

Notes towards a metamodernist aesthetic with reference to post-millennial literary works

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ABSTRACT

This study draws on discussions of post-millennial literary fiction to investigate the emerging body of critical theory about the passing of postmodernism and the formulation of what comes after, designated "metamodernism". The aim is to identify and map the underlying structure of intersections and interrelations between the different theories and ideas in order to provide an approximation of the shape that metamodernism is taking.

This study investigates metamodernism's origins in terms of critical theory and situates it in relation to postmodernism and modernism. The failure, absorption, and rejection of postmodernism gave rise to metamodernism, which draws on renewed modernist notions to counter the failings of postmodernism. As a continuation of both postmodernism and modernism, metamodernism is situated both between and beyond its critical predecessors.

The emergence of metamodernism in cultural products is traced in a range of post-millennial literary works and studies of literary works. Four recent novels that respond to the ethical imperative of metamodernism provide an in-depth perspective on the aspects of metamodernism: *A tale for the time being* (Ruth Ozeki, 2013); *A brief history of seven killings* (Marlon James, 2014); *Buys* (Willem Anker, 2014) and *The Sympathizer* (Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015).

A network of interrelated aspects constituting metamodernism is identified in post-millennial fiction. These aspects respond to the perceived deficiencies of postmodernism, and include renewed notions of affect, authenticity, myth, optimism, realism, and sincerity. They are centred around and give rise to affective structures of intersubjectivity, and are founded on and respond to a strongly defined ethical imperative — showing that metamodernism operates on an intersection between ethical concerns, ontology, and (inter)subjectivity.

Three bodies of theory recently developed in the humanities and social sciences that express the central theoretical impulses of metamodernism. Affect theories, chaos and complexity theory, and posthumanism are characterised by a renewed emphasis on ontology, a relational understanding of subjectivity, and the formulation of both ontology and subjectivity to respond to an ethical imperative.

The emphasis on affective processes and interconnected (inter)subjectivity indicates a relational understanding of being as the basic theoretical tenet of metamodernism, that which animates its ethical imperative and gives rise to its renewed focus on ontology. On a

metamethodological level, relationality acts as the underlying organising principle of metamodernism, and highlights the interconnectedness of its different theoretical aspects.

The structure of this study attempts to express the information relationally, both to preserve the integrity of metamodernist theories that reject linear, hierarchical epistemological frameworks and to reflect the function of relationality as organising principle of metamodernism.

Key words: metamodernism; postmodernism; modernism; *A tale for the time being*; Ruth Ozeki; *A brief history of seven killings*; Marlon James; *Buy*s; Willem Anker; *The Sympathizer*; Viet Thanh Nguyen; affect; authenticity; ethical concerns; myth; optimism; realism; sincerity; subjectivity; affect theory; chaos theory; posthumanism; relationality

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie verwys na besprekings van post-millenniale literêre fiksie om ondersoek in te stel na die ontwikkelende korpus krities-teoretiese studies wat besig is om tot stand te kom rondom die heengaan van die postmodernisme en die formulering van dit wat daarna kom, naamlik die "metamodernisme". Die doel is om die onderliggende struktuur van interseksies en interverwantskappe tussen die verskillende teorieë en idees te identifiseer en te karteer, om sodoende 'n vooruitskatting te maak van die vorm wat die metamodernisme aanneem.

Hierdie studie ondersoek die oorsprong van die metamodernisme in terme van kritiese teorie, en plaas dit in verhouding met die postmodernisme en die modernisme. Die mislukking, absorpsie, en verwerping van die postmodernisme het aanleiding gegee tot die ontstaan van die metamodernisme, wat gebruik maak van hernude modernistiese begrippe om die tekortkominge van die postmodernisme teë te werk. Die metamodernisme, as voorsetting van beide die postmodernisme en die modernisme, is tegelykertyd tussen en oorkant sy kritiese voorgangers gesitueer.

Die sigbaarwording van die metamodernisme in kulturele produkte word aangedui in 'n verskeidenheid van post-millenniale literêre werke en studies van literêre werke. Vier onlangse romans wat gehoor gee aan die etiese opdrag van die metamodernisme bied 'n in-diepte perspektief op die aspekte van die metamodernisme: *A tale for the time being* (Ruth Ozeki, 2013); *A brief history of seven killings* (Marlon James, 2014); *Buy's* (Willem Anker, 2014) en *The Sympathizer* (Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015).

'n Netwerk van interverwante aspekte wat die metamodernisme uitmaak word geïdentifiseer in post-millenniale fiksie. Hierdie aspekte reageer op die veronderstelde gebreke van die postmodernisme, en sluit hernude begrippe van affek, ontentisiteit, mite, optimisme, realisme, en opregtheid in. Hulle is gesentreer rondom en gee aanleiding tot affektiewe strukture van intersubjektiwiteit, en is gegronde in en beantwoord aan 'n sterk gedefinieerde etiese opdrag — wat aandui dat die metamodernisme werksaam is in 'n interseksie tussen etiese vraagstukke, ontologie, en (inter)subjektiwiteit.

Drie teorieë wat onlangs in die geestes- en sosiale wetenskappe ontwikkel is, gee uitdrukking aan die sentrale teoretiese impulse van die metamodernisme. Affek-teorieë, chaos-en-kompleksiteit-teorie en posthumanisme word gekenmerk deur 'n hernude fokus op ontologie, 'n relasionele verstaan van subjektiwiteit, en die formulering van beide ontologie en subjektiwiteit om gehoor te gee aan 'n etiese opdrag.

Die beklemtoning van affektiewe prosesse en 'n interverwante (inter)subjektiwiteit dui aan dat 'n relasionele verstaan van wese die teoretiese grondslag van die metamodernisme vorm. Dit dien as motivering vir die metamodernisme se etiese opdrag en gee aanleiding tot sy hernude fokus op ontologie. Op 'n metametodologiese vlak vorm relationaliteit die onderliggende organiserende beginsel van die metamodernisme, en beklemtoon dit die interverwantskap van sy verskillende teoretiese aspekte.

Die struktuur van hierdie studie poog om die inligting relasioneel voor te stel, om sodoeende die integriteit te bewaar van metamodernistiese teorieë wat lineêre, hiërargiese, epistemologiese raamwerke verwerp, en om die funksie van relationaliteit as organiserende beginsel van die metamodernisme te weerspieël.

Sleutel terme: metamodernisme; postmodernisme; modernisme; *A tale for the time being*; Ruth Ozeki; *A brief history of seven killings*; Marlon James; *Buy's*; Willem Anker; *The Sympathizer*; Viet Thanh Nguyen; affek; outentisiteit; etiese oorwegings; mite; optimisme; realisme; opregtheid; subjektiwiteit; affek teorie; chaos teorie; posthumanisme; relationaliteit

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introduction

And now we are in the time of dying.

(Marlon James, *A brief history of seven killings*, 2014:111)

the context: post-truth, post-global, post-postmodern

In November 2016, Oxford Dictionaries chose the term "post-truth" as the word that best reflects the passing year. The word saw a 2000% spike in usage compared to 2015, and was mostly used in the context of "the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States" (Flood, 2016). Casper Grathwohl, president of Oxford Dictionaries, predicts that "post-truth" might well become "one of the defining words of our time" (Flood, 2016).

"Post-truth" is defined as an adjective "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Flood, 2016). Oxford Dictionaries stresses that, rather than simply referring to a period of time after a specified situation or event, the prefix "post" indicates "belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant".

