

UNDERSTANDING POST-POSTMODERNISM

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ABSTRACT

The paper argues that the present era of post-postmodernism experiences a revival of metanarratives via conscious human cultivation, invention or ‘fabulation’ of new totalities and truths. The age of postmodernism with its undermining irony, hopelessness, pessimism and the sense of the looming end could not but leave the world in a state of despair, characterised by a propagated rule of the simulacra and the subaltern, hybridism, uncertainty, absence and inconclusiveness. As a result, the world witnessed the appearance of various calls for the re-institution of metanarratives as the only cure to rescue mankind from continuous deferral of signification, which tends to feel secure only with a score of guiding narratives.

Key Words: Postmodernism, Post-postmodernism, Metanarratives, ‘Fabulation’, Meaning.

Post-Postmodernizmi Anlamak

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı günümüzdeki post-postmodernizm’in, postmodernizm tarafından bozulmuş yadsınmış, ‘fabülasyon’ aracılığı ile iyileştirilmiş üst-anlatıların yeniden gözden geçirilmesini tartışmaktır. Postmodernizm çağı, sarsıcı ironisiyle, umutsuzluğuyla, kötümserliğiyle ve kaçınılmaz sonun geleceğinin neden olduğu hisle, dünyayı, belirsizliğin neden olduğu önlenemez bir kedere terk ediyor. Bu keder ki, ortaya çıkışını, simulakranın ve bastırılmış olanın, melezin zaferinin, kesin olmayanın, farklılıkların, yokluğun, sonuçsuzluğun saklı propogandasına borçlu. Sonuç olarak, dünya bir epistemoloji çerçevesini oluşturmada yardımcı araçlar olan ütöpic yaşam anlatılarının sebebinin varlığıyla güvende hissetmeye meyilli, anlamın devamlı ertelenmesinden kurtaracak gerekli şifa olarak, üst-anlatıların tekrar kurumsallaşması için çeşitli çağrılarının ortaya çıkışını gördü.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Postmodernizm, Post-postmodernizm, Üst-anlatı, ‘Fabülasyon’, Anlam.

The question “Why?” – we are born with it, brought up with it, we dread it, scorn it, distrust it, but, nevertheless, find ourselves constantly brooding over it. Thus, the moment of innocence vanishes with the first gulp of air penetrating the lungs of a newborn, making its mind twitch with wonder at the initial pain from breathing. Furthermore, the query becomes particularly manifest as soon as we contract a fatal disease or lose a loved one, shaking off the profound intoxication with the familiarized, pre-fabricated and ready to

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hand answers offered by culture, simplifying, but, nonetheless, smothering our existence. In fact, there is a certain aura of inescapability surrounding the question challenging meaning, no matter what the degree of mistrust, or, on the contrary, blind assurance in holding the key to eternal ontological queries really is. The truth is, as Dennis Ford (2007) puts it in the famous work *The Search for Meaning*, “that we cannot take our world for granted, because we find ourselves wondering why there is something rather than nothing, we insist on the answer to the question ‘How do people – and, in particular, how do I – invest life with meaning?’” (xxii), thus bringing the stage of ‘intoxication’ (to implement the term developed by Ford) with pseudo-meanings to a seeming close. The paths and trails towards the hidden answer are as lengthy as the overall human odyssey in the universe. Therefore, meaning becomes “not only something we once had but have now lost; meaning is also something toward which we are always moving” (Ford, 2007: xxii).

Consequently, as soon as ‘the’ question is posed, our life, full of clichés and pre-fabrications, faces the threat of being absorbed by meaninglessness, as the whole array of “human forms of instincts” (Ford, 2007: 8), intoxications and disguises forged by culture, so as to provide mankind with a score of pseudo-meanings and to conceal the underlying universe in all its grandness, is being destroyed. Therefore, as Rudolf Otto (1958) sees it in *The Idea of the Holy*, it is the terror of the world, the feeling of overwhelming awe, wonder, and fear in the face of creation – the miracle of it, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum* of each single thing, of the fact that there are things at all, the feeling of inferiority in the face of the massive transcendence of creation, [...] the real creature feeling before the crushing and negating miracle of Being” (49) that makes us either come back to delusion, shaking off the necessity to seek, or else soberly linger on the brink of meaninglessness in a desperate attempt to answer the question “Why?”. Nevertheless, the stage of intoxication can rarely be returned to once the next stage of ‘sobriety’ has been achieved, as the impact from the seen, “marks one as irreversibly an ‘outsider’, alienated and a step removed from social conventions” (Ford, 2007: 5). What is more, the exposure to the naked truth devoid of delusions and shielding constructs fostered by culture, including cultural symbols or rituals, often begets emotional disturbance. Thus, “whenever cultural symbols fail, and we are exposed to the truth, our condition is close to madness” (Ford, 2007: 6). As a result, the former state of intoxicated blindness can never be returned to ever after.

