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THE PERSISTENCE OF JAMESON'S POSTMODERNISM ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the elements of Fredric Jameson's analysis of postmodernism that remain relevant today. Although the term and periodization of postmodernism may seem to have lost popularity in contemporary theory, many theorists agree that capitalism has undergone a radical transformation since the 1970s. With this final stage of capitalism, the cultural and economic spheres have overlapped, and every aspect of daily life has become commodified more than ever before. In this article, after explaining Jameson's concept of postmodernism as a historical condition and a mode of production-subjectivity, I argue that the theory remains valid in all three areas that constitute the triptych under the headings of a. the waning of affect, b. immediacy, c. new depthlessness, and d. pastiche and nostalgia. Ultimately, I contend that the decline of postmodernism should be interpreted as a sign of its complete realization.

Keywords: Fredric Jameson, postmodernism, immediacy, waning of affect, pastiche

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JAMESON'IN POSTMODERNIZM ANALIZININ INADI

Öz

Bu çalışma, Fredric Jameson'ın postmodernizm analizinin günümüzde güncelliğini koruyan unsurları öne çıkarma amacı taşımaktadır. Postmodernizm güncel teoride bir terim ve dönemselleştirme olarak popülerliğini kaybetmiş gibi görünse de pek çok teorisyen, kapitalizmin 1970'lerden itibaren radikal bir şekilde dönüştüğü konusunda hemfikirdir. Kapitalizmin bu son aşamasıyla birlikte, kültürel alan ile ekonomik alan birbirinin üzerine katlanmış ve gündelik hayatın her zerresi hiç olmadığı kadar metalaşmıştır. Bu makalede, Jameson'ın postmodernizm kavramını tarihsel bir durum ve üretim-öznellik tarzı olarak açıkladıktan sonra, a) duygulanımın sönümlenmesi, b) dolayımsızlık c) yeni derinliksizlik, d) pastiş ile nostalji başlıkları altında teorinin günümüzde triptiğin konusunu oluşturan her üç alanda da halen geçerli olduğunu iddia ediyorum. Makalede postmodernizmin gözden düşüşünün aslında onun tamamen kendini gerçekleştirmesinin bir belirtisi olarak algılanması gerektiğini savunuyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fredric Jameson, postmodernizm, dolayımsızlık, duygulanımın sönümlenmesi, pastiş

Introduction

After the post-World II boom, the world experienced significant transformations. During this period, countries referred to as the Third World, such as Indochina, Egypt, Algeria, Cuba, and Angola, began gaining independence through national liberation struggles, while movements such as feminism and Black liberation also came to the fore. The student and worker movements of 1968 dismantled the old order. However, this revolutionary wave reversed in the years following the 1970s and 1980s. The revolutionary energies of 1968 were stifled, and Czechoslovakia's attempts at communist reforms were crushed by the Warsaw Pact armies (Anderson, 1998, p. 91). The feeling that something had come to an end—such as the end of classes, ideologies, art, or the welfare state (Jameson, 1992, p. 1) was attempted to be conceptualized by various scholars, while these changes were broadly understood as a transition from modernity to postmodernity. Postmodernism has been considered by various thinkers as an artistic/aesthetic/epistemological shift (Hassan, 1987; Lyotard, 1999), a change in the mode of capitalist production, and a new form of subjectivity that emerged as a result of these transformations (Hartley, 2003).

For instance, Ihab Hassan, though not precisely defining modernism and postmodernism, points to the existence of postmodernism in art as a distinct literary genre, different from Dadaism, Cubism, and Surrealism. Hassan, by referencing Nietzsche and Heisenberg, discusses the rise of uncertainty in philosophy and science. According to him, "the play of indeterminacy and immanence is crucial to the episteme of postmodernism" (Hassan, 1987, p. 46). Jean-François Lyotard, the first to popularize postmodernism in philosophy, directly borrowed the concept from Hassan. In a famous declaration commissioned by the Quebec government, Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1999, p. xxiv). The most significant of these metanarratives are the beliefs that historical progress leads to liberation and that knowledge is integrative. Lyotard contends that integrative claims of modernity must be refuted, as metanarratives inherently harbor the danger of totalitarianism. To counter this threat, he argues for the prioritization of pluralism and fragmentation. Postmodernity, according to Lyotard, is associated with the emergence of a post-industrial society, where knowledge becomes an economic force, and science loses its divine status as the quardian of knowledge. In his view, society should be understood not as an organic whole but as a linguistic communication network. Though not addressing art or philosophy at all, focusing instead on the epistemological condition of the natural sciences (Lyotard, 1999, pp. 24–25), Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) remains one of the most cited texts when discussing postmodernism in art or philosophy.

