WHAT IS POST-NEOMODERNISM? ABSOLUTE, MULTIPLICITY, POST-TRUTH, DISRUPTION.

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This paper is the first of two that seek to propose the establishment of a new singularity for the arts defined as a Post-neomodernism by examining the first five points of the Post Neomodernist Manifesto (2015). As the micro movements of Post-postmodernism, Neomodernism, and Metamodernism have established their own positions in an after Postmodernist context, therein lies an absence of a greater contextualisation to which a Post-neomodernism can establish and by this, approach a singularity in more holistic terms. Discussion will examine the context of a new absolute, the role of multiplicity in new relativism, the rise of post truth and the disruption of such instances through digital media.

Keywords: Post-neomodernism, multiplicity, new relativism

Since the demise of Postmodernism there has been a complex uncertainty for the arts as to what defines a singularity for its twenty-first century context. In response, the Post Neomodernist Manifesto (2015) was established to attest this lack of singularity by considering three often opposing concurrent perspectives referred to hereafter as micro movements - Neomodernism, Metamodernism and Post-postmodernism. While such entities have spawned, in part, from a dissatisfaction of Postmodernism, and, as in the case of Neomodernism, began its own disruption during the last two decades of Postmodernism's effect, we now ought to consider or at the very least come to terms with the suggested argument that the arts no longer have a direct relationship with Modernism in the same accounts as Postmodernism did by way of disengaging itself from the advancement of Modernism in its attempt to understand the movement through its own deconstruction of knowledge.

This new era of an after-Postmodernism has not yet arguably demonstrated a solid comprehension for a singularity because, as this paper will suggest, the period, first, is divided into several different ways of defining an absolute which often lack multiplicity in its disruption of relativism, and second, that the condition of the absolute in a twenty-first
century modus is now defunct when thought of as the former being once a facsimile of the Modernist ideal achieved through analysis and critical deconstruction.

Defining a Post-neomodernism is not necessarily applicable to be considered as an after Neomodernism movement when thought of as a type of replacement or advancement of the former’s critique. In fact, such an assessment does not accommodate the more important issues of a wider defining singularity as opposed to merely ending one micro movement and consequently starting another - whether as an advancement or a deconstruction - in its place. The issue at hand is that such considerations of replacement only serves to address the more localised conceptual issues of a first generation hierarchical evolution based on the agency of action-follows-reaction, and so forth. For Post-neomodernism, its existence is not defined by a critique of its former nor the bringing forward or even further, the revival of a ‘modern Modernism’ but rather, enabled by defining the absolute which can be on the one hand, revoked through new relativism from the action of multiplicity and on the other, a presence of an intentional facsimile of knowledge and the future. With this in mind, the Post Neomodernist Manifesto opens up these issues by establishing a ten point thematic which must, however, be thought of as speculative due to its untested nature. This, of course, is best served as an introduction to the potentiality of a Post-neomodernist debate that, at the time of this paper’s publication, has not yet been explored in any further detail other than through the authorship of manifesto. To that end, this paper is the first noted critique of the movement’s position and a springboard for future debate that will consider the manifesto as existing in two separate parts of first which are an examination of the themes of the absolute and multiplicity while the second part is to consider knowledge through a new relativism, which shall be the subject of the second follow up paper.