The recent rise of "post-truth" to buzzword status is however misleading, as its roots date back much further. Oxford Dictionaries note that the word was first used in its current sense in a 1992 essay, written by Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich about the Iran-Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf War, saying "we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world" (Flood, 2016).

Calcutt (2016), writing for *The Conversation*, argues that the popular association of "post-truth" with contemporary Western politics (as exemplified by Brexit and Donald Trump) is inaccurate: its origin is found in postmodern strategies of scepticism and suspicion towards grand narratives. For more than thirty years, the postmodern era has been "setting the scene for a 'post-truth' era":

[i]nstead of "the truth", which was to be rejected as naïve and/or repressive, a new intellectual orthodoxy permitted only "truths" — always plural, frequently personalised, inevitably relativised.

Tkatch (2016), too, explains the rise of the "post-truth" era as the result of a backlash against modernist universalism and grand narratives:

After a modern age optimism about the possibility of creating a perfect society resulted in Gulag and Auschwitz, a generation (or two) of postmodernists distrusted and fought all big narratives, universal theories, fixed conventions, traditions, ideologies, etc. Instead, they believed that it is only possible and admissible to self-consciously blend these narratives, creating ever more new and unstable models, world views and styles. It fit well with the hard reality of capitalism, under which both consumerism on steroids and economic precariousness urged people to adopt the rapid flow of constant self-reinvention.

Postmodernism was the true post-truth age. But the logic does not end there. It's not the end of history and the initial post-truth is now over and done with. Trump's victory heralds a new era. I'll call it "post-postmodernism".

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that truth in contemporary times is considered unimportant or irrelevant, or that objective facts no longer hold much value or influence. The slipperiness of truth has, after all, been a concept of critical theory since the heyday of postmodernism: prevalent interpretations of postmodernist theories hold that "reality is a linguistic construct, in which truth-value is indeterminate and all utterances are equally valid or invalid" (McLaughlin, 2007:58). According to postmodernism, any claim to absolute truth is impossible (Toth & Brooks, 2007:7). In fact, postmodernism's "principal deployment, not to say *raison d'etre*" was the "delegitimation of textual authority", for which it developed critical tools specifically designed to deconstruct, critique, destabilise, undermine, and subvert any totalising truth claim (Maltby, 2007:25-26).

If postmodernism was the "true post-truth age" (Tkatch, 2016), then the proliferation of "post-truth" we are currently witnessing should be heralded as the triumph of postmodernism and its values. However, this triumph is not celebrated as a victory as much as it is regarded with horror.

Nietzschean scholar Kathleen Higgens (2013) suggests that "post-truth" came about as a term primarily as indictment of "contemporary American political culture", a grave accusation levelled against conservatives and neo-fundamentalists by a liberal left. She refers to the so-

called "post-truth politics" as the "heightened progressive concern with alleged conservative mendacity":

In accusing conservatives of lying and deceit, these progressive writers offer more than schoolyard taunts. They are suggesting that political conservatism is powerful because it has adopted a stance of growing relativism — a kind of conservative postmodernism — regarding the basic facts of reality...

Higgins reckons that this "progressive view" of a post-truth era is a recent development:

Where the liberal case against political conservatism used to focus on the right wing's small-mindedness, lack of compassion, and selfishness, today it is focused on perceived conservative lies to the public. The insinuation behind the complaint is that if people only knew the truth, we wouldn't have the problems of global warming, economic recession, and poverty — or at least such challenges would be far smaller. More truth, it is assumed, will lead to a better world. (Higgins, 2013)

Despite the popular association of "post-truth" with Western politics, the "better world" Higgins refers to is not limited to the Anglo-American or European sphere. Nordtveit (2010) argues that, as a result of the wide-spread export of neoliberal Western education, development models, and economic practises over the course of the twentieth century, we can be said to be entering a "post-globalisation" age. Local discourses are subsumed into "a state of global and local unification in one capitalist discourse" (Nordtveit, 2010:323), rendering discourses at local and regional levels similar to those of the international arena (Nordtveit, 2010:321).

Henrietta Moore, in her *Still life: hopes, desires and satisfactions* (2011), articulates the need for a new critical theory to engage with the present — a "time of great change, of speeded up connections and distortions of space and time", when technology makes it possible to be more connected than ever before (2011:par. 101). In the "enhanced proximity" of this present global situation — characterised by the "plural, unpredictable nature of processes of change and transformation" — analytical frameworks that depend on binaries such as local/global, inside/outside, micro/macro and western/non-western are no longer viable (2011:par. 113). In order to engage with emergent forms and ways of being, newly created and developed spaces and opportunities for new forms and networks of sociality (2011:par. 172, 185), a theoretical system is needed that moves beyond notions of hybridity, mimicry, resistance, reappropriation and the "endless play of *différance*" (2011:par. 144) — in other

words, a theoretical system that moves away from postmodernism's preoccupation with the specific and the particular towards a globalised vision of emerging ways of being.

Elias (2012:738) argues that the twenty-first century is marked by "an insistent return of history". It reverberates through a global network of interconnections within the planet-wide context of

a global war on terror, a backdraft global financial crisis, new concerns about global climate change, and national democracy movements aided and abetted by global technologies.

In the emergent cultural paradigm, "culture" is no longer taken to mean a localized phenomenon, tied to a specific national or ethnical identity. A concept of culture that is based on difference, framed in terms of tradition, origin, "ways of life", the celebration of identity and the fear of a loss of authenticity is abandoned. Referring to Indonesian fashion designers, Moore (2011:par. 192) argues for the emergence of "global citizens" whose "perspective is not one that is fractured along the lines of western/non-western, global/Indonesia", who inhabit a "world of transnational capitalism, transnational faith and interconnected geopolitics" and whose aim is not to resist, appropriate or subvert western culture, but rather "to take up their place as producers of culture within a new set of cultural possibilities" (Moore, 2011:par. 170).

Bourriaud, in an interview with Ryan (2009), suggests that the emerging paradigm is already "post-postcolonial", and claims that contemporary artists start from a "globalized state of culture". He strongly criticises what he terms a "multiculturalist dogma" for being paternalistic and limiting the individual to his or her "origins" or "identity". Instead, he argues that contemporary artists have access to all kinds of information and influences from all over the world: "they all use the same toolbox, from Stockholm to Bangkok". As a consequence, any kind of grouping based on nationality is "more and more absurd, as the fact that you are born here or there does not necessarily determine your frame of mind anymore" (cf. Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010). (See also Gunning (2012) for ways in which post-millennial writers seek to move beyond boundaries of ethnicity and race.)

the problem: characterising metamodernism

Based on this, a few ideas in relation to the contemporary moment can be discerned. Firstly, postmodernism has passed. In so far as postmodernist ideals have completely permeated the contemporary landscape, its project was successful. However, since its project was in fact to *deny* any dominant, totalising narratives, postmodernism failed as soon as it rose to totalising dominance itself (cf. Toth & Brooks, 2007). Conversely, its success is considered a failure, and there is already a vanguard movement poised to replace it. As a critical movement, as soon as postmodernism became absorbed into the everyday cultural arena, it lost its capacity for critical engagement and passed into obsolescence. Culture has caught up with theory, and it is time for a new critical theory — one that can engage with the realities of the post-globalised world.