When considering the interpretations of these thinkers on postmodernity, neither Hassan, Lyotard, nor others such as Habermas (Foster, 1998) manage to historically situate postmodernism. Each, in one way or another, emphasizes shifts in aesthetic styles (the death of the avant-garde) or ahistorical transformations (the end of grand narratives) as indicators of postmodernism's emergence. Fredric Jameson's 1984 essay, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, published in *New Left Review*, caused a paradigm shift in the discussions surrounding postmodernism (Anderson, 1998, p. 78). Contrary to the aforementioned thinkers, Jameson connects this cultural transformation (or even cultural revolution) to economic changes, linking seemingly unrelated domains through mediation. In this respect, Jameson differs from others in that postmodernity, for him, corresponds not only to a mode of production and a form of subjectivity but also to a cultural logic.

In the subsequent sections, I will first contextualize postmodernism within the broader debates on the periodization of capitalism, discussing it as a mode of production. A critical emphasis will be placed on the increasing prominence of circulation in this period. I will then further dig into the various aspects of postmodernism concerning subjectivity and style under the headings of a) the waning of affect, b) immediacy-intensity, c) depthlessness, and d) pastiche and nostalgia, which are highly relevant to today's discussions in communication studies and arts & humanities. In doing so, my goal is to underscore the enduring relevance of Jamesonian cultural analysis. It also seeks to contribute to the limited body of

Jamesonian interpretations of postmodernity in our national context. While existing literature on postmodernism (Zeka, 1994) offers valuable insights, it often falls short of providing a comprehensive engagement with Jameson's critical framework.

In the section on the *waning of affect*, I will examine how the subject's affective mode on social media platforms can be interpreted in Jamesonian terms. Postmodernity marks an end of temporality, resulting in a shift toward spatiality, and the subject's reduction to the body, where previously distinct affects like *ennui* are supplanted by states of affective intensity. This, I claim, can be observed in social media platforms. I will then turn to theorist Anna Kornbluh's work which, building on Jameson, highlights *immediacy* as a prevalent feature of contemporary cultural production. Immediacy has indeed become a dominant mode of subjectivity and aesthetic style in settings such as social media, museums, and concert venues. To illustrate this, I will examine cultural phenomena like immersive Van Gogh exhibitions in the light of Jameson's concept of intensities.

Closely related to immediacy is Jameson's notion of *new depthlessness*. This concept is exemplified in the surface logic of Andy Warhol's pop art. I will argue that contemporary theories like flat ontology and surface reading—both of which aim to erase layers, distinctions, and symptoms—are similarly marked by this depthlessness.

The final concepts I will examine are *pastiche* and *nostalgia*. From a stylistic standpoint, postmodernism is not so much defined by a dominant style as it is by a generalized lack of style, one that plunders the dead styles of the past, which Jameson terms "pastiche". In postmodernism, the modernist personal styles have been replaced by the neutral language of news reporting (Jameson, 1992, p. 17). Then, the most obvious feature of the postmodern is stylelessness which contrasts sharply with the modernist pursuit of new styles and languages (Jameson, 1992, p. 17). I will argue that the postmodern reliance on pastiche and nostalgia continues to shape much of today's cultural production in movie seguels, and internet memes.

Today, despite its ongoing popularity in Turkish literature, the term "postmodernism" appears to have lost its appeal in the English-speaking world. However, this study argues that the waning interest in or fatigue toward postmodernism should be read as a symptom in and of itself. This is not a sign of its demise but rather an indication of its full realization. Postmodernism continues to maintain its relevance by positioning itself at the intersection of the art-philosophy-communication triptych, which forms the core of our inquiry in this special issue.

What is Postmodernism Again?

In the Jamesonian framework, postmodernism functions as a mode of production, a form of subjectivity, and a dominant cultural logic. The interwoven nature of these three aspects, much like a Möbius strip, can be summarized as follows: postmodernism is one of the cultural designations of the final stage of the capitalist system in which we currently exist (Jameson, 1992, p. xx). During this period, the distinction between the cultural and the economic realms has disappeared, to the point where culture has undergone immense commodification/reification, and even the smallest cultural product presents the appearance of capitalism (Jameson, 1992, p. xi).

One of the most notable distinctions between modernity and postmodernity is in *temporality*. In the modern era, temporality was paramount, as there still existed a distinction between urban and rural spaces and their differing temporalities. In modernity, the subject, living through these different temporalities, made time a central issue. This time was often linear, marking progress towards higher stages of modernization. In the postmodern era, however, the progress of time and temporality collapses in the present and spatiality takes precedence, as the temporality of the city and the countryside has become synchronized in a world connected by communication systems, creating a simultaneous global reality. The dominance of spatiality in the postmodern era reduces the subject to the present moment and to the body as a spatial entity (Jameson, 1992, p. 44).

In this era, a new form of subjectivity and affect, labeled the schizophrenic subjectivity, emerges (Jameson, 1992, p. 26). This form of subjectivity can no longer historicize or position itself (Jameson, 1992, p. 21), as the rejection of grand narratives has reduced the representation of the past to little more than pop-cultural images of history, and the horizon of the future has been suppressed. While the modern period was characterized by the search for a new personal style, in the postmodern era, old styles are plundered randomly (Jameson, 1992, p. 16).

