

## Self-consciousness and Fragmentation as Major Themes in Modernism

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### Abstract

*The search for a new manner to encounter a world that denied man's dissatisfaction, became the new task of modern man. This search created a sense of lack against man's hopes of existence of all its values. Of course, this of anxiety and uncertainty resonates in art and artists, such as poets, playwrights and so on. Consequently, the world became full of changes that sought to explore the proper means for presenting their effects and set man's position in his new world. However, these changes in life and thinking needed to be represented by new forms of expression. In fact, the 20th century could be called the age of isms. Therefore, the chaos that was suffered from by the world was reflected by the abundance of "isms" such as Surrealism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Absurdism and Dadaism. All of such movements/schools had one common characteristic of their being anti-realists, or anti-rationalists. Hence, it can be said that all these movements rejected the old-fashioned conventions. This paper focuses on the themes of modernism that are used by the writers, playwrights, thinkers, as well as theorists. Such figures have employed the shared themes of modernism to reflect their ideas, thoughts and intensions through their writings regardless the respective genre that they have written for. Such themes are self-consciousness, social fragmentation.*

### 1. Introduction

In its complete definition, modernism means a modern thought, character, or practice. Specifically, modernism intends to give a description of the modernist movement, its traditional tendencies of associated cultural movements. Originally, modernism appeared to be arisen from wide-scale changes to Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernism represented the revolution against the traditional values of realism (Barth, 1984; Graff, 1973). It is argued that modernism is a movement of rejection against the of traditions, rewritings, revision and parody in new forms (Eco, 1990). The persistent certainty of Enlightenment thinking and the existence of a compassionate, all-powerful Creator God are both rejected by modernism (Brooker, 2014; Lewis, 2000).

Generally speaking, as a term, modernism covers the activities and production of the scholars who dealt with the conventional forms of art, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life as being old-fashioned. These forms as compared with new economic, social, and political conditions of a developing and industrialized world. Theodor Adorno articulated the paradigmatic exhortation as he challenged traditional surface coherence and appearance of harmony of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking (Adorno, 1993).

One of the characteristics of modernism is self-consciousness. This is led to experiments with form and work that attracts the processes and materials used to the tendency of abstraction (De la Croix, Gardner, Tansey, & Kirkpatrick, 1991). The beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed that the modernist movement marked the first time that the term avant-garde, by which the movement was labelled until the prevailing of the term modernism. The use of this form was for the arts rather than in its original context (Orton & Pollock, 1996). It has been commented that modernism is a social progressive trend of thought. This trend upholds the power of human beings to be a creator and improves and reshapes their environment making use of the practical experimentation and scientific knowledge (Berman, 1983).

As stated above, a re-examination of every side of existence is found in modernism and to be extended from commerce to philosophy. The aim of such re-examination is to find which was block progress. At the same time, to replace it with new ways that facilitates the reaching the same end. This is also a facilitation of the attention of precise reactions to the use of technology and anti-technological and negativistic aspects of the works of diverse thinkers from Nietzsche to Samuel Beckett's time (Oser, 2007).

#### History of The Term

In Europe and during the first half of the 19th century, a number of wars contributed to an aesthetic turning away from the realities of political and social fragmentation that facilitated a trend towards Romanticism. Romanticism was a revolt against the values of the Industrial Revolution and bourgeois values (Barth, 1984). A focus was placed on individual subjective experience, the sublime, and the supremacy of nature.

However, the mid of the same century had a synthesis of the ideas of Romanticism with constant forms that were emerged as a reaction to the failure of Romantic and democratic Revolutions of 1848. (von Bismarck) in *Realpolitik* exemplified the practical philosophical ideas such as positivism. This constant synthesis was called by various names and was rooted in the idea that reality dominates over subjective impressions.

As a central role to this synthesis were the shared conventions and institutional frames of reference. These involve the religious norms that existed in Christianity and the scientific norms that existed in classical physics and canons. Within these, there is found an assertion that the external reality is depicted from an objective standpoint was both possible and desirable. This set of canons was labelled by cultural critics and historians as realism. However, this term is not universal. While, in philosophy, the movements of the rationalist, materialist and positivist recognized a primacy of reason and system.