In other words, the notion of "post-truth" is only the most recent symptom of a movement that, by all accounts, is already dead (Toth reckons the death-watch already began "as early as the mid-1980s" (2010:2)). In the second decade after the turn of the millennium, critics agree that postmodernism is over, has passed, has died, is still dying, or possibly has been dead for quite some time already, which makes its current manifestations particularly ghastly (cf. Kirby, 2006; Toth, 2010; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010). Critics also seem to agree that, in its place, a new or emerging paradigm is becoming visible in contemporary cultural products like movies and television series (Kirby, 2009); visual art (Ryan, 2009; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010; Elias, 2012; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015); and especially literature (Amian, 2008; Timmer, 2010; Elias, 2012; Gąsiorek & James, 2012; James, 2012; Jones, 2012; Fjellestad & Watson, 2015; Gibbons, 2015; Visagie, 2016a and 2016b).

Several names have been suggested for the emerging paradigm.¹ Besides the self-evident term post-postmodernism (McLaughlin, 2004; Amian, 2008; Timmer, 2010), other

¹ In this study, I use the term "metamodernism" (except when a direct quotation uses a different term). I chose "metamodernism", after Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010), for the following reasons: it is more specific and less clumsy than the doubly prefixed "post-postmodernism", and also captures the intricate relation between modernism, postmodernism and the currently emerging cultural paradigm better than the obvious "post-postmodernism". I find "pseudomodernism" to be a misnomer regarding the relation with modernism, and "digimodernism" is too narrow in its reference to a single aspect of the currently emerging paradigm, namely digitisation, while Bourriaud's "altermodernism" mainly refers to developments in visual art. The other terms listed by Kirby (2009) are mainly suggested through different artistic and aesthetic "manifestoes" — in contrast to more critical-theoretical studies — and have not gained much currency. Finally,

suggestions include metamodernism (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010; Turner, 2011; Galerie Tanja Wagner, 2012), pseudomodernism by Kirby (2006), which he later replaced with digimodernism (Kirby, 2009), altermodernism (Bourriaud, in conversation with Ryan (2009), as well as remodernism, performatism, hypermodernity and supermodernity (Kirby, 2009:25,39,41,44).

Even though critics agree that, globally, a new paradigm is emerging, what they *cannot* agree on — not yet — is what exactly *is* this new thing that is shambling its way past the end of history into a future that postmodernism has not prepared us for.

If postmodernism was truly the "post-truth" age, then the criticism against "post-truth" might provide a clue of what will come after. To return to Higgens's characterisation of the liberal case against political conservatism: the belief that more truth will lead to a better world. This belief implies a renewed search for universal values, something that is only possible if a shared sense of reality can be agreed on. The challenges of a globalised world — global warming, poverty, natural disasters, war — point to an objective reality that can no longer be ignored. To rise to these challenges calls for a renewed faith in an objective, quantifiable reality, and new forms of realism will have to be formulated to counter the endless play of signification that is "post-truth". All of these — universal values, a shared sense of reality, reality as objective — come together in the belief in the possibility of a "better world", so giving rise to an imperative of ethical engagement.

The following research questions arise:

- What is metamodernism's origins in terms of critical theory? What happened to postmodernism? What is the relation between metamodernism and postmodernism, and between metamodernism and modernism?
- What aspects or themes can be identified as constituting metamodernism?
- What areas of recent development in the humanities and social sciences are related to and express a metamodernist turn?
- What is the underlying organising principle to metamodernism?

"metamodernism" has already been taken into use by selected critics in the context of South African literary theory, e.g. Visagie (2016a; 2016b).

aims and objectives: mapping metamodernism

Metamodernism as emerging cultural paradigm is primarily visible in contemporary cultural products, such as the arts. As fiction deals with characters and representation, and has long been regarded as an empathetic art form because it allows the reader to enter a fictional character's mind (cf. Timmer, 2010:115), it makes sense to direct a study about emergent metamodernism to works of fiction, to discern contemporary cultural shifts in terms of subjectivity, realism, and affect.

This study therefore draws on a wide range of post-millennial literary works (as the date given for postmodernism's passing is usually no later than the turn of the millennium) as well as studies of literary works. I specifically chose four recent novels to provide a more in-depth perspective on the aspects of metamodernism I have identified in the course of this study: *A tale for the time being* (Ruth Ozeki, 2013); *A brief history of seven killings* (Marlon James, 2014); *Buys* (Willem Anker, 2014) and *The Sympathizer* (Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015).

These novels differ widely in terms of style and scale, and represent different parts and aspects of a globalised world (see the novel contextualisation for a more detailed discussion). However, they all connect with a common theme in the form of political violence in a global context. This theme reflects on the "enhanced proximity" of the present global situation, as Moore (2011:par. 101) describes it, and suggests the entangled spaces, processes, and ways of being that characterise the globalised vision of the twenty-first century world. The focus on violence — especially violence that erupts at the borders and intersections of different spheres of nationality and culture, as a result of expansionist projects on the one hand and the drive to protect certain formulations of national identity (similarities and differences) on the other — speaks to contemporary preoccupations with culture not as a localized phenomenon, but as a challenged experience in a transnational world of interconnected politics and social being (cf. Moore, 2011:par. 170).

In addition, all four novels were recently published, yet contain characteristics of historical novels. This suggests, in the first place, metamodernist fiction's engagement with history in order to understand the present and imagine the future, and in the second place, a metamodernist global awareness that spans time as well as space — in other words, the notion that to understand the global present we must first understand the global past. In both ways, then, these four novels answer to the metamodernist ethical imperative of engagement with the realities of a globalised world.

The aim of this study is to investigate the following matters with reference to post-millennial works of literary fiction:

- The failure, absorption, and rejection of postmodernism that gave rise to metamodernism, and the way in which metamodernism is related to, and interdependent with, postmodernism and modernism respectively.
- The aspects that constitute the metamodernist turn, namely affect, authenticity, ethical concerns, myth, optimism, realism, sincerity, and subjectivity.
- The ways in which affect theories, chaos and complexity theory, and posthumanism — as they are developed and applied within the social sciences and humanities — engage with the central theoretical impulses that constitute metamodernism.
- Relationality as the underlying organising principle of metamodernism that animates its aspects and theories.

central theoretical statement: relational intersection of realism, subjectivity, and ethical concerns

The contemporary moment is regarded with suspicion by many. A steady increase in fundamentalism (Maltby, 2007; Crockett, 2007) and the recent rise in populism — see Zakaria (2016), Kazin (2016), Mudde (2016) and O'Neil (2016) in vol.95, issue 6 of *Foreign Affairs* — seem like an unwelcome return to the universal grand narratives that postmodernism was expected to have banished permanently. According to this view, metamodernism is a conservative and naïve backlash against the liberal sophistication of postmodernism, and so embodies a regression to the worst aspects of modernism (an era which in the West culminated in the rise of fascism and is echoed in the twenty-first century fears regarding populism).

Digitalisation is often blamed for this state of events. Tkatch (2016) points to the proliferation of social media and its role in filtering reality into "perfectly comfortable echo-chambers" that reinforce relativism and the notion that one's personal truth is the only truth. Kirby (2009:1) holds digitalisation responsible for the "infantilism" he considers to be one of the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century subject. Contrary to the notion that metamodernism

is a regression to modernism, the digitalisation theory often views metamodernism as the apotheosis of postmodernism, an exaggeration of its worst characteristics leading to extreme self-absorption and a total loss of social engagement.

A study of contemporary fiction, however, reveals a very different picture. As Elias (2012:739) puts it, at the turn of the twenty-first century, "the arts were prepared" to respond to the global horrors of the new millennium,

armed with newly reworked techniques and aesthetic language that focused not on a utopian vision of the socioeconomic future but on a redefined ethical relation between people in the spaces of the present.