These ten points are, indeed, a core basis of the movement’s overriding philosophy which have since provided some meaningful insight into, for example, the emergence of post-truth fundamentalism located in digital media with regards to, in particular, the underlying nature of the 2016 United States of America presidential election and its impact on the multiplicity within new relativism propelled through social media. To that end, such instances have certainly contributed to a new mode of understanding for critical thought as ‘truth becomes a function of time… Fidelity to yesterday’s truth consists precisely in abandoning it in assuming it into today’s truth’ (Teilhard de Chardin in Soares de Azevedo, 99). Such modularity can frame history and recorded truth as replaceable if relativism is attested to ‘the idea that nothing is definitive, and that truth is dependent on [the versioned editions of] history’ (ibid). So with this in mind it then becomes apparent that the contemporary arguments of truth can indeed change in time and this, of course, is attested to what Post-neomodernism recognises by the need for defining authenticness through the absolute.
In a press statement from Facebook in December 2015, Vice President of Facebook news feed Adam Mosseri calls for news articles that are ‘authentic and meaningful’ (Mosseri, 2015) in response to fake news circulation which was heightened in discussion several months later during the intensity of the Trump and Clinton political campaigns as it was claimed that ‘an even greater volume of stories express an opinion that many will disagree with and flag as incorrect even when factual’ (Perrott, K, 2016). Likewise, post-truth in the political sphere has recently demonstrated in what one might argue to be a litmus test for a tendency of the moral and political divisiveness located in the wider digital community as a return of the social fundamentalisms of ‘burn the witch’, what Peter Ellerton considers as ‘what we value most in politicians is not that they tell the truth, but that they agree with us, or at least that the worldview they espouse resonates with our own’ (Ellerton, 2016). If there is, hypothetically, no need for universal truth then the absolute and, notwithstanding, the condition brought about by relativism, and in particular the dictatorial enclaves of new relativism through Post-neomodernism, certainly provides a platform by which to attest to what Peter Seewald notes that ‘in a false reality with its false truth – or the absence of truth altogether – nothing, in the final analysis, is important any more’ (Seewald 2016). As the disruption of social media has demonstrated through digital media platforms that the distribution of factless information has enabled users of such technologies to a mechanism by which they themselves can embellish and comprehend an ongoing falsity, therein raises questions about the validity of history through selective editing and moreso, engaging with truth as a multiplicity not unlike when, in 2007, ‘a congressional subcommittee accused Google… of “airbrushing history”’ by replacing post-Hurricane Katrina satellite imagery on its popular map portal with images of the region taken before the storm’s devastation’ (nbcnews, 2007).

With this in mind, the first point of the Post Neomodernist Manifesto establishes the claim ‘we recognise the importance of multiplicity in relativism’ (Wilson, 2015) and while one of the key aspects of Post-neomodernism is to consider that it exists as a new fascite of relativism, that is, a new relativism, it cannot function and moreover, cannot exist without the implicit role of multiplicity, giving rise to the issue of the absolute understood in the traditional sense as universal truth being subjected to the effects of multiplicity that ensure the absolute itself cannot be established without a subjective effect on the transitory nature of, in this case, new knowledge. This is a critical component in defining a core singularity as the combined said micro movements have already established an after Postmodernism territory albeit not yet intertwined through a situated commonality. Unlike this three way split, one might come to terms with Post-neomodernism as a critical unification which acknowledges each micro movement’s differences in the one consideration yet by doing so signals the rupture of postmodernity in response to its evolved habitation within critical thought.
A useful consideration to this point is situated in the idea with regards to Manovich’s claim that multimodal ‘sources are brought together within a singular cultural object’ (Manovich 2001, p. 76).

‘Contrary to popular images of computer media as collapsing all human culture into a single giant library… or a single giant book… it is perhaps more accurate to think of the new media culture as an infinite surface when individual texts are places in no particular order… In contrast to the older storage media of a book, film or magnetic tape, where data is stored sequentially… seducing the user through careful arrangement of argument and examples, cultural interfaces bombard the user with all the data at once (Manovich 2001, pp. 77-78).

The multiplicity of forms used in digital technology makes the concept of defining or limiting mediums of artist practice in this domain redundant (Manovich 2001, p.10) yet moreso, this redundancy which Manovich speaks of is not unlike the dependency which new relativism embraces through multiplicity in a Post-neomodernism context; transcending the evolution of old media, that is, the singular artefact of knowledge belonging to an ordered catalogue, subjected to a mode of analysis where the primary way of understanding such an artefact is by a spatial perspective of geographically situating its agency into a documented classification. Differing from this approach is first, the widely understood new media way of accessing data instantaneously through, as Manovich claims, the one unit of knowledge, to what this paper considers to be the second effacement understood as a digital media, that is to say, the collective system of emotive exchange brought about from the connectedness of interface experiences. While there may be some confusion implied in this idea with regards to rejecting social media as a secondary transgression of old media to instead consider digital media as not being a ‘thing’ used in digitised media transactions but rather as a condition brought about by its own facilities - with social media positioned as a micro movement contained within digital media - the treatise with which this notion is attested to positions such a condition as impacted, and from this, induced from the existence of multiplicity brought about as an indicator of new relativism not necessarily limited to the older, more outdated sense of a new media to what, instead, is more akin to the nature of digital communication enabled from the very end of postmodernism at the start of the early 2000s.