The innate failure of the human mind to perceive the ultimate truth, as well as one’s refusal to be content with the consequential idea of meaninglessness of existence, makes one seek for deeper truths. Hence, disillusioned with the taken-for-granted and stale truths employed at the stage of intoxication, and disenchanting by the impotence to answer the question “Why?”

at the stage of sobriety, the mind, nonetheless, longs for “another level of Truth beyond that first level of disillusionment” (Ford, 2007: 6), for a qualitatively novel system of ideas and powers - but this time being fully aware of its constructed nature. As a consequence, we enter Dennis Ford’s stage of ‘longing’ for revised truths, though still reluctant to admit our weakness and the resulting necessity to rely on something that transcends us. In this connection, it seems suitable to cite Ernest Becker (1973), who in his prominent opus *The Denial of Death* asserted that Man [can] strut and boast all he wants, but he really draws his ‘courage to be’ from a god, a string of sexual contests, a Big Brother, a flag, the proletariat, and the fetish of money and the size of bank balance. [...] We enter symbiotic relationships in order to get the security we need, in order to get relief from our anxieties, our aloneness and helplessness; but these relationships also bind us, they enslave us even further because they support the lie we have fashioned. (56)

The article suggests to rename Ford’s stage of ‘longing’ into the stage of ‘fabulation’ or conscious construction of human truths, be it metanarratives or multiple ontological and epistemological categories, instilling mankind with the power to go on and to become a master of one’s existence, while the Truth *per se* continuously remains inaccessible. The stage is radically different from the blindness of intoxication, due to its mature recognition of the existent falsification/ invention, coupled with an inescapable conscious addiction to it.

At this point this article would like to propose its own theory of meaning, based on Denis Ford’s onto-epistemological stages and, yet, broadening the scope of its application. It will advocate the existence of a tight interconnection between the three Fordian stages of the human quest for meaning and the foundations of modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism. As a result, the examination will start off with the following scheme, outlining the basic logic of our conjecture:

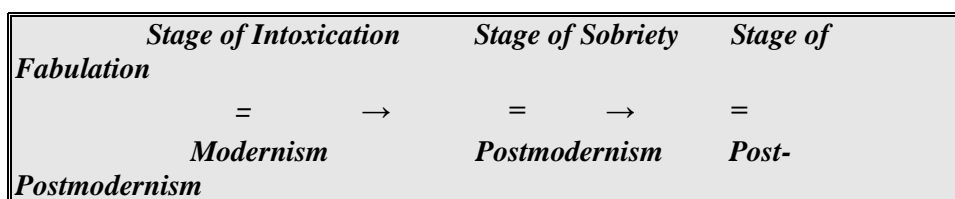


Figure 1: The Three Stages of Human Onto-Epistemological Development

The study argues that the reasons bringing to existence the stages of intoxication, sobriety and fabulation may be applied with a similar degree of success to identifying the reasons for the emergence of modernism,

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postmodernism and post-postmodernism. Thus, the workings of an individual psyche may be transferred onto the *raison d'être* of these three epochs.

Hence, it seems necessary to start with the era of modernism, its rise and subsequent crisis. In this respect, the majority of textbooks depict the epoch as the “era of the bourgeoisie, of the primacy of industrial production, where [...] the imperatives of production determined social life” (Kellner, 1988: 131). Nevertheless, the modernist period was much more than mass intensification of production and capitalist logic; it was an era of mechanical amplification of energies by individuals intoxicated with personal self-sufficiency and intellect, and operating in a given, set and isolated universe. Thus, according to Charles Olson (1967), commenting on the essence of the modernist Western world in *Human Universe and Other Essays*:

Western culture closed itself against true experience, against life's authenticity, because of its orientation on (originally Greek) rationalism, with its obsessive and relentless intellectualization of all human experience. (5)

Indeed, modernism affirmed the power of human beings to create, improve, and reshape their environment, “with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation” (Berman, 1988: 16), encouraging the re-examination of every aspect of existence, from commerce to philosophy, “with the goal of finding that which was holding back the process, and replacing it with new, progressive and, therefore, better ways of reaching the same end” (Berman, 1988: 16). As a consequence, modernism encompassed the works of thinkers who rebelled against the nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions, “believing the ‘traditional’ forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organisation and daily life becoming outdated” (Berman, 1988: 17).