In philosophy, rationalism also had reactions from the anti-rationalists particularly Hegel's dialectic view of civilization and history that had their reactions from Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard who contributed widely on existentialism. It was a start from all of these reactions to see a challenge to any comfortable ideas of certainty derived by civilization, history, or pure reason. As a famous thinker, Darwin in his theory of evolution, he believed that the natural selection undermined the religious certainty of the general public. The notion that human beings were driven by the same impulses as "lower animals" proved to be difficult to reconcile with the idea of an ennobling spirituality. Karl Marx argued that the capitalist system contradicted with the workers. Therefore, this does not mean that all modernists rejected either religion or all aspects of Enlightenment thought, rather that modernism can be viewed as a questioning of the *axioms* of the previous age.

Various dates have been suggested by historians as the beginnings for modernism. For instance, William Everdell stated that the start of modernism was with Richard Dedekind's division of the real number line in 1872. Clement Greenberg called Immanuel Kant "the first real Modernist" (Harrison & Frascina, 1982). However, Greenberg (1980) wrote that, "What can be safely called Modernism emerged in the middle of the last century—and rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting, and perhaps with Flaubert, too, in prose fiction.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the modernist movement gave the term "avant-garde", in which the movement was called till the prevailing of the word modernism (Orton & Pollock, 1996). Till then, the term modernism was used as a description for the movements that identify themselves to attempt to drop aspect of the status quo. The fame that was gained by surrealism among the public of represented the "the avant-garde of modernism" (Debord, 2004).

In arts and letters, separately two ideas were originated in France that would specifically influence the movement. The first one was impressionism, which was a school of painting that focused on actual works of painters. Through the impressionist paintings, it was demonstrated that human beings rather than see objects, they can see light. Supporters were gathered though they were internally divided among its leading practitioners. Initially, the impressionists organized group exhibitions during the 1870s and 1880s. One of the most important events that took place was of 1863 *the Salon des Refusés*, this event was created by Emperor Napoleon III to display all the rejected paintings by the Paris Salon. Coming next, is the school of symbolism, which believed that language is specifically symbolic in its nature and portrays patriotism. Therefore, writings and poetry should be connected (i.e. the creation of texture of words and to pure sound as well). The year 1930, witnessed that modernism had established political and artistic establishment, though the change in modernism had occurred. As a general reaction in the 1920s against the pre-1918 modernism, in which a focus was continued with a past while rebelling against it, and against the aspects that were irrational and emotionalistic.

Some writers defended modernism as being mechanistic, though other attacked its madness. Disputes existed among modernists about how significant the public is, how art and audience are related, and the role played by art in society. Modernism included contradictory responses to the condition as it was understood, attempting to fight common principles from it. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, science and scientific rationality came to be seen as the source of logic and stability. Whereas, the basic primitive sexual and unconscious drives, along were taken as the basic emotional substance. From these two poles, modernists started to set a complete style of view of life that could include every aspect of life.

Peter (1972, pp.,4) argues that some critics extend the period from 1880 to 1950, while some others divide the period and "give priority to the pre-war years," or "post-war years". As a twentieth-century movement, literary modernism appears in varied aspects of literature. It is about the changing of the status quo of the society. While some other critics say that the beginning of the movement was from 1890 - 1945 when the World War II was over. For (Levenson, 2011, pp.,2) modernism as a "creative violence" deviates from the literary tradition and moves the general literary concepts into new trends; internal and mental. Here, it is important to distinguish between the modernist and the modern. Modern refers to whatever produced at the contemporary period, whereas modernist denotes to certain experimental elements. This means, for modern writing, the historical period is definitely implied. While for modernist writings stress is laid on the dominant techniques and approaches as the touchstones for writing. Modernism has been defined by Cuddon (1977, pp.,399) in the following lines:

“A very comprehensive term applied to international tendencies and movements in all the creative arts since the latter end of the 19th c. Professor Kermode has made a distinction between Palaeo-modernism and Neo-modernism. Paleo-modernism refers to early manifestations of new movements concluding, perhaps, c. 1914- 20, while neo-modernism refers to movements (like surrealism [q.v]) since that time. As far as literature is concerned modernism reveals a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man’s position and function in the universe and many (in some cases remarkable) experiments in form and style”.

The modernist movement is “a breaking away from established rules” of the preceding eras. It mainly looks at man as “man’s position” and “function”, which is unusual for other conventional movements. Modernism as “the literature of technology” shows “introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism” (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1991, pp.,26,27) “experiments in form and style”. Here, experiment is the hallmark of this era, as new forms and styles are being experienced for modern man’s satisfaction. This is done as they juxtaposed simple narrative and irony (Faulkner, 1977).