This obviously sets up digital media to be open to the understanding that it's said condition must be taken into account as the driver for day to day cultural communication in the twenty first century which likewise adds value to enabling multiplicity to exist nonetheless as an independent agent within new relativism. Drawing back to the Neomodernist Manifesto which claims that ‘Neomodernism [in art] acknowledges the primacy of the Hegelian Idea’ (Bayraktari) prescribed through the absolute in contrast to the Metamodernism Manifesto that proclaims to ‘be defined as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity,
naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons’ (Turner 2011), the opposing absolutes in Neomodernism versus the oscillation of Metamodernism concretise two vastly opposing strategies that one might argue are at odds with each other. Given new relativism on its own cannot support pluralistic mergers yet the condition brought about by digital media can in fact facilitate a pluralism when reacting to new relativism - despite its own concept of having no absolute truth in knowledge that enables a condition to establish a Post-neomodernism - not so as to consider a pluralism of where these two attested micro movements conjoin but rather as a vantage point to consider the singularity of such treatises using digital media as a key set of values in order to come to terms with a Post-neomodernist state. These considerations are reflected upon in the second manifest point which establishes a Post-neomodernist condition by cementing the discontinuation of Modernism to infer that ‘the existence of a Modernist ideal cannot continue once it’s facsimile is made through examination’ (Wilson, 2015).

This point draws from a failing of Postmodernism that, despite the efforts of its critical deconstruction, the movement aimed, both ostensibly and subjectively, to target and defunct the Modernist ideal from understanding its primary intermediate processes. By its very definition, this canceled out the ability for Modernism to exist on its own ideals which were never meant to be questioned through a conditional or even a suggestive absolute. Therefore when this absolute was questioned by postmodern enquiry it then arguably lost its ability to repel against such an analysis and further, its ability to even exist if its entire existence was based on the state of being rather than considering. Yet there is no argument from Postmodernism as to what happens to a Modernist ideal once it has been cloned in order to gain new knowledge of its whole. Moreover, Postmodernism was able to exist as a critical scan of its former but had no way of containing such a critical gaze once its logic had determined new knowledge brought about through collective examination. One might argue, for example, that this critical standpoint is where Postmodernism stopped or at the very least was incapable of functioning beyond examination once its perceived logic circumvented the very knowledge it was trying to come to terms with. Thus, mitigating the effacements of the movement’s implications is attested by this paper to be paradoxical. This is why that the need for a Post-neomodernism is able to sustain long term analysis from a culmination of its three preceding micro movements notwithstanding because, as the inferred pluralism located in the diametrically indifferent movements suggest that the particular shortfalls of Postmodernism gives rise to the wider implications of absolute knowledge. One such example is that Postmodernism in the arts had no mechanism to further argue against Modernism outside of examination other than to allude that Modernism, and that of the enlightenment had failed - ‘...the modernist posture was one of pathfinder and conqueror, [while] the postmodernist prefers the passive life of a voyeur’ (Dutton, p.35). Perhaps this is due in part to French Poststructuralist discourse where ‘at the center of post structuralism is the idea that the Enlightenment has run its course… [and] Poststructuralist critics of the Enlightenment have
sometimes faulted it for the faith that history is moving toward some sort of omega point’ (Dutton, p.23) which is exactly what the Modernist ideal sought to establish in the arts and for what Postmodernism set out to dismantle.

Expanding on the paradoxical, and drawing back to the dictatorial essence of new relativism, David Brooks writes in *The New York Times* that ‘some sort of moral system is coming into place. Some new criteria now exist, which people use to define correct and incorrect action’ (Brooks, 2016). ‘This new code has created a paradoxical moment in which all is tolerated except the intolerant and all included except the exclusive’ (Merritt, 2016) Suffice to say, the Modernist ideal in this kind of environment, leading to a paradoxical condition, is not unlike the paradox of the dictatorial social intolerance which both Brooks and Merritt infer. Within their observations, how can it be so that the demand of tolerance can exist through truth if the demand itself is intolerant of alternative positions to the very tolerance it demands in the first place inasmuch similarity as the Modernist ideal existing when its intolerance of anything other than that of being ‘Modernist’ reduces its ability to function and negates modularity in a Post-neomodernist condition?

