialogue provides metaxis with a new aesthetic content. The term of idealism in combination with the "structure of feeling" as the main means of representation contributes to the dualistic nature of the metamodern discourse on art.

An appeal to ancient Greece — and the origins of European culture — protects statements on the postmodern crisis from triviality, turning the discussion to the nature of being. T. Vermeulen, one of the theorists of metamodernism, comments on the statements by M. Heidegger and F. Jameson on the origin and end of artistic creation. Discussing a pair of peasant shoes painted by Vincent van Gogh in his well-known picture, M. Heidegger clearly sees their ontological affiliation: "This equipment [shoes] belongs to the earth... From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to resting-within-itself" (Heidegger, 2008). Jameson contrasts Van Gogh's shoes with E. Warhol's monochrome image of

fashion brand shoes, which are "shorn of their earlier life world" (Van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen, 2019, 97). Art without being loses its meaning, turning into an advertising slogan. Talking about a contemporary art image, T. Vermeulen, in his turn, notes "that appearance can give a sense of what is beyond it" (Fukuyama, 1990, 353). This affective feeling gives the work of art a transcendental meaning (De Man, 1984, 42). At least there is no deconstructive "presence-absence" game (Derrida, 2006a).

124), turning art into a many-faceted "collage" or "decollage" of endless copies.

T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker make an attempt to separate the form and the matter of a work of art in order to fix the position "in between" them. The art form behind imaginary settings can be deformed, transformed or reformed into a copy, but the matter (glass, stone, wood, metal, paint, fabric, clay, etc.), as original creativity, is genuine in the choice of surface exposure and instrumental work. Today the "reterritorialization" of the visual arts unfolds on the surfaces of fences, cars, bodies, displays, banners, residential buildings, etc., And the phrase about

"cosmic artisan" in the book "A Thousand Plateaus" by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (Deleuze, Guattari, 2010) became a signal for the connoisseurs sympathizing with metamodernism to suggest a revival of the 16th century mannerist artisan skills in design and pop art (Van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen, 2019, 184). The transition from fine art to craftsmanship requires not so much professionalism as ingenuity in handling materials (including industrial waste and artificial ingredients) and attention to consumer demand and fashion.

In the traditional arts of the early 21st century, metaxis delineates the surface and "depth" of the represented object. In this context, an interesting example is Damien Hirst' statue "The Anatomy of an Angel" (located in a park of Stockholm [Oslo????]) — a figurative antithesis of the "body without organs" by A. Artaud. The sculptor merged the spiritual and the natural into the marble form of an angelic female body. On the one side, we see a messenger of heaven, as evidenced by the wings and the perfect body of a vestal that have not been burdened by childbirth, on the other — a gaping womb and protruding bones of a creature of earthly origin that has

cunningly attached the wings of an eagle. Metaxis, together with the sculptor's chisel, surgically creates smooth edges on the body formed as an angel and a woman. The white marble unifies the figure in a single cartographic surface without bleeding reliefs. The spectator's representation captures the

transcendental intention of the creator in a massaging gesture of a person who is not used to walking on earth. In the autopsy of a natural but unreal image, there is no hysteria of a "body without organs", which dismantles "the organism in favour of the body, the face in favour of the head" (Deleuze, 2011).



Figure 1. Damien Hirst. The Anatomy of an Angel (2008)



Figure 2. Sarah Sze. The Third (2019)



Figure 3. Olafur Eliasson. Harpa Conference Centre in Reykjavík, Iceland (2013).

Metaxis as delimitation of planes is especially noticeable in the painting "The Third" by American artist Sara Sze. We can see four planar elements of ancient natural philosophy, converging in an illusory perspective. The mirrored surface of the river in the distance comes into contact with a fireplace fire, which is by no means cosmic. Temporary skyscraper display cases with all sorts of odds and ends are depicted as a blurred, gradually melting glaciers on the both sides. The river, as a symbol of time, reflects and absorbs lateral planes within its borders. The viewer's gaze invariably rests on the central glowing point, leading beyond the limits of the picture.

An architectural solution of metaxis is represented by the glass building of the Conference Centre in

Reykjavik, designed by Henning Larsen Architects and O. Eliasson. The key element of the interior is light: refracted, incident, reflected, captured, decorated, shaded. The delimiting faces are rectangular surfaces of walls, ceilings, windows, staircases and floor levels. The glass geometry of the building produces an effect of its transcendence owing to visible weightlessness and detachment from the earth's surface, as if it is striving towards the screened sky. We get the impression that the architect wanted to construct a bottom-up transition from the real world to the imaginary world in order to recreate a transparent super-reality (Baudrillard, 1999, 149).