What is emerging is a cultural paradigm that deliberately rejects postmodernism for its irony, solipsism, relativism, detachment and cynicism. In response to postmodernism's affective lack, ethical impotence, and moral vacuity, metamodernism does indeed draw on aspects of modernism — but revives them into a renewed form, informed by the lessons of postmodernism so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

From a metamodernist perspective — a perspective that, in defining itself in relation to its predecessors, necessarily simplifies that which came before in order to determine its reaction to it — modernism is taken to be the age of rationality. It is characterised by a belief in teleological progress, a humanistic focus, and a commitment to stylistic experimentation. In the same way, metamodernism's reaction to postmodernism posits the latter as the age of irony: marked by an apathetic, nihilistic lack of faith in anything, and an overemphasis on textuality.

In its reaction to these epochs, metamodernism emphasises affective processes and interconnected (inter)subjectivity as a response to an ethical demand. It focuses on ontology, materiality and corporeality, and rejects textual and epistemological analyses. Through its self-imposed ethical task to respond to the Other in a dialogic, interactive, intersubjective, and interrelational manner on the one hand, and its deliberate drawing on interdisciplinarity in order to respond effectively on the other, metamodernism is emerging as an epoch that is much more relationally oriented than anything that has come before.

Structurally, metamodernism is constituted by a matrix of interrelated aspects that responds to the deficiencies of postmodernism: renewed notions of affect, authenticity, myth, optimism, realism, and sincerity — all emphasising affective structures of intersubjectivity

and founded in a strongly defined ethical imperative. Operating on the intersection of an ontological turn, an ethical imperative, and an affective construction of subjectivity, the central theoretical impulses of metamodernism manifest in formulations of affect theory, chaos theory, and posthumanism.

The emphasis on affective processes and interconnected (inter)subjectivity indicates a relational understanding of being as the basic theoretical tenet of metamodernism, that which animates its ethical imperative and gives rise to its renewed focus on ontology. On a metamethodological level, relationality acts as the underlying organising principle of metamodernism, and highlights the interconnectedness of its different theoretical aspects.

methodology

Grusin, in his introduction to *The nonhuman turn* (2015), refers to the notion of "turn fatigue": "the weariness (and wariness) of describing every new development in the humanities and social sciences as a turn" (2015:par. 90). Grusin investigates the different meanings of the word "turn", specifically in its sense as an "occasion" that

operates temporally — referring not to change or movement in space but to the movement of action through time. In this sense *turn* describes behavior that fosters (or counters) collectivity, especially as turn refers to the time an action comes around to an individual, or when one fulfills one's obligation to serve — as when one takes one's turn or when one's turn comes around, or conversely when ones acts or speaks out of turn. In this interesting sense of the word, it is agency or action, not wheels or rivers, that rotates among individuals or changes course or direction. (Grusin, 2015:par. 263-277)

In this sense, the turn is seen as "a shift of attention, interest, or concern", an "action, movement, or change" (2015:par. 277), one that is

invariably oriented toward the future. Even a turn back is an attempt to turn the future around, to prevent a future that lies ahead". (2015:par. 277)

Grusin's notion of the "turn" — as he applies it to the project of the collection he is editor of — is a "macroscopic concept" that can account for the "simultaneous or overlapping emergence" of various, sometimes disparate, theoretical trends and developments, or "something of a theoretical or methodological assemblage" that

tries to make sense of what holds these various other 'turns' together, even while allowing for their divergent theoretical and methodological commitments and contradictions. (2015:par. 113)

Following Grusin, the aim of this study as it attempts to identify and map the metamodernist "turn" is not to claim that metamodernism is the totalising, inevitable source of all the various and different theoretical and methodological trends emerging in the humanities and social sciences at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Rather, this study intends to map the responses of the humanities and social sciences to the twenty-first century world, characterised by new temporalities, marked by new organisations of succession and sequence, consisting of plural and unpredictable processes — a world that is globalised, interrelated, intersecting, plural, transnational, and heterochronic. This study thus draws on varied and sometimes disparate theoretical developments. By mapping them onto a single theoretical site (demarcated by relationality), or placing them in a single conceptual framework (in relation to both modernism and postmodernism), I attempt to show the interconnections and interrelations between the different theoretical developments. From these intersections — a "theoretical and methodological assemblage", as Grusin (2015:par. 117) puts it — I believe a picture can be discerned of a new paradigm taking shape.

I do not want to suggest that this framework is the only possible or useful one, or even that the emerging image is the final one that only needs to be consolidated and validated in the decades to come. Instead, by providing a map of the interconnections between the different views of the new and as yet largely uncharted emerging cultural paradigm at the beginning of the twenty-first century, my aim is precisely to allow meaning and a final conclusion to emerge always relationally, always provisionally.

In working towards this end, I have decided to present the information of this study in a way that resists a linear, hierarchical, and causal interpretation in favour of preserving the different strands of theory and their related concepts "as is": unaccomplished, unfinished, not definitive, fixed, or stagnant. In this way, my goal is to present the different components as embedded or entangled in a relational network that emphasises the intersections and interactions between them without privileging a single, all-inclusive interpretation — while at the same time preserving and expressing relationality in such a way that it brings to light its function as organising principle of metamodernism.

This study therefore consists of twenty-seven text units or concepts, arranged into four thematic clusters: namely "theorising metamodernism", "aspects of metamodernism", "metamodernist theories", and "relationality". The four clusters can be read in any order, as can the concepts that are organised under them.

The intersections between the different interrelated concepts are indicated by means of cross references in square brackets. In this way, the interconnections and correspondences between, and similitude of, the different concepts are indicated without imposing a hierarchical relation between them.

In **theorising metamodernism**, the interconnections between metamodernism and postmodernism, and metamodernism and modernism, are discussed to situate metamodernism in relation to both preceding epochs. The factors that contributed to the passing of postmodernism and consequent rise of metamodernism are investigated to determine what cultural and social events and perspectives informed and shaped metamodernism.

The **aspects of metamodernism** indicate the central themes that constitute metamodernism by drawing on works of post-millennial fiction. Metamodernist notions of affect, authenticity, ethical concerns, myth, optimism, realism, sincerity, and subjectivity are discussed as they manifest in post-millennial works of fiction, with specific reference to *A tale for the time being* (Ruth Ozeki, 2013); *A brief history of seven killings* (Marlon James, 2014); *Buyx* (Willem Anker, 2014) and *The Sympathizer* (Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015).

Affect theory, chaos theory, and posthumanism are identified as **metamodernist theories** that were developed within the social sciences and humanities. The way in which they operate on a metamodernist intersection of realism, subjectivity and ethical concerns is discussed and illustrated with examples from post-millennial fiction.

An understanding of **relationality** provides insight into the underlying organising principle of metamodernism. Following the theories of relationality put forth by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, as well as Kaja Silverman and Bracha Ettinger, relationality is formulated as being based on an apprehension of alterity and similitude that is founded in a recognition of finitude, openness, and a dispersal of subjecthood. It has implications for epistemology, ontology, and subject/object categories that figure in heterochronicity and a refusal of narrative interpretation. The intersections between the different aspects of metamodernism are traced with the help of a relational model to characterise metamodernism as network of

interrelated critical theories developed in response to an ethical imperative to engage with the interrelated realities and subjectivities of a globalised world.