For this reason, modernism represented the residual belief in the supremacy of logic and scientific rationalism “that assumes reality as a whole and can be rendered and comprehended, that ideas and concepts are determinate, and that human beings share a level of universal experience with one another” (Taylor and Winqvist, 2005: 251). This fact strengthens the hypothesis of an existent parallel between modernism and the stage of human intoxication, employing ‘protecting’ categories of reason (be it ‘subject’, ‘object’, ‘beginning’, ‘end’, ‘finitude’, ‘infinitude’, and others) for the safe and uninterrupted existence of the self. As an illustration, in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson (1991) compares modernism to a so-called ‘fantasy of a hedgehog’, picturing the mind being inebriated with a notion of the Self:

This pseudo-experience, which must be marked as a fantasy and as a failure to achieve representation, is also a reactive effort, an attempt to

recuperate what lies beyond the reach of my own senses and life experience and, drawing that back inside, to become, if not self-sufficient, then at least protectively self-contained, like a hedgehog. (362)

All in all, though there exists a great multitude of visions of modernism, this study attempts to systematize them in such a manner as to disclose the intoxicated nature of modernism. For this reason, it seems logical to start off with the basics – the level of signs, which forms the foundation for any paradigm of knowledge. In this respect, it was Jean Baudrillard (1983) who, in *Simulations and Simulacra*, provided an illustrious vision of the evolution of the sign:

The evolution of the sign goes through four discrete stages: (1) it is a reflection of basic reality, (2) it masks and perverts a basic reality, (3) it masks the absence of basic reality, and (4) it bears no relationship to any reality whatever – it is its own pure simulacrum. (11)

If the sign in the pre-modernist era was still known to reflect basic reality which, just like the brief stage of human innocence, “was linking two persons in an unbreakable reciprocity” (Baudrillard, 1983: 84); the following epoch of modernism indeed happened to be an exemplification of Baudrillard’s second and partially third stages of the evolution of the sign. Thus, the early modernist sign masks the reality of extreme innovation in all spheres of human existence. The ongoing insistence on novelty, renovation, iconoclasm, change and radical transformation of older forms into a “new aesthetic of wonder-working technologies” (Jameson, 1991: 304) is concealed by means of the imposed reality of persistent nostalgia and protests against modernization and technological progress, “pastoral visions, Luddite gestures, [...], or a new wave of anti-positivist, spiritualistic, irrational reactions against triumphant progress and reason” (Jameson, 1991: 304).

With the onset of high modernism or modernism proper it seems necessary to introduce a correction to Baudrillard’s third stage of the development of the sign. Thus, rather than masking the absence of reality proper, it masks the profound distance from reality proper, which remains undiscovered due to intense intoxication with self-sufficiency, grandness and utopian attempt to create a new and unprecedented social order. As a result, the high modernist era happened to experience the peak of all grandiose social, cultural and economic phenomena, be it imperialism or monopoly, individualism and subject, charismatic leadership or rule of the genius. Indeed, as Frederic Jameson (1991) puts it, modernism was a “time of giants and legendary powers no longer available to us, [...] organized around the great Work, the Book of the World – secular scripture, sacred text, ultimate ritual mass for an unimaginable social order – [a time of] great demiurges and

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prophets” (305), be they Hitler or Stalin, Peron or Mussolini, Joyce or Proust, Picasso or Kafka.