Metaxis in the correlation between the literary form and the described reality is associated with non-

fiction. The most common plot of this literary style: a helpless lonely hero suffers from a general misunderstanding, but after some collision with the destructive reality, the hero acquires a new mental experience of overcoming oneself. The herald of the non-fictional prose of anti-postmodernism was American writer D.F. Wallace. One of his first literary works was the short story "My Appearance", which was published in Playboy magazine in the late 1980-s. The female protagonist tells a story reconstructing what happened on 22 March 22, 1989, at Letterman's talk show that used to ridicule all its participants. The turning point of the story is the unnamed narrator's resolved internal conflict *between* the horror of waiting for appearance on stage in the entertainment show and the internal conviction that in reality one cannot laugh at everything. Fear of the heroine, waiting to go on stage and periodically swallowing Xanax sedative tablets, is pumped up by the pictures of the previous sketches: a piglet falling from a great height, a woman wearing a Velcro suit on a wall covered with Velcro and a tornado explosion of pink dynamite (Wallace, n,d). The talk show, which attracts audience with slippery questions

about the personal life of its participants, unexpectedly deviates from the usual script after the stage appearance of the well-known heroine. Free participation of the narrator in advertising sausages causes misunderstanding of the ironic audience and the presenter, who are looking for hidden benefits in everything.

The situation when a real event conflicts with an imaginary imitation is also played up in another early story D.F. Wallace — "The Depressed Person" (1988). An unnamed female protagonist experiences a painful feeling of guilt towards her parents who pay for her therapy, sympathetic classmates and even members of her "inner child" focused therapy group. The protagonist, who is cut off from the world around her, experiences a moment of psychological insight during her confession in front of her dying friend. A sincere feeling of loss because of the death of her therapist returns her to reality, at the same time destroying unnecessary psychological defence mechanisms and helping her realize her own importance (Wallace, 1988).

Such ironic stories about simple, though universal, human values distinguished all the later solipsist prose

by D.F. Wallace ("Octet", "Infinite Jest", "Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story", etc.), with a minimum of details describing the setting and the mental state of characters, rapid development of the plot combined with the radical mental transformation of the protagonist, etc. Interest in reality liberates almost all of Wallace's protagonists from subjective limitations (Hutcheon, 2012, 27).

In the literary aesthetics of metaxis, there is an element of fading, affect and transformation over the exposed surface of things, which invariably leads protagonists to getting rid of initial illusions and discovering something genuine and previously unknown. The denouement of the narrative comes at the spatial location of "between" (metamodernists use the notion of *atopos* — "no-place", or "at once a place and not a place") (Voegelin, 1990) and the temporal dimension of "oscillation". The relationships of time in the fictional space of the narrative can be compared to the beats of a metronome, with its pendulum swinging back and forth between the past and the present. In each narrative, the tempo of these oscillations is different, varying between *largo* and *presto*. This unusual

chronotope is best represented in the novel "House of Leaves" by Mark Danielewski. This novel should be not only read but also watched. Such experiment on the text has never been being carried out by any other writer: the text is turned over, pasted in, cut, crossed out, torn off, erased, photographed, encircled, bent and so on.

In his intellectual novel, M.Z. Danielewski invites the reader to establish the authenticity of a documentary by reporter W. Navidson about a happy family life in rural America, which turns into a philosophical clue to Nothing. In the post-theological era, only Nothing remains shrouded in poetic awe and animal fear. The reader is offered to follow three threads of the story about the mystical house in which the events unfold: a manuscript dictated by blind Zampano, who was on his deathbed when he revealed the meaning of what was happening in the film; the story of Johnny, who accidentally found the manuscript that later became a part of his life; and the documentary "The Navidson Record" with all the critical notes (Danielewski, 2016). The constantly expanding space occupied by Nothing in the house is recorded audibly and

visually in a contradictory way, violating all physical laws. Quotations from the Bible, the books by Dante, Milton, Wordsworth, Yeats, Derrida, Heidegger and other authors allow you to get as close as possible to Nothing, but these are thoughts from the past or predictions that cannot be empirically confirmed or denied from within. One thing is certain: as long as the narration is going on at the moment (in any form, even if there are only marginal notes, scraps of letters or spontaneous phrases), Nothing can be talked off and delayed; but as soon as it stops, Nothing invariably comes into possession of everything, turning it into the past, thus proving its own authenticity. The reader is placed in the granular intertextual space of the book pages, where the general meaning is contained in several adjacent fragments at once, and it is necessary to find some way to read them simultaneously.