This crisis of historicity is evident in culture, art, and even architecture; works of culture and art, which once contained traces of history, depth, and labor, are replaced by products that rather consist of isolated, glittering surfaces (Jameson, 1992, p. 6; Jameson, 2016a, p. 105). This logic of surface not only plagues culture and art but also affects philosophy. Ontological divisions, dialectical categories and mediations have been dethroned, and concepts such as History, and Truth have been deconstructed by postmodern theorists (Jameson, 1992, p. 12). Below, I will examine these characteristics individually.

Postmodernism as a Mode of Production and Periodization

"Things are that way in 1973 for a reason, not because of anyone's epistemology" (Crais et al., 2024a, p. 37).

The periodization of postmodernism is closely tied to the transformation of capitalism that began in the 1970s. The Fordist mode of production, characterized by mass production on an assembly line, and a semi-skilled labor force involved in only a small part of the production process, began to decline in the mid-1970s (Amin, 2011, p. 10; Harvey, 1989, pp. 141–142). The post-Fordist system, also referred to as lean production, flexible specialization, or Toyotism, sought to overcome the rigidness of the former. This new system brought workforce reductions, introduced flexible labor regimes, and transitioned from the compliant Fordist worker to the dynamic, participatory worker. It also developed the "just-in-time" supply chains that produced parts as needed and integrated production more closely with circulation. Unlike Fordism's focus on standardized products, post-Fordism fostered a more diversified production-circulation model that was highly responsive to consumer preferences and demands (Harvey, 1989, p. 150). As a result, the mass factory worker characteristic of the Fordist system was dispersed, automation weakened the labor force, and workers were shifted from the core countries in the Global North to peripheral regions (the Third World) through containerization and electronic networks, with the consequence of the working class in the Global North transitioning to service and technical jobs (Dyer-Witheford, 2015, p. 38). This process was accompanied by intensive financialization, driven by globalization in favor of capital (Jameson, 2020a, pp. 136–161; Jameson, 2000, pp. 49–68; Jameson, 2015a, pp. 101–132).

Under post-Fordism, there has been an acceleration in both the production time and the circulation or turnover time. For capital accumulation to occur, the movement of capital between the spheres of production and circulation needs to accelerate further (Mosco & Fuchs, 2014, p. 229). The speed of circulation is crucial for capitalism because, "the faster the capital launched into circulation can be recuperated, the greater the profit will be" (Harvey, 1989, p. 229). Therefore, capitalism is constantly striving to shorten turnover times, particularly during periods of crisis and competition. The planned obsolescence of products, from cars to jeans, is now commonplace, while the fashion and advertising industries work to keep consumption alive and create new desires. The worker, who once enjoyed a stable, skilled job for life, is now forced into continual deskilling and job insecurity (Harvey, 1989, pp. 229–230).

These developments have resulted in a shift in capitalism's focus from production to circulation (Harvey, 1989; Stiegler, 2010; Srnicek, 2017; Kornbluh, 2023). The introduction of credit cards in 1950 and ATMs in 1969, which allowed for transactions without the need for cash or bank branches, exemplifies this shift.

Today, circulation has been further accelerated by the integration of contactless payment systems into credit and debit cards. While the first contactless payment system was implemented by Seoul Bus Transport in 1995 (Teker et al., 2022, p. 104), Near Field Communication (NFC) system which enable data exchange between devices at close range have now become widely used. Despite their broad application areas in health, transportation, and information collection, the focus on integrating NFC into credit and debit cards highlights the increasing emphasis on circulation (Mosco & Fuchs, 2014, pp. 218–220; Kornbluh, 2023).

In this phase of capitalism, the shift in emphasis from production to circulation, and the rise of the service, media, and communication sectors around consumption, have caused the economic and cultural spheres to overlap. This phenomenon, which Jameson identified as early as the 1980s and Harvey termed the "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1989, p. 285), reflects how periodization efforts increasingly reference cultural phenomena, which can be seen as new names for circulation (Kornbluh 2023). As a result, periodization concepts² that emphasize the economic sphere, such as disorganized capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987), flexible accumulation (Harvey 1989), late capitalism (Mandel 1975), post-Fordism (Aglietta 1979; Lipietz 1992), neoliberalism (Harvey 2005; Touraine 2001), just-in-time capitalism or Toyotism (Dyer-Witheford, 2015; Antunes, 2012), the long downturn, secular stagnation, or terminal crisis of accumulation (the Brenner school, Crais et al., 2024b, p. 1), have been accompanied by cultural periodizations. These periodizations, such as cognitive capitalism (Moulier Boutang 2011; Vercellone 2006), Empire (Hardt and Negri 2000), the knowledge economy (Drucker 1969), the information economy (Porat 1977), the third wave (Toffler 1980), the network society (Castells 1996), the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), control society (Deleuze 1990), semiocapitalism (Berardi 2009), and the proletarianization of the mind in the hyperindustrial age (Stiegler 2010), have proliferated. The list³ is extensive, but one thing is clear: we are witnessing a "frenzy of periodization" (Franklin, 2015, p. xii).