Furthermore, modernism was a time of great utopias, when the keen sense of the new fostered various visions of the transformed and integral self in the transfigured world of a new social order. Thus, Hitler assembles *Mein Kampf* and the resulting National Socialism; Stalin works on creating an unprecedented state of communism and communal existence in Russia, while China, Turkey, and numerous other countries on the globe conduct their own modernist campaigns of secularisation and cultural illumination. “‘You have to change your life!’ Rilke’s archaic Greek torso tells him paradigmatically; and D.H Lawrence is filled with intimations of this momentous new sea of change from which new people are sure to emerge” (Jameson, 1991: 312).

Likewise, it was an epoch when one’s existence was represented as a sealed off entity, unable to traverse the isolated worlds of others. Thus, according to Frederic Jameson (1991),

In Gide and Conrad, in Fernando Pessoa, in Pirandello, in Ford, and to a lesser extent in Henry James, even very obliquely in Proust, what we begin to see is the sense that each consciousness is a closed world, so that a representation of the social totality now must take the impossible form of a coexistence of those sealed subjective worlds and their peculiar interaction, which in reality is a passage of ships in the night, a centrifugal movement of lines and planes that can never intersect. (412)

Despite its seeming outer closedness, the period was, nevertheless, marked by an inner paradox of the “simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous, the synchronicity of the nonsynchronous, the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance” (Jameson, 1991: 307), the existence of two societies within one – a high modernist artificial creation and a human world of day-to-day existence. As a consequence, the self-centred, centrifugal and elitist nature of modernism as such, as well as its intrinsic conflicts could not but let in the air of decadence, with all the great promises of modernism gradually going limp, haunted by an inescapable feeling of a looming disaster. The growing fracture of unified conceptions, the distance between the high and the low, the superior and the plebeian could not but harbour a secret yearning for ‘the’ meaning behind the crisis of the now, leading to the rise of the question “Why?”.

Yet, before this article will turn to the analysis of the postmodern epoch, it seems necessary to come back to Baudrillard’s vision of the diachronic evolution of the sign and examine its fourth evolutionary stage. The study employed the second and the third stages of the paradigm to delineate human

progress through the period of early and high modernism. The fourth stage in Baudrillard's classification states that the sign "bears no relationship to any reality whatever – it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard, 1983: 11). Nevertheless, the study considers the proposition to be partially faulty and a bit premature for exemplifying the period of postmodernism. Therefore, this work is going to leave it aside for the characterisation of a later period of the human search for meaning. The study considers it necessary to edit Baudrillard's view of signal evolution, by making an addition of a stage when 'the sign discloses the inconceivability of basic reality' to characterise the period of sober postmodern exposure to the Truth of creation, the authenticity of which is unshielded by cultural and societal rituals, delusions and constructs. Hence, the first question "Why?" and the immediate shock that comes from the realisation of the impossibility to find 'the' answer, automatically plunges the human race into the astounding world of postmodernism, figuratively portrayed by J.G. Ballard (2001) in *The Atrocity Exhibition* in the following manner: "An empty beach with its fused sand. Here clock time is no longer valid. Even an embryo, symbol of secret growth and possibility, is drained and limp. These images are the residue of a remembered moment of time" (61).

As a result, the postmodern impotence to know and to perceive the truth of creation turns into a manifest fascination with ontology, with modes of being, instead of modes of knowing; with local and fluid meaning, instead of the timeless and universal. Indeed, as Brian McHale (1987) views it in *Postmodernist Fiction*,

Postmodern fiction negotiates the tension between self-reflexivity and representation by abandoning the modernist emphasis on epistemology – which leads inevitably towards reflexivity – for an emphasis on ontology. Knowing loses its privileged position to pluriform, polyphonic being. The one world which the modernists sought to know is replaced by a plurality of autonomous worlds that can be described and relations between which we can explore, but that can never be the objects of true knowledge. (121)

Thus, postmodern minds do not so much seek to understand the miracle of creation, as to acknowledge it in all its inaccessibility, contingency and fragmentation. As a result, the world is restored to all of its intrinsic objectness and "ceases to be part of the subjective consciousness" (Bertens, 1995: 34). Accordingly, the impossibility to know the Truth of being leads one to reflect on the possible modes of being - on the small, rather than big; on the insignificant, rather than transcendent – and the feasible ways of their representation, which brings to the fore the problem of postmodern signification.