The use of modern and modernity occurs in a number of different ways. In social disciplines, the idea of modernity has encountered a debate. Historically, modernity began in the seventeenth century, which was marked by significant social changes. In general, modernity has been defined by the institutions in which are nation-states and mass democracy, capitalism, science, and mass media. Renaissance, Enlightenment, Reformation, the American and French Revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution are the historical values that paved the way for modernity.

The subject was found in the political identity of feudalism. Subjects are placed under the authority, control, or dominion of the monarchy. The American and the French Revolution were the sparks of modern democracy. The citizen is the center in a modern democracy. It is the supreme individual with the power to use for determining truth and reason for discovering the world. Democracy is impossible due to the belief in the rational individual. This individual gives necessity for democracy. A group of individuals can be brought together and each of whom is able to rationalize inquiry and action through their consent (Allan, 2010, pp.,2-5). Science, astronomy, navigation, religion, and philosophy were the results of the transformation, which was accomplished during the Renaissance. At the same time, the contribution to other developments that finally compelled playwrights in Renaissance and Elizabethan societies to challenge “the divine right of kings” (Palmer, 1983).

In order to measure the vitality of modern age, philosophy, religion, and science will be considered physiologically. As a claim that “God is dead,” (Nietzsche, 2000, pp.,8) refers to the power of creating that should remain a human faculty: humans either create god or create like a god. But this god must be understood as a “completely thoughtless and amoral artist-god, who wishes to experience the same pleasure and self-satisfaction in building as in destroying, in good as in bad”. The idea fiercely competing energies is applied on the principles of the marketplace to the economy of the psyche. It offers an explanatory framework for internal division, and grounding the self in the experience of conflict. This was a discourse in which writers such as the Brontës, Eliot and Wilkie Collins, found interest on the relations between phrenology and economic and philosophical discourse (Shuttleworth & Sally, 1996).

Much of the emphasis on language by literary critics assumed a relationship between linguistic structures and political structures. Therefore, during the 1980s many American critics started to feel that politics could have a direct approach. Historical studies and investigations of race, class, and gender had the tendency to shift studies of signification systems. This happened where theories of language remained in use and the new task was to give an explanation of their relationship to economic and social forces (Bradshaw & Dettmar, 2008).

As the postmodernists see it, the modernist critique does not go far because they can no longer recommend major concepts of late modernity such as subjectivity, truth or utopia which had significance to modernists in the sense of Proust, Musil, Eliot, Simmel or Adorno. (Zima, 2010, pp.,ix). Literary critics have attempted to define these units on a stylistic level, which are vulnerable to criticism. Ihab Hassan’s analysis of stylistic features in the most general sense of the word: indeterminacy, fragmentation, dissolution of the canon, irony, carnivalization, etc. are regarded as salient features of postmodern literature. Irony is also one of the basic characteristics of modernism (Zima, 2010, pp.,4-5).

Modernization becomes reflexive; it is becoming its own theme. It will become clear that this self-reflecting process, initiated by the founding fathers of sociology, is also located at the center of Giddens’s thought. (Crook, 1990, pp.,51). This idea that social and cultural forms of solidarity is targeted to a conditioned individualization and atomization, which is not particularly new. For sociologists such as David Riesman in the USA and Lucien Goldmann in France developed it in a different context (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 2020, pp.,57).

The tendency towards particularization, which distinguishes brands of feminism from Marxist or sociological theories. Solidarity is emphasized by the feminist and on the corresponding postulate of a

universally valid social critique. It comes as a surprise that the coexistence of these tendencies cause contradictions among feminist theories. (Zima, 2010, pp.,32). (Haber, 1994) is of the hypothesis that dealt with a weak spot in feminist discourse that is confirmed by the challenges of postmodern tendencies towards particularization in *Beyond Postmodern Politics* (1994). To her, the focus of one-sided on radical heterogeneity or sexual matters constitutes a threat to solidarity and subjectivity. Women's movements operating in different cultural and racial settings cannot be successful without relying on these two factors. Without solidarity and subjectivity, the author argues, oppositional politics tend to fail.

Generally speaking, as language is very essential in creating one's value orientations, identity and practices in the world, it has been used to display power of resistance and solidarity (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Gee & Gee, 2007). This language, however, is to be recreated using other's language and utterances, which have power of resistance. Solidarity is related to the varied dialects that show how groups of same society are associated with each other. Their social cohesion is accomplished through shared forms of discourse. Labov (1982) has commented on resistance and power in which the language of African-American adolescents in American schools have institutionalized resistance to the norms, the ideologies of school systems through forms of language use. In this resistance, there seems to be originated within a cultural and political conflict between the speakers and the authorities of schools in addition to the linguistic behavior of peer group members as reflected in this conflict.