The second point of the manifesto not only forces a Modernist ideal to become redundant but the very action of doing so implies that Modernism cannot exist at all within Post-neomodernism unlike its noted presence throughout Postmodernism where the ideal had to be established, maintained and remain cognitive through its own agency in order for the later movement to make a copy of itself to analyse. This is a point of departure between Postmodernism and Post-neomodernism for the simple reason that for the first time in well over one hundred years, the arts do not have Modernism as either a governance nor a critical enquiry presiding over its ongoing inception. However, this is quite indifferent to components of Neomodernism which sought to propagate particular elements of Modernism into its own treatise with one such part being a dictatorial absolute. In a response to the Derek Beres article ‘How Does Intuition Work? which begins with the observed absolute ‘Humans love a good battle. Red versus Blue. Religion versus spirituality… every god needs his archenemy.’ (Beres 2016), Neo-modernist commentator Gabriel Omowaye responds ‘there are no good battles; there just are fine victories, especially triumphant ones’. As Omowaye considers the contemporary state as an outright ‘Neomodern period’ (ibid) without recognising, or perhaps not considering the duality of other concurrent albeit conflicting micro movements, this further highlights the Neo Modernist condition of a dictatorial absolute, that is, for example, that Neomodernism, in the Beres/Omowaye case is the only recognised cultural state above all others not unlike the same proclamations that Modernism held in art from its own self declared absolute. Yet the implications of a total absolute are not restricted or isolated in the present and instead have base in the future. If I was to say, for example, that the sky was green and that there was no other colour that the sky could be then this declaration of a dictatorial absolute effects not only the past and present but also the future for if the sky was
in fact green in the present then there would be no other colour for it to be in the future because it exists as an absolute truth in both the present and the future.

With regards to the third point which states that ‘the future can only be understood once it’s original is destroyed’ (Wilson, 2015), this passage speaks, on the one hand, to the legacy and limits of Postmodernism whereby in order for Modernism to be understood from critique but on the other hand, the consideration of a future determined by the destruction of its original dictates a version of the future to be permissible only because an absolute truth exists in multiplicity, that is, that first, the future exists both as an original which has been destroyed and as another multiple future, not to be confused with a facsimile of the future, which serves to replace it, and second, that we understand that the future exists in multiple because our established knowledge located in the absolute tells us that the future is both destroyed and established at the same time. The problem for multiplicity and for Post-neomodernism is how then can we understand the future or even become the future at a later point if the original future is no longer available to consider and that in its place is something else? ‘Here, multiplicity becomes subjective: the universals of reason and the particularities of nature are superseded in the individual as multiple’ (Hass, xxvi). Yet in the way multiplicity engages with this point and, of course, with regards to the totality of the absolute, the third point raises another more intricate sub-context brought about by the condition that the notion of both destroyed and experienced futures enable us to bring forth as a platform for the arts. If one was to consider the idea of the future as existing through multiplicity then we ought to consider the actuality whereby the future is not necessarily an embodiment of time set at some point beyond the present which although pragmatic and completely plausible within this context is not necessarily the only way to come to terms with such an idea. The future as a multiplicity can also exist by its very nature as an inferred condition not necessarily being the actual future understood from a Newtonian temporality. If I was to say, for example, that my future was happy and that the future as defined in that statement is manifested through the absolute, then that future itself isn’t necessarily related to the actual future which I will experience but instead is a version of the future’s potential of what could happen to the future not necessarily what is going to happen in the future. Moreover, it would be advantageous to consider the third point of the manifesto as something that Neomodernism would itself consider as an absolute and indeed, drawing back to the Modernist ideal that would give something of the same kind of dictatorial absolute.

However, this point contains a suggestion that future has undergone a process of deletion where there is in fact no authenticity in the absolute of the future at all because the old media format - the artifact - from the original has been destroyed leaving us with another informed future ultimately modified by the process of its former. It is important, however, in this regards to consider that new relativism cannot argue against the destruction of a past order so as to proceed to a future and if, for example, the future was perceived through an original
ideal or what we might consider to be a Modernist ideal then this very ideal itself must be destroyed through the disruption of knowledge if a future is to be established, not to be in the future but moreso by the condition it induces so that there is an assurance of a continuation of the present invested through the absolute that a future will be present in the future.