The growing focus in these periodizations on concepts like cognition, attention, information, and semiotics should be read, as Jameson suggested (1992), as a sign that the logic of late capitalism fully manifests itself in the cultural realm. In other words, capitalism has permeated every aspect of life, including cognition, emotion, attention, and social relations (Baumbach et al., 2016, p. 2).

² See (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, pp. 80-81)

³ See, Social Text authors Baumbach, Young ve Yue (Baumbach et al., 2016).

Postmodernism as a Mode of Subjectivity

"A prodigious exhilaration with the new order of things, a commodity rush, our 'representations' of things tending to arouse an enthusiasm and a mood swing not necessarily inspired by the things themselves" (Jameson, 1992, p. x).

Postmodernism is not only a historical period but also a cultural logic that shapes new styles, subjectivities and affect. The manifestation of this cultural logic in the realm of subjectivity is that the subject can no longer position themselves. The disappearance of grand narratives and the absolutes that underpinned them—such as God or the Party—parallels the decline of the once-secure factory worker who knew they had a lifetime job, now displaced by flexible specialization. This inability to position oneself is characteristic of the subject in this era.

Jameson, following Lacan, defines this as the schizophrenic subject. According to Lacan, schizophrenia is characterized as a "break in the chain of signifiers" (Jameson, 1992, p. 26). Since Saussure proposed that meaning is not constructed through the relationship between the signifier and the reality it represents but through the relationship between signs themselves, language has been seen as not merely a reflection of thought but its constructor. Consciousness, including the unconscious, can only be conceptualized through this mediation of language. For Lacan, who inherits this legacy of structural linguistics, meaning is rather created through the relationship between signifiers (signifying chains).

Jameson argues, based on this, that personal identity results from the ability to temporally synthesize the past and the future to construct the present, and this temporal synthesis is a function of language or the sentence progressing within a hermeneutic circle (Jameson, 1992, p. 27). Failure to achieve this synthesis affects not only personal biographical experience but also psychic life. Modernism displaced God as the guarantor of this hermeneutic cycle and replaced it with Reason. However, in postmodernism, every kind of meta-signifier is deconstructed, and as a result, the links in this relational chain are broken. What remains is a wreckage of disconnected signifiers (Jameson, 1992, p. 26) or language games (Lyotard, 1999). If the past, present, and future cannot be constructed or synthesized even within a sentence, then our biographical and psychic lives are similarly threatened. "With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson, 1992, p. 27).

For instance, in John Cage's music, the silence that follows a cluster of material sounds makes it impossible to imagine the next chord and erases any connections to the preceding sounds (Jameson, 1992,

pp. 28-29). Similarly, in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, the present is so dominant that the continuous flow of moments renders any synthesis of past and future—along with any cohesive plot or narrative—impossible (Jameson, 1992, pp. 28-29). The same applies to Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, which is often cited as an example of a postmodern novel. Likewise, the poetry of the *Language Poetry* or *New Sentence* movement, with its discontinuous and unconnected sentences, serves as an example of this schizophrenic aesthetic (Jameson, 1992, pp. 28-29).

Postmodernism as a Form of Subjectivity: The Waning of Affect

Although Jameson is primarily known for his writings on postmodernism, he is often overlooked in the field of affect theory⁴. While recent affect theories are typically rooted in Spinoza, through Deleuze & Guattari, Jameson follows a different tradition that stretches from Marx to the thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Jameson consistently connects affect and emotions to the base (mode of production) and thus frames them within specific socio-economic and historical moments. Indeed, affect, sensation, and the senses are not eternal or fixed constants, but rather historical and variable mechanisms (Marx, 1974).

According to Jameson, affect emerged in the 19th century, circa the 1840s, alongside "the emergence of the phenomenological body in language and representation" (2015b, p. 32), as an affective state experienced in the body which eludes language. In contrast, emotions, or "named emotions" were dominant in pre-modern times, not as bodily affects experienced by individuals as subjects in the modern sense of the word, but as conscious and named states (Jameson, 2015b, p. 32). Emotions like anger, wrath, love, and mercy are indeed commonly described in classical texts often as a historical "system of phenomena" (Jameson, 2015b, p. 29), in which the naming itself has both an effect and an object. It is only in the modern times, coinciding with the emergence of the phenomenological body in representation, -as depicted in mid 20th century novelists-, that affect became conceivable as a bodily sensation that eludes language.

Modern times witnessed affects, such as depression, alienation, nostalgia, *ennui*, as bodily sensations of individual phenomenological subjects. Along with the de-centralization of the modern -bourgeois- subject, postmodern times witness an "end of temporality," accompanied by a sense of living in "a perpetual present with a diminishing sense of temporal or indeed phenomenological continuities" (Jameson, 2015b, p. 27). While the experience of perpetually living in the present is rather characterized as "reduction to the body" (p. 28); in postmodernity, bodily affect has begun to take the form of an unstable flow, a state which Jameson calls "waning of affect" (Jameson, 1992, p. 15; Jameson & Buchanan, 2007, p. 45; Jameson, 2015b).