The relationship between feminism and postmodernity is to be imagined in view of these arguments. It would not probably agree with Linda Hutcheon who defines both terms as ideologies or world views:

"Feminisms are not really either compatible with or even an example of postmodern thought, as a few critics have tried to argue; if anything, together they form the single most powerful force in changing the direction in which (male) postmodernism was heading but, I think, no longer is".(Hutcheon, 2003, pp.,142).

Therefore, postmodernity should not only be imagined as a post ideological era of tolerant pluralism, but also as a context of ideological conflict. A society in which religious, moral and political values have ended to be related to the constitution of subjectivity, dualistic ideologies and ideological fanaticism.(Zima, 1995, pp.,73-75). The situation of Bauman and other postmodernists, the mood of Baudrillard's work can be explained as a reaction to the unfulfilled hopes of modernity. Postmodern disappointment with modernity is most clearly articulated in *Le Crime parfait*:

"All of modernity was geared towards the arrival of this reality, the liberation of humans and real energies that would change the world objectively and beyond all illusions (. . .). Today, the world has become real in a sense that surpasses all of our hopes". (Lyotard, 1984b, pp.,61).

Carravetta (1988, pp.,395) speaks in conjunction with Vattimo, of a 'decline and eventual disappearance of subject and subjectivity'. Vattimo appeals to Nietzsche's critique of the subject and reminds us of the latter's 'destruction in the development of 20th century analytic psychology' (Vattimo, 1979, pp.,54). In a complementary way, avant-garde art appears to Vattimo as a 'destructuring' power (*'la portata destrutturata dell'arte'*), which calls the unity and the identity of the subject into question. Vattimo considers the disintegration of the subject as a liberation from its own fundamental subjection in conjunction with the disintegration of metaphysical meaning:

"The world of symbolic forms – philosophy, art, culture as a whole – retains a certain autonomy vis-à-vis technological rationality, insofar as it is the place where the subject as a subjected subject (*soggetto-assoggettato*), as the last incarnation of the structures of domination and empowered by technique to dominate the world, is undone, dislocated, deconstructed".(Vattimo, 1979, pp.,121).

In other words: philosophy resists the technical and technological domination of the subject over the object by pursuing a systematic deconstruction of subjectivity. This means that each communication that takes place in society and raises questions concerning correctness, truth, truthfulness and mutual understanding, presupposes the existence of discursive structures articulating subjective interests. These cannot be neutralized within a universal language. This also means that a non-conflictual, undistorted communication cannot be presupposed: for it is impossible to eliminate subjectivity as discourse. (Zima, 2010, pp.,113).

However, this eliminates crucial aspects of postmodern literature. Thus, one overlooks the fact that it continues the modernist critique of rationalism and Hegelianism, of reason, truth and subjectivity. Proust's and Musil's critiques of rationalist postmodern writing in which it represents itself as a radicalized modernism and an attack on modernity. Consequently, the reasoning is a dualistic scheme in which negatively connotated aspects of modernism are opposed to positively connotated aspects of postmodernism: form/anti-form, purpose/play, design/chance, hierarchy/anarchy, mastery-logos/exhaustion-silence, distance/participation, creation-totalization/decreation-deconstruction, synthesis/antithesis, presence/absence, centering/ dispersal, hypotaxis/parataxis, root-depth/rhizome-surface, signified/signifier, metaphysics/irony, etc. (Vischer & Vischer, 1922, pp.,175).

These salient qualities show its fundamental flaws. Thus Musil, as considered by Hassan as a modernist author in the sense of D. H. Lawrence, Rilke, Thomas Mann, Pound and Eliot, would have to be defined as postmodern within the framework of Hassan's scheme. This is due to his style has antithesis, absence, deconstruction, dissemination, parataxis and irony (Russell, 1961, pp.,479). This reasoning in favor of a literary renovation based on a recourse to old narrative techniques may sound conservative; however, it anticipates Umberto Eco's critique of modernism and the avant-garde three years later:

"But the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further, because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently". (Eco, 1985, pp.,67).

Before the recreation of modernist problematic to serve as a theoretical model, some of key concepts such as ambivalence, irony, contingency and the crisis of the subject have commented on by Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando*. What Alan Wilde writes about the unity of opposites, about paradox and irony can be applied to this novel which may be regarded as a model of the modernist paradigm. (Zima, 2010, pp.,147).