On the fourth point of ‘disruption is the only universal truth once a proclamation is called through a Modernist framework’ Wilson, 2015), it reveals itself to be more of a thematic than the other key points already discussed because the term disruption implies to destabilise what has already been established by multiplicity and later, new relativism. This paper also considers this manifesto point to be problematic due to the termed actions of disruption and multiplicity as not sharing the same kind of effect on knowledge unifying a singularity from the said micro movements. An example of such would be that if we contained Metamodernism and Neomodernism together, neither movement would prescribe to using disruption as a device in order to propel its individual logic and agency, and the same can be said of Post-postmodernism as well. Yes, it is true that Postmodernism might be considered to be inclusive of a critical disruption though its repelling of Modernism but disruption itself was used in the context of a procedural element not necessarily as an instrument of the absolute. Where this paper could value the merit of disruption in universal truth belongs moreso outside of the arts and into the social and political spectrum through digital media which enables examples of disruption from social media. Referring back to the 2016 Trump and Clinton campaigns, fake news echoed a disruptive measure throughout the lead up to and during the election ranging from the Clinton email scandal and the consequential FBI investigation that followed versus the politically incorrect tweets and statements from Trump and the fear generated from the alleged Russian election hacking probe. While it may be premature to acknowledge that the 2016 election results were swayed by social media’s disruption using fake news and both neoliberal and neoconservative memes defining dictatorial absolutes, the disruptive nature of these absolutes contributed to a divisiveness or perceived pessimism amongst those engaging with digital media – the war in Syria, the mourning of celebrity deaths, Brexit, superpower provocations, and climate change for example. The condition of digital media brings with it a vehicle by which the validation of truth has been removed from what it was in old media platforms, that is, and in relation to the fourth point, a modernist framework, a new relativism has emerged in its place not immediately requiring the nineteenth and twentieth century systems and methods that were in active at the start of the 2000s now fracturing from the rapid measures of change through communication, commerce and social change.

Social media’s role in this change attests to its dominant influence in how we live and communicate with each other but what is more important in this respect is how we form judgments from a combination of factual and factless information together that forges the way in which we might interact and see the world. According to Singer and Brooking ‘clear
majorities of American Twitter and Facebook users now get their news from these platforms’ (Singer, 2016) signifying our collective demand for ‘news’ and the falsities conjured through instantaneous media consumption. There is little argument now against social media for its ability to generate disruption through platform networks as one only has to look at the events surrounding the Arab Spring uprisings to note how this kind of disruption can sway governments, corporate directions, and widespread social upheavals. Yet for the arts, the same kind of disruption brings little for its unity under a sought singularity and moreso, adds no cultural value to its perceived relativism. So with this in mind, the fourth point might indicate that digital media platforms have disrupted universal truth from a social perspective and thus reflects this attitude astutely but from a cultural point of view, it remains to be seen if such disruption has endured any substantial effect on universal truth governing the arts nor if it ever will have an effect on the arts at all.

The fifth point states that ‘the absolute established in a Hegelian sense is implicitly defunct when placed under scrutiny through multiplicity’. (Wilson, 2015) Such a statement brings into question the relationship between the absolute and multiplicity, which can be thought of in this instance as having two distinct components. On the first, if we were to take Hegel’s position of ‘absolute knowledge is the truth of all modes or attitudes of consciousness’ (Hegel, p.32) with a background that ‘there is no doubt that what Hegel calls ‘absolute knowledge’ (Cunningham, 621) is simply the result of this consideration of thought as it appears in every knowing experience’ (ibid) then the relationship it shares with multiplicity, while at odds with the Newtonian view that ‘truth is ever to be found in simplicity and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things ‘ (Manual, p.120) might be considered to be inclusive. The other component of this statement draws attention as to the importance that multiplicity plays out in Post-neomodernism simply because that under this kind of knowledge, the absolute is governed by multiplicity and not the other way around, and if the absolute is able to be rebutted by scrutiny from multiplicity then the act of scrutiny itself makes the idea of an absolute uncertain, especially in the second half of the manifesto which then takes this uncertainty and engages it through the device of a new relativism.

In sum, this paper suggests that the second component of the fifth point is a hidden logic generated by the condition it entails which also summarises the first half of the manifesto under the assumption that multiplicity and the absolute are the overarching facilities of Post-neomodernism in which other such devices like disruption are established as a resultant condition of the facilities. The positioning of the point within the manifesto’s order remains dynamic as the point’s logic is a multiplicity in itself whereby it exists as its own individual fascite of knowledge and at the same time, a summary of absolute knowledge. As this paper’s intention has dissected the first five points of the manifesto, the drawn conclusions would attest to the vital role of which the absolute and multiplicity play out in new relativism. Digital media has without doubt brought the means for people to consider and engage with
digital information through more meaningful ways that are only now starting to be explored and exploited. We have discussed the more recent incarnations of post-truth and fake news in context to the Trump and Clinton campaigns and how there is not necessarily a desire to seek absolute truth from the news feed we consume on a daily basis within digital media and how this has contributed to a new dictatorial relativism. As the intention of the manifesto is to create a singularity for the arts out of consideration from the state brought about by twenty-first century critical theory micro movements, the questions that emerge from this manifesto are important to consider if the purpose of the absolute and multiplicity are to be thought of as mechanisms which define new relativism in the arts or at the very least, are actually relevant for contemporary thinking in the first place.
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