⁴ It is often said that there has been an "affective turn" in cultural theory which aspires to make room for the role of affects both the construction of the subject and the agency of matter (Clough & Halley, 2007).

Distinct affects, such as *ennui*, give way to expressions of intensity, as in mood and vibe in the digital culture, terms depicting affective flow, rather than this or that affect.

Jameson's comparison between Munch's *The Scream* with Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* further clarifies the operation of the waning of affect. In seeing *The Scream*, an expression of modern anxiety and alienation, we externalize our internal, wordless pain. However, in Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe*, the issue is not Marilyn Monroe herself or the affects she evokes, but rather her commodified face. Monroe is reduced to a mere surface, a product to be displayed. Jameson expresses this new mode of feeling as follows:

Namely what I will call the disappearance of affect, the utter extinction of that pathos or even tragic spirit with which the high moderns lived their torn and divided condition, the repression even of anxiety itself -supreme psychic experience of high modernism-and its unaccountable reversal and replacement by a new dominant feeling tone: the high, the intensity, exhilaration, euphoria, a final form of the Nietzschean Dionysiac intoxication which has become as banal and institutionalized as your local disco or the thrill with which you buy a new-model car (Jameson, 2016b, pp. 234–235).

This Dionysiac intoxication encapsulates the experience of being exposed to the countless images, videos, and information we encounter today: on the same screen, and often in quick succession, we might see a video of a content cat followed by footage of a Tomahawk missile launch. Despite the vastly different content, both can evoke a similar feeling of rapture or intensity. The specificity of the content becomes secondary to the intensity of the unnamed affect it provokes. The affect stirred by the constant flow of content on social media—fragmented and rich in diversity but lacking depth—resembles a transition from one state of stimulation to another, much like moving through various moods in response to stimuli, rather than experiencing a fully formed, representational affect, such as *spleen*, as we might in a Baudelaire poem. The quality of the affect—whether positive or negative—seems less important than its sheer intensity. Indeed, Facebook's refusal to remove inflammatory posts from its algorithm purely for the sake of driving engagement reveals just how valuable this intensity of feeling has become as a commodity for social media companies. It underscores the fact that what matters is not the content but the heightened state of affect it induces in users.

According to Jameson, the defining art form of our time is neither literature nor cinema, but rather video and its close twins, "commercial television and experimental video" (Jameson, 1992, p. 69). In terms of the subject's experience, watching a film or an opera performance leaves a variety of images in the memory, and awakens lingering thoughts; and once the curtain falls or the film ends, the memory is activated, enabling critical distance. However, in the uninterrupted flow of the television screen and the video art forms, both distance and memory are effectively suppressed (Jameson, 1992, pp. 70-71). As television content flows

endlessly, commercial breaks become moments of respite for the viewer—moments to go to the restroom or grab a snack (Jameson, 1992, p. 70). Jameson perceives the boredom experienced by the viewer in response to the video stream as an attempt to establish distance, viewing it as a "defense mechanism" (Jameson, 1992, pp. 71-72). For Jameson, boredom elicited by a particular work or content can foster a constructive process for confronting cultural, existential, and ideological boundaries (Jameson, pp. 71-72; Yılmaz, 2015, p. 142). A piece that evokes boredom may, in fact, possess aesthetic value, while one that captivates attention may prove to be aesthetically inferior, or "degraded" (Jameson, 1992, p. 72).⁵

A defining feature of experimental video is its endless loop, shifting continually at every moment. Rather than generating entirely new content, these videos recycle existing material. In this format, no single piece can occupy a primary or master position; it is perpetually displaced. For this reason, Jameson argues that video is the quintessential narrative form of postmodernism (Sarup, 1988, p. 174; Jameson, 1992, p. 96). We can draw a connection here with Jameson's observations on the experimental video art of Nam June Paik. Nam June Paik's video art seems to ask the viewer to perceive all screens and differences simultaneously (Jameson, 1992, p. 31). In this overwhelming multiplicity of screens, the subject's ability to interpret is reduced. Today, a new trend, dubbed #corecore (Townsend, 2023), which can be explained as a diverse range of self-referential and intertextual short clips endlessly edited by various amateur users on a nostalgic audio background has similarly gained popularity in the social media platform TikTok. Here, even the name, corecore suggests the lack of a distinct genre becoming a genre in itself, the genre of a visual, almost ravishing flow. The "total flow" (Williams, 1975, p. 77) we encounter on these platforms can be seen as self-perpetuating, contentless video-texts. These forms, devoid of a dominant signifier and composed of fragments that depend on other texts, reshape subjectivity through affective transformation. The endless flow and fragmentation of content lead to a new mode of experience, where interpretation is replaced by an ongoing engagement with intensity.