A profound realisation of our inability to know the Truth and, as a subsequence, to represent it (which makes it impossible to take for granted the

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old forms of representation, as they create rather than reflect reality), led to a deep crisis of representation in the postmodern epoch, underlining the impossibility to depict in an unmediated fashion the “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (Otto, 1958: 49). As a consequence, one may characterise the era, as a period of deep Lyotardian-like doubt and suspicion towards all human forms of representation, the comprehension of their secondariness, “wire[d] up context” (Jameson, 1991: 299) and constructedness. The language itself, as an indispensable instrument of human cognition and representation, becomes reduced to a “function of a commentary, that is, of a permanently second degree relationship to sentences that have already been formed, [...] that can never go far enough to make primary statements” (Jameson, 1991: 392-393). For that reason, one comes across such postmodern phenomena as extreme textualisation or narrativisation of experience, saturated with a “cynical, jaded blank, and blasé attitude” (Goldman and Papsion, 1994: 224), and exhibiting the incapability of the sign to represent the real. Hence, one encounters such phenomena as bodies as texts, spaces as texts, psychologies as texts, soberly and acrimoniously enjoying, rather than lamenting their own lack of reference and epistemological emptiness.

Accordingly, the postmodernism’s overall inability to represent, followed by the subsequent dispersal of experiences and sensations, fragmentation of standards, orientations and values, cynical meekness, narcissistic yearning to enjoy, and decay of longing for epistemological certainty led to the near substitution of existence by the flurry of incompatible particles and remains of modernist existence. The process may be figuratively depicted by a remarkable comment made by Frederic Jameson (1991):

The [postmodern] space that thereby emerges involves the suppression of distance and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body – whether wondering through a postmodern hotel, locked into rock sounds by means of headphones, or undergoing the multiple shocks and bombardments of the Vietnam War – is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed. There are, of course, many other features of this space one would ideally want to comment on – [...] – but the disorientation of the saturated space will be the most useful guiding thread in the present context. (412-413)

A like stance of reasoning was expressed by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1989), comparing the state of postmodern existence to the “degree zero” (334), due to the evident “lack of reality” (336), continuous repudiation of representation and perpetual maintenance of “optimal dissensus” (Bertens, 1995: 133):

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The degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonalds's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the 'taste' of patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics, and public wallow together in the 'anything goes,' and the epoch is one of slackening. (Lyotard, 1989: 334-335)

The postmodern epoch is indeed that of "slackening" (Lyotard, 1989: 335), when too much, or too little of anything, demise of meaning, exhaustion of aspirations, rule of plurality, rise of ambiguity and blankness, marauding of texts substituting reality for meaning and value, lead to the total dispersion of the Self in a bout of schizophrenic jerks, impulses, anxiety and anomie. Indeed, schizophrenic fragmentation occurs due to the fact that postmodernism presents "instruments, [rather than] answers to enigmas in which we can rest" (James, 1997: 258), thus answering the procedural how-question instead of the enlightening question "Why?", and keeping the mind in constant tension from the perpetually unsatisfied hunger to perceive the ontological status of reality. What is more, postmodernism exposes the incontestable lie of human existence, the impact of which fosters the emergence of all those nomads, rhizomes and schizos that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari talk about in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

As a result, the fatigue from the postmodern chaos, alongside with an unmitigated vision of the incomprehensible truth makes people "not surely seated in [their] bodies, [with] no secure base from which to negotiate a defiance of and a denial of the real nature of the world" (Becker, 1973: 63) finally say: "'It's too much', or 'I can't stand it,' or 'I could die'. Delirium cannot be borne for long. Our organisms are just too weak for any large doses of greatness" (Becker, 1973: 49). Indeed, the human mind is secretly masochistic in its constant craving for repression, when freedom becomes too much for it to bear due to the innate yearning for self-imposed limitations. This justifies the human riddenness with artificialities, searches for limits, beginnings, ends, systems and paradigms, and allows one to conclude that man consciously dooms himself to be not free in order to exist, which goes hand in hand with the main idea of Marcia Lee Anderson's (1997) poem *Diagnosis*:

We multiply diseases for delight,
Invent horrid want, a shameful doubt,
Luxuriate in license, feed on night,
Make inward bedlam – and will not come out.
Why should we? Stripped of subtle complications,
Who could regard the sun except with fear?