Finally, a **metamethodology** explains the structure of the study as an attempt to express the information relationally, both to preserve the integrity of metamodernist theories that reject linear, hierarchical epistemological frameworks and to echo the function of relationality as organising principle of metamodernism.

contextualising the novels

A tale for the time being (2013) by Ruth Ozeki

A tale for the time being (2013) is the third novel of Ruth Ozeki. It was shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize and 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award, and received the 2013 Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

The narrative centres around the chance discovery of the diary of 16-year-old Japanese schoolgirl Nao by a Japanese-American novelist, named Ruth, who lives off the coast of British Columbia. The diary washed up, packed in a lunchbox, on the shore of the island where Ruth lives with her husband Oliver, who speculates that it might have been part of the debris of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011.

Nao was born to Japanese parents, but grew up happily in America before her father lost his job and they had to move back to Japan. Here she is miserable and bullied, and considers suicide. She decides to write the story of her great-grandmother, the Buddhist nun Jiko, before she, Nao, will "drop out of time". Nao's diary entries detail her own life, her torment at school, and her troubled relationship with her unemployed and suicidal father. It is interspersed with the Zen teachings of Jiko and the story of Haruki#1 (Nao's great-uncle and Jiko's son) who was a kamikaze pilot in WWII.

Through her reading of Nao's story, Ruth becomes intimately involved and emotionally invested in Nao's life. She also translates the letters and secret diary of Haruki#1 that were included in the lunchbox that contained Nao's diary. In a quantum leap of entanglement, Ruth manages to travel in a dream to Nao in the past and prevent her and her father's suicide in reality.

Reviewers and critics stress different aspects of the novel that place it within a metamodernist aesthetic, especially in terms of responding to the contemporary global world and its ethical challenges.

The transnational relationship between Ruth and Nao — spanning time and space — is discussed by Starr (2016) as an expression of "an alternative model of feminism", "one that emphasizes interdependence and communal identity while also preserving individual differences" (2016:100). Milne (2015:7) also stresses Ruth and Nao's friendship as one that "crosses spatial and temporal boundaries", putting forth the "notion of nationality as having

fluid and border-crossing qualities". For Milne (2015:7), the complex and reciprocal entanglement of Ruth and Nao as reader and writer indicates a "dynamic reader-writer relationship that emerges" to embody a "sense of the planetary" as Ruth and Nao "expand and import a global presence into their understanding of Americanness" (Milne, 2015:7).

In a piece about her view of writing and character, titled "A crucial collaboration: reader-writer-character-book", Ozeki (2013a) herself explains that fiction — both writing it and reading it — is an intensely relational act. Echoing Nao's words to her reader in the beginning of *A tale for the time being* — "if you do decide to read on, then guess what? You're my kind of time being and together we'll make magic!" (Ozeki, 2013b:4) — Ozeki states:

All meaning is created through relationship, which means all meaning is relative... There is only the exchange, the meaning that you and I, in any given moment, make together, as your eyes scan these words and your mind makes sense of them. (2013a)

Ozeki (2013a) examines the relationships that are construed through the act of writing and reading: "What are the relationships between these players [character, writer, reader], the relationships embedded in every novel or work of fiction?". For her, the relationship between novelist/character and reader/writer is one of symbiosis, and the novel is an act of "cocreation".

In her review of *A tale for the time being*, Milne (2015:7) links the novel's focus on the spatial and temporal interconnection between Ruth and Nao with its meditation on the nature of time:

In fact, the title itself takes this notion of home as a transient — and ultimately planetary — space from Zen Buddhist teacher Dōgen Zenji's work *Shōbōgenzō* (c. 13th century), which Ruth summarizes by noting, "Time itself is being, he wrote, and all being is time... In essence, everything in the entire universe is intimately linked with each other as moments in time, continuous and separate." This interconnection across time and national borders is the hub around which the protagonists' lives rotate, instilling in Ruth a sense of urgent commitment and relatedness that fuels her unlikely friendship with a teenager writing nearly a decade earlier and across the Pacific Ocean. (Milne, 2015:7)

The second aspect of the novel that reviewers emphasise is related to the notion of interpersonal interconnection: the global interconnections of the narrative that draws on references of global events spanning millennia. Usui (2015:91) focuses specifically on *A tale*

for the time being as an example of 3/11 literature — literature about the giant earthquake and tsunami that struck North-East Japan on 11 March 2011 — and describes it as an examination of "the interwoven psychological conflicts issued by 3/11 spreading across the ocean and over the generations".

The Great Earthquake, and the consequent Fukushima nuclear meltdown, was a "global issue, not only as a natural disaster caused by the global warming and its related causes, but also as the aftermath of globalization on all levels", as it represents "the multi-layered and enlarged issues originated from globalization" (Usui, 2015:92). *A tale for the time being* deals with the effects of globalisation in many forms, the most prominent examples being the Second World War, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York, and the effects of global warming.

In this sense, *A tale for the time being* is characterised by some critics as a response to the global realities of the twenty-first century, making it an example of metamodernist fiction that responds to an ethical demand. Spoth and Warner's (2015) discussion of Ozeki's two previous novels — *My year of meats* (1998) and *All over creation* (2003) — touches upon the themes of interrelation, globalisation, and time that are present in *A tale for the time being* as well. Positing "spontaneity" and the unpredictability of chaos as a mode of resistance against "corporate omnipresence and media saturation", Spoth and Warner (2015) draw on notions of chaos theory to examine how the novels express the "desire to see the culture of global capitalist hegemony decline in favor of local, organic, traditional means of sociality".

Nilges (2015) also focuses on the theme of time in *A tale for the time being*, citing it as an example of a "neoliberal novel", which is to say "the novel after postmodernism". Formulating the current epoch in a way that takes into account the "complex interplay of the formal relations between the market, social, and political structures and culture" (2015:357), Nilges theorises the contemporary moment in terms of the epistemological problem underlying neoliberalism. For him, "the epistemological impasse that lies at the heart of neoliberalism" is its "oppressive contemporaneity", the "paralysing effects of omnipresent contemporaneity in a system that is built upon yet begins to crumble under the weight of immediacy" (Nilges, 2015:369).

Nilges refers to Ozeki's *A tale for the time being* as an example of a *Zeitroman* — a modernist literary form that "takes time itself as its object" (2015:374), its subject being "time as an abstraction moving through history" (2015:375). The *Zeitroman* is viewed as marking

the "epistemological opposite to the inability to conceive of time and temporal limits, including the category of the contemporary, as historically specific thought forms" (2015:371). As an example of a *Zeitroman*, Nilges suggests that *A tale for the time being* is a novel for the twenty-first century, as it addresses the temporal crisis that is the result of the culmination of postmodernism.

***A brief history of seven killings* (2014) by Marlon James**

A brief history of seven killings (2014) is the third book of Marlon James. It was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award of 2014, and received the 2015 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the 2015 Man Booker Prize.

The narrative takes place in the 1970s in Jamaica and focuses on the historical event of an assassination attempt on the singer Bob Marley, identified in the novel only as "the Singer". The Singer had agreed to play a "peace concert" sponsored by the political party the PNP (People's National Party). The Singer's ostensible display of support for the PNP irked the rival political party, the JLP (Jamaican Labour Party), as well as the American CIA, who was opposed to the socialist PNP. In a plot orchestrated by the CIA, Josey Wales — the right-hand man to one of the leading crime dons of the slum Copenhagen City — trains a group of gunmen and attempts to murder the Singer in his home. The plot goes awry, and the rest of the narrative details the fallout of the attempt as it impacts the lives of the gunmen, the conspirators, and witnesses.