Postmodernism as a Form of Subjectivity and Style: Immediacy

Contemporary theorist Anna Kornbluh (2023), following in the footsteps of Jameson, explores immediacy as the dominant style of our time. Like postmodernism, immediacy is not just an artistic style but also a reflection of the current stage of capitalism which Kornbluh refers to as too late capitalism. If the first

⁵ In contrast, Mark Fisher argues that we lost our capacity for boredom in a time of heightened arousal; as soon as the feeling of boredom attacks the subject, they can immediately access social media platforms to get stimuli which would then alleviate and resolve that feeling (Fisher et al., 2018).

aspect of postmodern subjectivity is the waning of affect, and the shift from the experience of distinct affects, to intensities, then immediacy can be seen as its stylistic counterpart.

Immediacy is a difficult style to define, as it presents itself as a self-identical thisness (Kornbluh, 2023). Due to its very nature, immediacy appears to us as something given and natural. Its mode of representation is flat, suppressing any sense of distance. However, as Hegel noted, anything that presents itself as immediate is, in fact, mediated. For instance, the fact that we can easily read this text on a computer or phone screen is thanks to the proper functioning of the codes and systems behind the scenes. What seems like a seamless, immediate experience is actually mediated by various layers. Nevertheless, immediacy often manifests itself through sincerity, authenticity, lack of distance, directness, clarity, sharpness, and immersiveness. As mentioned in the previous section, in this phase of capitalism—where circulation has accelerated—media, communication systems, and platforms continually exploit our attention to fuel consumption-driven capital flows (Hari, 2022). This creates a dominance of immediacy in the cultural sphere, much like the just-in-time production model in the economic realm.

The desire for intense sensation pushes individuals to eliminate distance, to touch, and to bypass mediators. For instance, Byung-Chul Han suggests that the smooth and seamless nature of Jeff Koons' artworks induces a "haptic compulsion," and that the resulting lack of distance (which we can call immediacy) makes aesthetic judgment impossible (Han, 2018, p. 5). In Jamesonian terms, we could call this "mindless fascination" (Jameson, 2007, p. 1). The cancellation of criticism, thought, and distance by what is visible is something we also encounter on media platforms. In this sense, YouTube and TikTok videos, such as #corecore, slime, ASMR,⁶ or makeup tutorials can be seen as infused with a kind of intimacy, closeness, and immediacy. For example, in ASMR videos, people speak in whispers, creating a tingling sensation in the viewer, or they record simple daily routines, such as cleaning their home, evoking feelings of relaxation and euphoria in the viewer. Indeed, the emotions of immediacy are exuberant and realistic (Kornbluh, 2023).

In terms of spatial experience, immediacy manifests itself in museums and concert venues. For instance, CNN recently listed 12 of the best immersive experiences around the world, featuring immersive spaces that promise to let visitors experience the worlds of painters like Van Gogh and Gustave Klimt, TV shows like *Friends* and *La Casa de Papel*, or even the life of Princess Diana (Grumet, 2024). They are pastiches, which will be discussed in the next section, since these immersive experiences are nothing more than

⁶ ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, and it is a term used to describe a specific feeling of relaxation or calmness, similar to the sensation experienced when one's head is gently stroked, or a low-level sense of euphoria. ASMR has become extremely popular on YouTube, especially after 2010 (Andersen, 2015).

reproductions of cultural products that left a mark on popular culture in the past, resurfacing in the memory of that era's generation.

Recently opened in Las Vegas, the Sphere, also known as Vegasphere, is the world's largest spherical venue and offers customers immersive experiences for film screenings and concerts. The shows, advertised on their website as an experience like no other, promise immersive experiences that, depending on the event, may include elements such as seat haptics, movement sensations, flashing lights, intense lighting, visual effects, loud noises, and atmospheric simulations, including fog, scent, and wind (*FAQs | Policies & Ticketing | Sphere*, n.d.).

This can be compared to Jameson's (1992) description of the Bonaventure Hotel. The Bonaventure Hotel is a kind of miniature, self-sufficient world. There is a significant disconnect between the hotel's entrances and the external environment to which it is connected. It feels as though one is entering the Bastille Fortress. The mirrored glass windows, while imposing like someone wearing sunglasses to hide their gaze, reflect not the hotel itself but fragmented images of the surrounding environment. Inside the hotel, the subject experiences constant disorientation because they lack the necessary signs to map the space they are in. It was reported that when the hotel opened in 1977, no one could find the shops located on the balconies. Jameson refers to this space, where the subject finds it impossible to position themselves, as "postmodern hyperspace" (Jameson, 1992, pp. 40-44). Similarly, the Vegasphere is another world, just like the Bonaventure Hotel. In the Bonaventure, the subject is deprived of the signs that could help them find their way, while in the Vegasphere, the immersive immediacy causes the subject to lose their sense of direction. The experience of being enveloped is central in both, it is "bewildering immersion" (Jameson, 1992, p. 43), a state of waned affect also evoked in the works of contemporary architects such as Farshid Moussavi, Alejandro Zaera-Polo, Sylvia Lavin, and Lars Spuybroek. What architects now seek from spaces is no longer for the subject to maintain a critical distance or generate an interpretation while observing or experiencing a structure. Instead, they aim for the subject to simply feel high affective responses (Spencer, 2016, pp. 139-150), in a state of "new depthlessness" (Jameson, 1992, p. 12).