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This is our shelter against contemplation,
Our only refuge from the plain and clear. (7)

Hence, postmodernism is a transitional period in the human search for meaning, astonishing the mind with its sober vision of the inconceivable Truth, the notion of which gets completely substituted with limitless, chaotic and free-floating signification. This brings one to the verge of schizophrenic madness, with no means to enter the compulsory constructedness of existence, in which we have to be embedded so as to be called human.

It is for this reason that instead of fruitless attempts to represent the world-as-it-is, one seeks to represent the world-as-it-is-not, wilfully filling it with meaning and addictively constructing its new and revised maxims. Thus, the celebration and cognisant acceptance of the created world-as-it-is-not, with the only truth available being the synthetically constructed truth of human narratives, becomes an agenda for the next in line stage of post-postmodernism. Hence, mankind forsakes the boundless freedom offered by postmodernism in favour of healthy repressions, willingly imposed limitations, as well as self-constructed life-narratives of post-postmodernism, bringing to the fore the wisdom of Ernest Becker's (1973) prominent statement:

Creation is a nightmare spectacular taking place on a planet that has been soaked for hundreds of years in blood of all its creatures. The soberest conclusion that we could make about what has actually been taking place on the planet for about three billion years is that it is being turned into a vast pit of fertiliser. But the sun distracts our attention, always baking the blood dry, making things grow over it, and with its warmth giving the hope that comes with the organism's comfort and expansiveness. '*Questo sol m'arde, e questo m'innamore,*' as Michelangelo put it. (283)

In fact, the need for a new theory has been pronounced for decades. Thus, all major critics of the postmodern, be they, for instance, Linda Hutcheon or Jürgen Habermas, Douglas Kellner or Steven Best, Ernesto Laclau or Chantal Mauffe, came to the eventual realisation of its pronounced deficiency, restrictiveness and temporariness. Nevertheless, it was Frederic Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, who stopped just short of elaborating a system to supersede the chaos of postmodernism, so as to endow the world of broken industrial society with meaning and a sense of purpose. The scholar emphasised the overall shallowness of postmodernism and the unprecedented need for meaning and epistemological profundity. In this respect, Jameson (1991) argued that the claims of modernism, intoxicated by its seeming self-sufficiency, or, as he calls it, "older kinds of political positions" (180), stirred nothing but "widespread embarrassment" (180), and postulates of

the seemingly liberating postmodernism, or “official politics” (180), were “extraordinarily enfeebled” (180).

Thus, Jameson was able to catch the atmosphere of change overtaking the epoch of postmodernism. Nevertheless, despite elaborating a comprehensive analysis of the postmodern epoch, his visions of the post-postmodern era remained vague and did not evolve into anything more concrete than a mere suspicion. Yet Jameson (1991) was right in pointing out the utopian nature of the epoch to come, in its struggle for unity and meaningfulness, defining utopia as a “now generally recognised code word for the systematic transformation of contemporary society” (334). For this reason, Jameson (1991) introduced a notion of ‘reconciliation’ – “the illusion of the possibility of some ultimate reunion between a subject and an object radically sundered or estranged from each other, or even to some new ‘synthesis’ between them; [...] a moment of unity reinvented at the end of time when subject and object are once again ‘reconciled’” (334-337), and that of ‘totalisation’ –

The concept designed to stress the unification inherent in human action; and the way in which what was formerly called negation can also be seen as the forging of a new situation – the unification of a construct, the interrelating of a new idea to the old ones, the active securing of a new perception, whether visual or auditory, its forced conversion into a new form. (333)

Without a doubt, Jameson was among the first to underline the impossibility of a fully-fledged meaningful existence without a certain unity between the signifier and the signified. As a result, Jameson (1991) suspected the emergence of a new era of newly reinvented unified constructs, “securing a new perception” (333) of the world and the rebirth of meaning. Nevertheless, this article proposes to introduce one key correction to Jameson’s line of reasoning - that is the rebirth of meaning based on a socially agreed on set of purposefully constructed totalities.

Indeed, the ensuing epoch of what this work calls post-postmodernism appears to be an age of conscious construction/ fabulation and committed adherence to wilfully created totalities, so as to escape the threat of schizophrenic dissolution in the inconceivable universe. Niels Bohr once said that “it is wrong [...] to think that the task of physics is to find out what nature is. [...] Physics concerns what we can say about nature” (qtd. in Ford, 2007: 119). Hence, post-postmodernism may be rightfully called the epoch of what-we-can-sayness, the time of conscious cultivation and fabulation of new totalities and new life-narratives.