In his search for authenticity, Danielewski rejects the structured form of a traditional novel and the optimistic lies of fiction. As a result, the documentary about something indescribable is replaced with reliable, but incoherent evidences based on almost all textual achievements of the world culture. The reality of the present

is confirmed by the decomposed fragments of the texts of the past. This, apparently, is the cultural and historical mission of the oscillation swings.

### **3. Criticism and discussions on metamodern methods**

The unconstrained emergence of the metamodern method occurred in parallel with the steady trend of modern literature to go beyond the boundaries of narrative (e.g. the book "Reality Hunger: A Manifesto" by American writer David Shields (2010)). Traditional social, psychological and science fiction novels adjust reality to a plot in accordance with the predictable expectations of their characters, and this sooner or later makes this genre outdated. The plot provokes the writer's passion for fiction even in the genre of memoirs, which can lead to problems with legal institutions due to possible literary forgery. Even trying to create something new within the framework of the plot, the authors still repeat something fictional and previously written by someone else. For Shields, the essence of writing is the novel source — in recording the naked raw material of reality without looking for any reasons. Thus he enters into dialogues with the real people who will



become his interested readers. The chaos of factual material in the form of a text or video recording simply cannot be embraced by the organizing form of the novel any more. In today's literature, a fictional novel turns to extreme idealism, to which Shields opposes "collages" of true stories from "real life" (user-generated content in Internet) or quotes from biographical self-references (Samuels, 2010).

When asked whether a breakthrough to reality is achievable in a literary text, post-structuralist critic J. Culler answers negatively. The text, woven from semantic differences, deontologizes thinking and history within its boundaries (Culler, 1988, 161). Any attempt to get rid of fiction in the narrative leads to creating another story or a multi-layered meta-reference. Metamodernists I. Huber and W. Funk dispute this structuralist message, referring to the communicative function of the narrative, "reconstruction puts its focus on the potential of fictionality as a communicative strategy which aims towards an activation of the reader's responsibility, an endeavour which is related to the reciprocal trust between author and reader" (Van den Akker, Gibbons, Vermeulen, 2019, 366). When

an author writes for a specific reader, new semantic relationships arise, advanced by specific life situations. In this context, P. Vermeulen, in his book "Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel" (Van den Akker, Vermeulen, 2010), analyses an increasingly popular non-fiction autobiographic style of the books by K.O. Knausgård, Z. Smith, J. Lethem, J. Coe, M. Houellebecq and others. The reader is always attracted by the moment of removing the actors' masks and re-trusting the hidden, secret and obscene. An ordinary biographical narrative gets the status of a "social text" — a meeting place for readers' interests, nostalgia for the past, hope for their own transformation, imitations and personal comments. The narrative ambiguously comes to life in the readers' specific life problems and conflict zones, going beyond its own limits. Traditional plot-based novels of J. Franzen, Th. Wolfe, J. Tarde, J. Wayne and other writers objectify such agreements with the reader in advance, successfully develops them, but leaves them in the closed form (Franzen, 2017).

According to the metamodernist beliefs, in the history of literature of the early 21st century, the pendulum has swung from the extreme of textual

impersonality to the other extreme of the narrative self-reference, realism and subjectivism. The paths of literary realism at the beginning of the 21st century run through criticism of postmodern fragmentation, simplification and irony (Krasavchenko, 2018). According to J. Sturgeon, literary editor at *The American Reader*, *The Baffler* and *Flavorwire*, today's memoirs are characterised by an inquisitive interest in environmental issues, process of writing a novel, genuine inner experiences, causes of social conflicts, etc. (Sass, 2015).

#### 4. Conclusion

We can state that the emergence of metamodernism in European culture was not accidental. Each of its aspects is an embodied opposition to postmodernity: reconstruction became a counterweight to deconstructivism, realism to textualism, authenticity to irony, etc. Using individual works of literature and art as samples for our study, we examined the aesthetic implications of the metamodern concepts, but this is not enough to recognize metamodernism as the foundation for the entire contemporary culture. As stated by N. Säde Rönkkö, a

participant of metamodern performances, "we cannot take one work or one phenomenon and define them precisely within the framework of metamodernism. It is rather the world in which we live today; it is the structure that connects different ideas, objects and cultures with each other" (Eshelman, 2008). Metamodernists, in principle, do not take a definite position with regard to explaining the modern culture and limit themselves to describing environmental, economic, and political crises. This ambivalence seems to be the strategy of oscillating between opposites and avoiding extremes. Based on the findings of our research, we can state that metamodernists offered their representative practice of interpreting contemporary literature and art. This aesthetic concept is oriented to the future and applicable to cinema (D. McDowell), photography (P. Eshelman), architecture and pictorial art (O. Eliasson), or any other type of art.

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