Comparing the two models of modernism and postmodernity, leads to say, it is not meaningful to define modernism and postmodernism on a stylistic level because stylistic features only adopt aspecific meaning within the contexts of ambivalence or indifference. While separation shows a critical attitude in modernism it fulfils an aesthetic function in postmodern works or is meant to provoke without aiming at major social changes. Both modernism and postmodernity are stylistically heterogeneous. The explanation of the linguistic and stylistic heterogeneity of postmodern literature can be in conjunction with concepts of relation of indifference and pluralism. (Zima, 2010, pp.,150-151). As far as the transition from modernism to postmodernity goes, "shifts in sensibility, practices and discourse formations", as Huysen puts it, can be observed and related to corresponding shifts in the sociological and philosophical problematic (Harvey, 1990, pp.,39).

Adorno's confirmation of the concepts of truth and subjectivity is not merely a symptom of his partial solidarity with liberal individualism. However, he attempts to associate critical thought with the non-identical, dissenting individual, whose survival is one of his main concerns:

"In view of the collective powers, which in the contemporary world are usurping the world spirit, the general and rational is better looked after by the isolated individual than by the stronger battalions which have abandoned the generality of reason in a docile manner". (Etzioni, 1968, pp.,440).

In his novel *The Name of the Rose* (*Il nome della rosa*, 1980), Umberto Eco argues that the past 'must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently'. (Eco, 1985, pp.,67) He practises what he preaches by reflecting on his techniques from the beginning of the novel: 'Naturally, a manuscript' ('naturalmente, un manoscritto'). To distinguish between modernist and postmodern literature is because Eco's advice to postmodern writers to adopt an ironical, a non-naïve attitude towards literary forms of the past. Again, it leaves 'the novel in the modern sense of the word' and at the same time questions the established system of literary genres. Finally, it suggests that the postmodern text may be just a game. (Zima, 2010, pp.,198).

The term postmodernism is the precursor term of modern because it has been used to elevate those who have been oppressed and exploited. Under the circumstances, the complete fact of black people in the United States embodies and enacts the postmodern themes of otherness and marginal people. Black people resisted notions such as segregated identity, dominated heterogeneity, universality and, in a brusque language, white supremacy (Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993, pp.,393).

Craig Owens of the argument that the postmodern debate has been neutral to the issue of sexual difference. However, it would be more possible to say that some postmodern writers have been neutral as well. Jardine says that, though Lyotard has not adopted the issue of the paternal signifier as a main theme while discussing the postmodern crisis in narrative, he clarifies the crisis as it is not sexually neutral.

"He does this primarily through his descriptions of the only viable source and place he sees for legitimacy in postmodern culture: para-logic. This kind of logic is dependent upon and valorizes the kinds of incomplete short stories historically imbedded, hidden, within so-called scientific or objective discourse: the kinds of short narratives that this discourse attempts to evacuate in order to shore up its Truths" (Owens, 1983, pp.,66).

At work in the cinema, the process of gynesis has increased the concern with the theme of becoming woman. In the case of downfall of the symbolic function that highlights what Jardine describes as "an inability of words to give form to the world". Then, this may cause a conflict to control that which has humiliated the paternal function that has started to threaten all forms of paternity". The newly theorized discourses (i.e. feminism and postmodernism) which have begun to be the master discourses, seeing themselves as no longer in "a system of loans and debts to former master truths". These according to Jardine, have been conceptualized as a new space, that of woman. (Lyotard, 1984a, pp.,100).

## Conclusion

Writers of modernism adopted the point of view in which our understanding of the world is achieved via stories. Therefore, the change that is needed towards stories to be told for establishing the link with a meaningfully different world. Elimination and women's voting, the increased of assimilated people in a more open debate of changes in marriage all showed a newly established freedom, with challenges of the status quo. These changes called into a more complicated and contradicted senseless stories intended for the resistance of the extent to which interpretation has appeared to be a habit of bad adoption. Its forms of challenge represent its historical context, and its literature of modernism is a way to remind readers to respect the difficulty of reading. To recall the self-effacement required for understanding of sensitivity. When readers fail to understand many components of vague yet poetic narrative, that experience recalls the global world together all the important unknowability of the self. Some of the features of African-American expression accept more than a short-lived likeness to practices of stylistics such as self-consciousness and juxtaposition that are regarded as features of modernism. Modernism involves fragmentation in terms of linguistics to demonstrate man's alienation in the modern city. Modernism can also be used to determine and heighten a chaotic sense that is recognized by many critics of modern literature. This is to offer treatment of issues such as sexuality, psychology, time, and epistemology,

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