Reviews of *A brief history of seven killings* often point out the following comparisons: to William Faulkner's modernist masterpiece *As I lay dying* (1930) — cited by James in his acknowledgment to *A brief history* — and to Quentin Tarantino's films, known for their postmodern use of pastiche. In fact, Marlon James has been dubbed the Quentin Tarantino of the literary world (Akbar, 2015) — a comparison that he himself has "got bored" with (Miller, 2014).

While *A brief history* is compared to Tarantino's films for its use of graphic violence — "a gruesome catalogue of violence fuelled by cocaine and guns" (Jordan, 2015) — its structure is reminiscent of monumental modernist works of fiction. Similar to *As I lay dying*, *A brief history* consists of a loose collection of interior monologues by twelve different narrators, presented in short chapters headed by the name of the narrator. Thier (2015) compares the

style of interior monologue to that of James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), noting that it "occasionally slips into Molly Bloom-style stream of consciousness".

Jordan (2015) also indicates the comparison with William Faulkner, but reckons that "a stronger comparison can be made" to Faulkner's earlier *The sound and the fury* (1929).

Like Faulkner, James uses the full range of first-person trickery, including long single-sentence stream of consciousness and even a poem.

Yet, famously, even Faulkner had to switch to third person right at the end of *The Sound and the Fury* to bring the story together. James's novel doesn't do this but it does suffer from the weaknesses of his enforced solipsism in other ways, the need for artificial summary, for example, and the crow-barring in of historical context. As a consequence, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* has a curiously old-fashioned feel to it, a return to the experimentalism of the early 20th century.

With this statement, Jordan (2015) links *A brief history of seven killings* to other recent novels — notable Will Self's *Umbrella* (2012) and David Peace's *Red or dead* (2013) — that have shown "how the great Modernist project can be pushed forwards in new and exciting ways". For Jordan (2015), James's innovation is less on a stylistic than a thematic level, as it answers to the ethical and moral dilemmas that are the result of a global history of violence and oppression. He states that, while James's novel is "exciting and important in its own way", its experimentation is less "the bravura of its form and more the forensic exposition of its subject, the deep emotional scars of the Caribbean".

The importance of *A brief history of seven killings* lies in the way it is embedded within a global historical and geographical context. In contrast to the relativising effect that modernism's stream of consciousness had — limiting the world to the perspective of the character — *A brief history* provides a wide-spanning view over a large part of history. As Miller (2014) states, the "book brings together a variety of Jamaican experiences, which isn't to say that these experiences are local or parochial... James often brings the international within a national space", telling "a story about Jamaica that doesn't only take place in Jamaica".

Kakutani (2014) summarises the span of the novel:

Brief History uses the story of the 1976 assassination attempt on Marley as a kind of trampoline, bouncing off that terrible event into a multilayered, choral inquiry into Jamaican

politics and poverty, into race and class, and into the volatile relationship between the United States and the Caribbean. Spanning several decades, the novel attempts to trace connections between the gang wars in the Kingston ghettos, C.I.A. efforts to destabilize a left-wing Jamaican government in the 1970s and even the crack epidemic in America in the 1980s.

In its depiction of Jamaica, Jordan (2015) also notes that *A brief history* can be read in conversation with V.S. Naipaul's *Middle passage* (1962). Like *Middle passage*, it offers a "whirlwind of different voices, intertwining and separating as the novel proceeds", but unlike *Middle passage*, "there is no artful attempt to spare the darkness of what was once the heart of the slave trade" (Jordan, 2015).

Through the polyphony of voices, a narrative is constructed that spans wider than a single historical event. Thier (2015) suggests that the main event — the shooting of the Singer — only serves as "reference point in a much larger narrative", encompassing Jamaica, the Jamaican diaspora, "and the whole of the American world in the second half of the 20th century". Jordan (2015) too, acknowledges the bigger global context, and links it to the history of slavery:

Slowly we begin to see the murky involvement of the CIA, desperate to prize Jamaica away from its growing infatuation with communist Cuba. As Papa-lo, the don of Copenhagen City, implores fruitlessly, "save order from chaos". Yet if there's a message in James's tale, its that the scars of slavery and oppression run deep. And with such a heart of darkness, chaos will never be far away. (Jordan, 2015)

Through a combination of its modernist structure, its resonance with a postmodern aesthetic of spectacle, and its embeddedness within a global narrative spanning time and space, *A brief history of seven killings* situates itself in-between modernism and postmodernism, in the beyond-space of metamodernism, to be what Jordan (2015) calls an example of "how the great Modernist project can be pushed forwards in new and exciting ways".

***Buys* (2014) by Willem Anker**

Buys: 'n grensroman (2014) is the second novel of Willem Anker. It was awarded the University of Johannesburg Prize for creative work (2015), the kykNET-Rapport Book Prize for fiction (2015), the Hertzog Prize for prose (2016), as well as the Helgaard Steyn Award (2016).

Buys is a narration of the life story of the historical figure Coenraad de Buys, once known as the most dangerous man in the South African Cape colony of the late eighteenth century, specifically in the surroundings of the Oosgrens (the eastern border of the colony). Although the figure of De Buys has to a great extent disappeared from history books — Human (2014) suggests De Buys might have been deliberately written out due to the unsavoury nature of his many exploits — he looms large in legends and folk tales, almost to a mythical extent (De Kock, 2015:12).

As the subtitle indicates, *Buys* is a frontier novel ("grensroman"). Van Coller (2015) distinguishes between the Afrikaans term "grensroman" as it is used and understood within the context of Afrikaans literature, and the English translation of the term, "frontier novel". The latter is mostly used to refer to American works set in a certain time period, and indicates narratives taking place on the "border" between the wilderness or savagery and civilisation. It presents a kind of neo-romantic vision which is characterised by the archetypal hero, the lone frontiersman (Van Coller, 2015).

The Afrikaans term "grensroman" is mostly understood to refer specifically to literature about the South African Border War that took place from 1966 to 1989 in Namibia and Angola. Van Coller (2013) identifies three characteristics of Afrikaans frontier literature. Firstly, it directly or indirectly deals with a situation of armed conflict. Secondly, most writers of frontier literature took part in the Border War themselves (or were otherwise in a position to directly observe it, for example as journalists), giving rise to narratives which take the shape of neo-documentary authenticating reports from *within* a situation rather than *about* it. Lastly, although the notion of the border might initially be topological, it is usually expanded through the narrative to encompass the border on a metaphorical level: the boundaries between humans, or between races, between life and death, between genders, etc. It can also indicate the shifting of word boundaries on a metalinguistic level, so that the distinctions between good and evil, friend and enemy, terrorist and freedom fighter are undermined, blurred or deconstructed.

Buys correlates on a literal level with the understanding of a frontier literature in the Anglo-American tradition, set on the border between "civilisation" and "savagery", with Buys as the legendary, almost mythical frontiersman. It also meets the requirements for a "grensroman", even though it depicts armed conflict other than the Border War. Most significantly, as Van Schalkwyk (2014) indicates, *Buys* engages with the notion of boundaries and many levels, and is in this sense indeed also "grensverskuwend" (boundary-shifting).

The shifting of boundaries manifests firstly in the actions and narrative of the nomadic protagonist who rejects any notion of boundaries or borders, and secondly on a meta-conceptual and meta-textual level (Van Schalkwyk, 2014). In this regard, the subtitle "grensroman" plays an important role, as the "grensroman" within the Afrikaans context has definite conceptual boundaries, and thus creates a certain expectation for the reader. However, *Buys* undermines this expectation and metafictionally broadens the understanding of "grensliteratuur", even while it connects to and confirms the existing tradition of frontier literature (Van Schalkwyk, 2014).