One might say that the emerging concept of post-postmodern fabulation is no different from Jean Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra. Yet, it is far from being so. As we have seen, Baudrillard (1983) claims that at the fourth and,

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hence, the last stage of the development of the sign “it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (12). Though it indeed bears no relation to any reality due to the impossibility either to comprehend it or represent it with a set logic conceived by a human mindset, the sign is far from being its own pure simulacrum; rather, it happens to be its own pure fabrication, for the reasons to be explained below. The difference between the two is as significant as the gap between complete absence and inconceivable presence. Thus, Baudrillard (1983) comments on the essence of simulation, saying that

To dissimulate is to feign to have what one has. To simulate is to feign what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. [...] The age of simulacra and simulation [implies that] there is no longer any God to recognize as his own, nor any last judgement to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance. (10-13)

Thus, Baudrillard (1983) underlines the fact that the age of simulacra is based on a complete vacuum, on a complete extinction and non-existence of Truth and reality as such, on “a liquidation of all referentials” (10), fostering, as a result, the generation of hyperrealities from an unending succession of purely simulacral entities. Consequently, one is faced with the eternal “precession” (Baudrillard, 1983: 10) (or primacy) and eternal recurrence of simulacra – that is the eternal recurrence of underlying absence.

To illustrate the above statement it seems necessary to discuss Baudrillard's example with God, put forward in *Simulations and Simulacra*. Thus, if God has never existed and all the surviving icons, texts and scriptures are a mere simulacra, then the atmosphere of God worship and apprehension of God as such becomes a hyperreality, making God, as a consequence, a pure simulacrum of the second order, and thus “making room only for the orbital recurrence of [based on nothing] models and the simulated generation of difference” (Baudrillard, 1983: 10). However, such a stance appears to be very deficient due to Baudrillard's obstinate promotion of the concept of primal absence. For this reason, this article intends to expand the above example with God to prove that it is incomprehensible presence rather than pure annihilation that instigates men to produce artificial visions of reality.

Thus, if one looks at the concept of God *per se* and puts aside all divine images and attributes systematically imposed on us by religion (be it numerous churches, mosques, temples, icons, or saints), God is nothing more than a complex of disguised human fears, anxieties and phobias about its own helplessness, mixed with desire for the utmost protection and shelter. What is more, God may be equalled to the eternal yearning of mankind for the plenitude of meaning. Hence, as men always yearn to comprehend the incomprehensible

and fear to be destroyed by the grandness of the life force, God remains as an everlasting presence, rather than Baudrillard's pure simulacrum based on annihilating absence. Furthermore, as 'the' meaning remains unknown and life force unconquered, one cannot talk of Baudrillard's absence of reality; rather one has to acknowledge its perpetual presence beyond human comprehension. The acknowledgement, in its turn, becomes possible only via continual fabulation of personal meanings and life-narratives.

As a result, post-postmodernism envisions the sign as a fabulation, or a purposefully revived reunion of the signifier and signified that had been estranged by postmodernism, which aims at a conscious construction of men-made truths that confront the otherwise incomprehensible truth of creation. Accordingly, as Mikhail Epstein (1997) puts it in "The Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity",

If in postmodernism even the language of feelings was subjected to the use of quotation marks, then at present quotation marks have penetrated the word so deeply that each one of them contains secondariness within itself, which is an imperative condition for the freshness of its repetition to be felt against the background of these former usages. Thus, the [post-postmodern] word contains the presumption of guilt and an implicit act of apology – confessing its own non-substitutionability, its singularity, its absoluteness. It represents the movement of meaning in two directions at once: both the application and removal of quotation marks. The same word may sound like "““““I love””””” and I Love!!! (2)

Thus, what one observes here is a post-postmodern celebration of a purposefully generated absoluteness of a sign, of a long awaited reunion of a signifier and signified, constructed by humans in their yearning for the promise of new and revised meanings and truths, fresh in their emphasised secondariness and people-constructed nature. Therefore, contrary to the notion of Baudrillard's simulacra - a category of pure destructive nihilism, post-postmodern fabulation turns into a category of constructive optimism, providing men with a tool to produce (in a self-conscious manner) new life-narratives and meanings, and, as a consequence, strengthen their belief in the *a priori* existence of the ultimate Truth.