Postmodernism as a Resistance to Interpretation and Representation: Depthlessness

"The new depthlessness" first manifests itself in the realm of painting (Jameson, 1992, p. 10). Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980) serves as a striking example of surface aesthetics. The artwork features different colored shoes, each industrially produced with a single-layered surface. In contrast, Jameson juxtaposes this with Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1887), which evokes a sense of perspective:

when the viewer looks at the shoes, they can perceive the labor of the worker reflected in them. This is history and depth; something Andy Warhol's piece lacks. It belongs to the world of things and objects. The same goes for "Campbell's Soup cans", "Marilyn Monroe's portraits," and "glossy photos in magazines," which are depthless, devoid of any sign capable of stirring human sensibility (Jameson, 2016a, p. 105). Such works eliminate the possibility of interpretation, aiming to exist merely as what they are (self-identical thisness).

It is no surprise that philosophical movements relying on a flat ontology, that flattens out ontological distinctions between humans and non-humans come to the fore in this period. In this vein; while new materialisms have turned towards the unmediated agency of the matter (Barad, 2007) (Grosz, 2004) among others), Object-Oriented Ontologies have rather turned their gaze toward the world of objects for-themselves that constantly withdraw themselves both from each other and from the various means of cultural signification, not the least language (Bogost, 2012; Harman, 2018). Either absolutely relational, as in the case of new materialisms, or anti-relational, as in 000, what today's dominant schools of thought have in common is an antipathy towards, linguistic or cultural mediation, not to mention dialectics. These theories compress interpretation, depth, layers, or distinctions onto a single surface. We can best describe these new realism theorists—such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Manuel De Landa, who follow very different lines of thought—through their common enemy. This enemy is representational, as well as dialectical mediation (Morin, 2021, p. 139).

Similarly, the surface reading method in literary criticism opposes symptomatic reading and elevates the surface as an "affective and ethical stance" (Best & Marcus, 2009, p. 10). Concepts like affect, body, surface, intimacy, and ethical distance, frequently employed by these authors, somehow reflect the affirmation of the absence of a political dimension in their theories (Baumbach et al., 2016, p. 6). Their target is the rejection of the symptomatic interpretation championed by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, a book that defends uncovering the political contents that literary texts suppress or push into the unconscious through various mediations (Best & Marcus, 2009, pp. 2–3). As such, these theories, particularly flat ontologies, and surface reading are continuations of the anti-interpretative and anti-representational stance of postmodernism.

Postmodernism as Style: Pastiche and Nostalgia

Modernist personal styles have now transformed into a disposable technique. Roland Barthes, who foresaw the breakdown of unique personal styles long ago, referred to this impersonal, styleless writing as

⁷ There is a growing body of literature critical of these contemporary theories: (Kornbluh, 2023; Yalvaç & Erçandarlı, 2020; Malm, 2018; Brassier, 2015; Galloway, 2013; Noys, 2012).

"colorless writing" or "writing degree zero" (Barthes, 1968, p. 5). Jameson claims that the disappearance of personal style is a core feature of postmodernism. For Jameson, the expansion of the concept of writing degree zero occurs through the concept of pastiche. Pastiche refers to the imitation of another artist's work or style. However, Jameson contrasts pastiche with parody, assigning pastiche a special meaning in the postmodern period: "Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs: it is to parody what that other interesting and historically original modern thing, the practice of a kind of blank irony" (Jameson, 1992, p. 17).

The historical novel, a collective project of bourgeois consciousness in modernity (Lukács, 1963) has today turned into images and simulacra; a transformation of which the term nostalgia is helpful to conceive of, though falling short of a full explanation (Jameson, 1992, p. 18). In modernist nostalgia, there is an "aesthetic compensation" (Jameson, 1992, p. 19), referring to reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2008) which wanders among the ruins of the past, seeking to rethink time, history, and other places (Boym, 2008, p. 41), as an aesthetic compensation for what is lost. Yet, postmodern nostalgia attempts to seize, rather than compensate for -which would again call for representation and mediation-, the lost past mostly through pastiche, the cannibalization of modernist forms (Jameson, 1992, p. 19). Yet, it is a hopeless endeavor, as the past has been shattered by changing fashions and the ideology of the new generation (p. 19).

American Graffiti (1973), reflecting the lost image of 1950s America is in that sense a "nostalgia film" (p. 19), much like Star Wars (1977), which is a reproduction of Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, a serial that was one of the most important cultural experiences for the generation between the 1930s and 1950s. Unlike American Graffiti, Star Wars does not reinvent the picture of the past in its full, vivid entirety; rather, it tries to revive the emotional and formal characteristics of older cultural objects (like serials), reawakening a sense of the past associated with those objects (Jameson, 2020, p. 8). A nostalgia film is never an old-fashioned representation of the past but instead captures historical content through stylistic connotations, such as the polished quality of images, reflecting the past in a 1990s aesthetic, for example, with its distinctive hairstyles and fashion. These associations create imaginary and stereotypical inventions; in short, nostalgia films are "pastiche of a stereotypical past" (Jameson, 1992, pp. 19–20). Today, productions like Ready Player One (2018), Stranger Things (2016–present), and Bladerunner 2049 (2017) place pastiche and nostalgia at the center (León, 2021; Özkent, 2021).