In connection to the notion of *Buys* as a frontier or border novel, Snyman (2014) describes it as a "trekroman" (a travel narrative). The travel or journey takes place on different levels: the literal journey to the Oosgrens, the journey of Buys's life, the journey over various borders, and finally, the journey of the restless spirit. This journey, according to Snyman (2014), is the journey of a wild spirit that cannot bear to be contained and is constantly looking for freedom outside of binding boundaries. It is partly escape, including escape of the law, and partly the constant passage of loss and reconstitution, of destruction and beginning again, during which Buys is constantly reinventing himself into different forms, as he crosses and blurs boundaries of all kinds, whether geographical, racial, or social (cf. Van Schalkwyk, 2014).

More contentious is *Buys*'s categorisation as historical novel. Snyman (2014) argues that the term, although applicable to the novel, would be only partly accurate. Similarly, Human (2014) cautions against classifying *Buys* exclusively as a historical novel, because this categorisation would diminish its impact and scope.

De Kock (2015:12) criticises the shift between the idiomatic language and historical register of Buys the character and the intellectual voice of the omniscient narrator and historian, Alom-Buys. For De Kock, the crossing of this boundary is a daring meta-shift for an author who labours hard to create the illusion of historical accuracy, as it places the narrative in the realm of historiographic metafiction which risks undermining the historical basis of the novel (2015:12). He further claims that it is rare in historical fiction that the historical I-figure

identifies himself with the omniscient consciousness of an omniscient third-person writer, because these can be regarded as clashing registers of narrative voice, the boundary between which Anker crosses time and again (De Kock, 2015:12).

In an interview, De Kock asks Anker about his intended purpose with the novel *Buys* — whether he wanted to recreate the historical figure Coenraad de Buys in a specific way or summarise the mythological figure of Buys in all his different manifestations, and whether it is right and accurate to blur the boundary between the registers of the historical first person narrative and the omniscient third person (2015:12).

Anker answers that, when it comes to historical reports and well-known historical facts, the emphasis should be on "how" the story is told, since the "how" is an important and inevitable part of "what" is being told (as quoted by De Kock, 2015:12). This response resonates with the aesthetic at the heart of the novel: it is less occupied with postmodernist questions of epistemology — what do we know, what can we know — than with affective and ontological issues of authenticity — why and how events occur and what human experience, feelings and motivations gave rise to them.

In relation to this, Anker claims that the combination of the two registers — the perspective of the omniscient Alom-Buys and the localised and limited perspective of Buys as character in his own story — made it possible to engage with notions of identity, history, and the representation of both (in De Kock, 2015:12). In this, the novel moves beyond the postmodern notion of past and present as textual in order to respond to universal ideas of identity and humanity — as is attested to by the fact that Snyman (2014), Van Schalkwyk (2014) and Botha (2015) all discuss *Buys* in terms of themes such as mortality, morality, history, boundaries and borders, rebellion, and the contrast between animal nature and human reason. Even De Kock (2015:12) eventually concludes that Anker, in *Buys*, wanted to honour the laws of truth on a higher level (that of the incontrovertible historical framework of events), while being able to break the rules on the micro-level: the small, core events that make human lives interesting and where a certain amount of uncertainty is unavoidable.

***The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen**

The Sympathizer (2015) is the first novel of Viet Thanh Nguyen. It was a finalist for the 2016 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and received the 2015 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, the 2016 Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the 2016 Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, the 2016 Edgar Award for Best First Novel by an American Author, as well as the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

The novel recounts the life story of the protagonist, identified only as "the Captain", a man of mixed Vietnamese and French descent who, as a secret communist agent, serves as spy in the role of captain in the South Vietnamese Army's Special Branch. The narrative opens with the fall of Saigon in 1975 to communist forces. The Captain, along with "the General" and the General's family, is extracted by the American forces and is resettled as a refugee in California, from where he continues to relay information to his handler, Man. Here, the Captain and his other fellow immigrants try to make a living while longing with nostalgia and bitterness for the home and life they had left behind.

Through the General's connections, the Captain becomes involved as a consultant for the making of a movie about the Vietnam War — a veiled reference to Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) — and travels to the Philippines for the shooting. Back in America, the Captain joins an anti-communist recoinnaissance mission to Vietnam in the hopes of saving his friend Bon. They are captured by the communist forces and imprisoned in a "reeducation camp" for months before being released.

The novel has been described as "subversive" (Lefferts, 2015); "blackly comic" (Freeman, 2016); "[p]art thriller, part political satire" and "sharp-edged fiction" (Kellogg, 2016); a "mordantly funny and highly polished" novel that makes "anti-war classics like *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* seem happy-go-lucky" (Streitfeld, 2016); an "absurdist tour de force that might have been written by a Kafka or Genet" (Caputo, 2015).

Most reviewers place *The Sympathizer* in a tradition of political fiction that engages with societal problems of oppression, racism, and war. Freeman (2016) describes it as "part of a double-barrelled assault on broadening how we talk about Vietnam", referring to Nguyen's non-fiction *Nothing ever dies: Vietnam and the memory of war* (2016a), which is described on his website as the "critical bookend to a creative project whose fictional bookend was *The Sympathizer*" (Nguyen, 2016b). Together, these two books "perform an optic tilt about

Vietnam and what America did there as profound as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible man* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* were to the legacy of racism and slavery" (Freeman, 2016).

Boyagoda (2016) also invokes Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, describing the opening of *The Sympathizer* as a "showy riff on... *Invisible man*", after which "Ellison's novel offers a template for Nguyen's", both narrating the story of an "unnamed narrator-protagonist [who] recounts and attempts to make sense of his variously doubled life from a position of concealment". Boyagoda (2016) further indicates that *The Sympathizer* "contains a Whitman-like multiplicity":

The Sympathizer can be read as a spy novel, a war novel, an immigrant novel, a novel of ideas, a political novel, a campus novel, a novel about the movies, and a novel, yes, about other novels.

These various themes come together in a "greater result: a bold, artful and globally minded reimagining of the Vietnam War and its interwoven private and public legacies" (Boyagoda, 2016). Caputo (2015) regards *The Sympathizer* as an invaluable addition to the representation of the Vietnam War, which has always been viewed as "a solely American drama", as the novel "fills a void in the literature, giving voice to the previously voiceless while it compels the rest of us to look at the events of 40 years ago in a new light".

The Sympathizer's impact is not limited to the historical past. As Caputo (2015) argues, the novel "reaches beyond its historical context to illuminate more universal themes", such as the cultural misconceptions between East and West, the nature of revolution, and moral dilemmas. Its themes and ethical project also resonate with broader contemporary political and social currents. Nguyen, in an interview with Nelson (2015), says that he was influenced by African American literature, particularly its expression of "a combination of rage and aesthetics", and indicates authors Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison as inspiration.

Streifeld (2016) situates *The Sympathizer*'s political project in the present. Referring to the novel's criticism of the "American dream", he states

The American dream has been looking a little tattered recently, which makes *The Sympathizer* a historical novel that matches the current mood.