In addition, fabulation endows men with an effective tool to overcome the sense of inner barrenness and weakness imposed by postmodernism; to create new meanings on which to project all their individual qualities; to feel at last powerful and secure, finally overflowing with meaning and a sense of purpose. Furthermore, fabulation provides men with a sound way to affirm themselves, by instilling life-narratives with "the self-transcending life process, [which] gives to one's self the larger nourishment it needs" (Becker, 1973: 157).

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For this reason, fabrication is a tool to escape the centrifugal cocoon of modernism and the incapacitating freedom of postmodernism. What is more, it is a mechanism allowing one to accept the existence of ultimate truth as such, by means of a set of personally constructed life-narratives and meanings. The point here is not the arrival at ultimate truth as such, but conscious acceptance of its *a priori* existence. In this connection, it was Ernst Becker (1973) who said that “we did not create ourselves, but we are stuck with ourselves” (158), hence men are bound to perpetual fabrication of life-narratives, allowing one to have a life of meaning in a universe never to be fully understood.

So as to summarise the above arguments about post-postmodernism, this work presents the following schematic vision of the epoch:

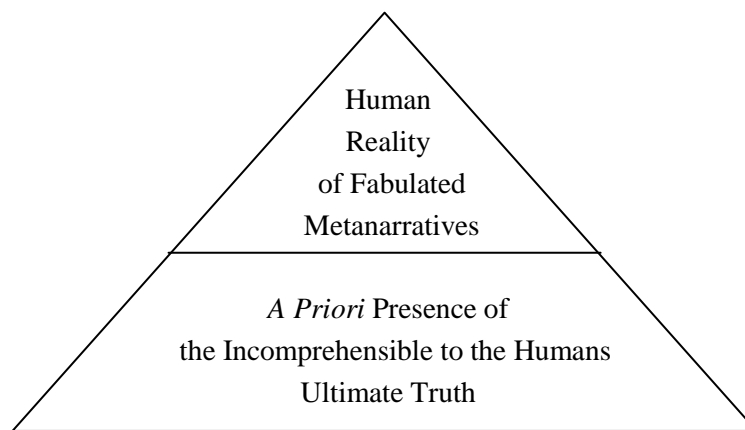


Figure 2: The Essence of Post-Postmodernism

A triangle has been chosen to represent the age of post-postmodernism, so as to emphasize the one-sided nature of relationship with the underlying Truth, which is impossible to understand. Thus, it forms a sort of a Marxian-like base for an artificial superstructure of the world of humans, perpetually fighting against the terror of meaninglessness with the help of the belief in the *a priori* existence of the ultimate truth. This results in the subsequent fabrication of personal life-narratives, truths and meanings, which enable them to exist, and strengthen their belief in the Truth even further. In addition, the overall shape of the triangle stands for an active, constructive and future-oriented nature of the epoch, which is wilfully stating, rather than schizophrenically doubting, and generating, rather than dispersing. All of this endows post-postmodernism with an effective tool to oppose the constant threat of being subsumed by the underlying chaos of creation.

To conclude, this work assembles a reworked version of the general evolution of the sign, so as to display its profound difference from the one

initially proposed by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations and Simulacra*, and to illustrate again the stages of human search for meaning on the basis of the theory elaborated in this work:

Sign:
(1) is a reflection of basic reality; (2) masks basic reality; (3) masks the distance from basic reality; (4) discloses the incomprehensibility of basic reality; (5) bears no relation to any reality whatsoever, being fully fabricated by the human mind.

Figure 3: The General Evolution of the Sign

As a consequence, the paradigm provides a useful tool to reflect on the progress of mankind in its quest for meaning from the stage of modernist ‘intoxication’ and postmodern ‘sobriety’ towards the promise of post-postmodern ‘fabulation’, the essence of which is concisely, but, nevertheless, most accurately depicted in an excerpt from Carlo Levi’s (1950) work *Of Fear and Freedom*: “[...] men incapable of liberty – who cannot stand the terror of the sacred that manifests itself before their open eyes – must turn to mystery, must [make] [...] the [...] truth” (135). To achieve this purpose one should leave aside the era of postmodern schizophrenic extra-magical helpers and turn to the promise of post-postmodern conscious fabulation.

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