The cultural production of our time mostly consists of reproductions of 20th-century works, particularly modernist ones, rather than new and original ideas. This guarantees the widest possible consumer audience, making it risk-free for the market. Reviving a once-beloved film today or creating new productions that explain the origins of a popular series from a few years ago has become a common phenomenon. As long as the same content universe is consumed by audiences and generates profit, it is expanded infinitely.

In fact, since 2010, all of Hollywood's top 20 highest-grossing films have been sequels (Canavan, 2019). A similar phenomenon is happening in music as well, with today's popular music frequently adorned with samples of 20th-century music (Fisher, 2014).

In our time, pastiche has reappeared in another form called internet memes. The concept of the meme was first defined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as cultural genes that replicate themselves by jumping from one brain to another through imitation (Dawkins, 1989, p. 192). Memes can consist of any visuals, videos, or texts that can spread widely (become viral) and are ready for any user to rearrange and put back into circulation (Baspehlivan, 2024, p. 35). Memes are reminiscent of Jameson's concept of pastiche (Shifman, 2012, p. 188) that offer users the ability to reproduce and rearrange content as if they were artists. Moreover, memes often function through immediate identification without commentary (Figlerowicz, 2024).

This only shows that rather than fading away, pastiche has become more prolific, with mechanisms that continually reproduce it, one of which being AI. Although AI applications may be a beneficial ally in fields such as medicine and linguistics to discover new antibiotics (Trafton, 2020), or decipher ancient texts (Weber, 2024); in cultural production, they do little more than pillage already-produced cultural products. Jameson (1992) once said that cultural producers no longer create anything other than the dead languages of the past. Jameson's prophetic words lose none of their meaning if we adapt them to AI: [The AI] "have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture" (Jameson, 1992, pp. 17–18).

Conclusion

Fredric Jameson's ideas on postmodernism fundamentally transformed the prevailing theoretical understandings of postmodernism 40 years ago. Our study reveals that various aspects of Jameson's analysis of postmodernism remain relevant today.

Postmodernism is not just an architectural style or an art movement but one of the names for a systemic transformation, which is accompanied by a cultural logic. Various commentators have identified a tendency of declining profit rates in capitalism since the 1970s, noting that in response, the system has prioritized the *circulation* of capital through technological investments to generate profit (Crais et al., 2024b). This systemic transformation is reshaping subjectivity, modes of experience, emotions, and style. Subjectivity has undergone fragmentation, and the subject has increasingly found itself unable to historically position itself. The representations of the past that the subject turns to are woven from pop-images of history, making access to the past suppressed, existing only through reproductions within the present. The result of this

reduction to the present, and to the body as the spatial terrain of experience is a fascination with the present and with things that exist in the present. Stuck in a perpetual present, and reduced to its body, the subject experiences affect in the form of intensities and highs, rather than distinct affects such as *ennui*, and anguish.

The depthless surfaces of architecture, as well as new media platforms, largely invest in creating affective intensities through increasingly immersive experiences which parallel the perpetual present the subject inhabits. In terms of style, cultural production, much like the dynamics of postmodern production modes, is marketed instantly, without mediation, creating the illusion that things are exactly what they appear to be. New media platforms, concert venues, and museums have increasingly promised this immediacy in terms of style and form. Immediacy and depthlessness suppress critical distance, layers, and interpretation. Moreover, contemporary theories like flat ontology and surface reading seem to produce theories that speak to this immediacy and depthlessness.

Rather than a search for a new style, language, or difference, postmodernism, as a cultural dominant, is further built on the pillaging of old, dead styles. It's not just old styles that are being pillaged, but the emotional memories of previous eras are also being revived. This is where nostalgia comes in: successful films, TV shows, and the lives of artists from the past are constantly being re-released through remakes.

The modes of subjectivity that Jameson described 40 years ago, such as the waning of affect, the new depthlessness, pastiche, hyperspace, and immediacy, have not lost their potency today. Although new periodization attempts abound (Kornbluh, 2023, *among others*), it can aptly be stated that the postmodern subject's experience of depthlessness, reduction to the present, and affective mode condition speak to immediacy.

While works directly addressing postmodernism or capitalism may seem to have decreased in the English-speaking world, we witness central themes of philosophy, communication, and cultural studies echo what Jameson has analyzed as the styles of postmodernism. In fact, as Jonathan Beller rightly points out, postmodernism has not disappeared; it has become invisible because it has fully realized itself. The sense of waning we experience today is actually the waning of the waning itself, meaning that what postmodernism has completely triumphed in is commodification and the feeling of timelessness, to the point that we have even forgotten its existence (Beller, 2016, p. 26). Postmodernism is dead, long live postmodernism!

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