He goes on to quote 1993 Pulitzer Prize-winner Robert Olen Butler, who said that it is "fitting and proper" that *The Sympathizer* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, as its "fundamental anger

welters at the heart of the politics and protests and public discourses of America today" (Streitfeld, 2016). Charles (2015) also relates *The Sympathizer*'s confrontation with "the existential dilemmas of our age" to its depiction of racism, describing it as "laced with insight on the ways nonwhite people are rendered invisible in the propaganda that passes for our pop culture". This, too, is read in a wider global context, as Charles (2015) reckons that the novel provides not only an examination of America's "misguided errand in Southeast Asia", but also has contemporary relevance in its searching exploration of the "morality of torture" as used as recently as the Iraq War by the United States. However, in the end, the novel transcends "these historical moments" and "Nguyen plumbs the loneliness of human life, the costs of fraternity and the tragic limits of our sympathy" (Charles, 2015).

theorising metamodernism, noun. (also metamodernist, adj.)

Metamodernism is one of the names that has been suggested for the emerging cultural paradigm, as coined by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010). Alternative suggestions include post-postmodernism (McLaughlin, 2004; Amian, 2008; Timmer, 2010), pseudomodernism (Kirby, 2006), later changed to digimodernism (Kirby, 2009), altermodernism (Bourriaud, in conversation with Ryan, 2009), as well as remodernism, performatism, hypermodernity and supermodernity, as listed by Kirby (2009:25, 39, 41, 44).

As a reaction against, and in some cases a rejection of, postmodernism, metamodernism responds to three core issues (cf. Kirby, 2009; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010): firstly, postmodernism is perceived to have become irrelevant to and incompatible with present culture. It has lost its critical edge and exhausted its potential of engaging with contemporary culture — it does not provide tools for understanding the changed reality of contemporary culture [POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE].

Secondly, and connected to this, is POSTMODERNISM'S ABSORPTION INTO POPULAR CULTURE. Its characteristics have become so widely accepted, in some cases elevated to the "norm", that postmodernism does not have any critical function left.

Thirdly is the conscious and wilful rejection of postmodernist values and theories [REJECTION OF POSTMODERNISM]. Metamodernism is critical of what is perceived to be postmodernism's moral vacuity or affective lack, and deliberately seeks to distance itself from it in order to reconstruct a mode of engagement that refocuses attention on affect, relationality, sincerity, meaning, optimism, and the ethical.

With regard to how metamodernism is situated in relation to postmodernism, there are three interrelated but distinguishable suggestions put forth by recent literature on the matter. The first suggestion is that metamodernism is a revival of modernist aesthetics in reaction against postmodernism, specifically a return to a more realistic mode of representation and focus on meaning, truth and sincerity (however, the form of modernism that is resurfacing is tempered, or tainted, by the lessons of postmodernism). The second suggestion is that metamodernism is a continuation of postmodernism in an altered form — in the same way that postmodernism is an altered form of modernism — which means that metamodernism indirectly continues the modernism project as it was inherited from postmodernism. Thirdly, it

has been proposed that metamodernism is a fusion of postmodernist and modernist values, and therefore occupies an ideological space in between these two paradigms.

Metamodernism can thus be said to be simultaneously a RETURN TO MODERNISM — or more specifically a form of MODERNISM INFORMED BY POSTMODERNISM — and a CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM. The reason for the current rise of metamodernism as the dominant cultural paradigm is on the one hand POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE (which is related to POSTMODERNISM'S ABSORPTION INTO POPULAR CULTURE), and on the other a deliberate REJECTION OF POSTMODERNISM for its affective lack and moral vacuity or impotence. In response to postmodernism's perceived irony, solipsism, relativism, cynicism and detachment from society, metamodernism puts forth a set of interconnected notions: AFFECT, AUTHENTICITY, ETHICAL CONCERNS, MYTH, OPTIMISM, REALISM, SINCERITY, and a rethinking of SUBJECTIVITY.

POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE

Two different but related reasons are often given for postmodernism's demise. In the first place, contemporary culture has developed in such a way that postmodern critical theories can no longer be said to be applicable: postmodern theories were developed to engage with the reality of the world in the 1970s and 1980s, and the contemporary cultural milieu has simply outgrown postmodernism. Secondly, there is the notion that postmodernism's failure lies in the increasing suspicion that it has become the very thing it aimed to destroy: its insistence on being anti-dogmatic, anti-ideological and anti-hegemonic was so successful that postmodernism itself has become dogmatic, ideological and hegemonic.

With regard to the fact that contemporary culture has moved beyond the scope and capability of postmodernism, postmodernism's failure is linked to the necessity of a new theoretical framework for a sociocultural reality which no longer bears much resemblance to the world that postmodernism was developed to critique. The twenty-first century, as introduced in the West by way of the terror attacks of 9/11, is marked by the "lapsing of a critical orthodoxy and the emergence of a new kind of temporality" in which new technologies and new networks of global power have shaped and reshaped "the principles of succession, of sequence, the passage from one moment to the next" (Boxall, 2012:701). What Boxall (2012:695) terms the postmodern "millenarian historical narrative" — the notion that history has ended — has proven to be incapable "to account for the first wars of the twenty-first century, and the consequent sense that time, in the new century, is flowing or passing in a new way" (Boxall, 2012:695).

The twenty-first century

began with an insistent return of history precisely in the context of geographical spatiality, ironically in the deeply politicized contexts of a global war on terror, a backdraft global financial crisis, new concerns about global climate change, and national democratic movements aided and abetted by global technologies. (Elias, 2012:738)

Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5-6) list ways in which the social and political landscape has changed over the recent years, necessitating a new way of thinking about it: geopolitical instabilities and climatological concerns made a reform of the economic system necessary; the rise of Eastern economies and the polarization of localities, ethnicities and classes have disintegrated the political centre of the Western world and necessitated a restructuring of the dominant political discourse; environmental concerns such as the need

for alternative energy, the impact of urban sprawls on the environment and sustainability have transformed the material landscape. To this, Fjellestad and Watson (2015:3) add the war on terror, migrant movements, new media, digital cultures, as well as transformations in how we think of the family, sexuality, ourselves as human beings, and animal life.

In an attempt to address the way in which the socio-political and cultural milieu has, in a sense, overtaken postmodernist theory's ability to engage with it, Crockett (2007:263) distinguishes between postmodern theory and a broader postmodern condition. For him, postmodern theory is a "largely American phenomenon", founded in a "broadly literary, cultural and political reading of French post-structuralism" and postmodernism as a whole signifies a "variety of philosophical, literary and cultural discourses inspired by contemporary French Continental philosophy". The underlying principle which provides a "resemblance" between all the different theories associated with postmodernism is, for Crockett (2007:263), "anti-foundationalism", which points to the "lack of foundations, or at least any consensus regarding the proper foundations of our theoretical discourses". Crockett (2007:264) suggests that the failure of the postmodern discourse lies precisely in the fact that it "fails to seriously engage with the Reality of the postmodern condition". Theory has "retreated" from the contemporary experienced reality, perhaps partly due to its inherently anti-foundational character, and is unequipped to engage with the "fundamentally religio-political" nature of the contemporary historical, cultural and political situation — a situation which, for Crockett, is characterised by a "new or neo-realism" (2007:264). Neo-realism in this sense refers to "the new realism that dominates our political, philosophical and aesthetic intellectual discourses"; "an ideological name for the convergence of economic neo-liberalism and political neo-conservatism, resulting in a hegemonic American neo-imperialism" (Crockett, 2007:264).

According to Crockett (2007:266), the danger of this kind of neo-realism lies in the fact that it is "able to appropriate the language of cultural relativism and graft powerful emotional, political and religious appeals — fundamental appeals — onto it". This "cultural relativism" is an effect of the anti-foundationalism that neo-realism shares with its predecessor, postmodernism (Crockett, 2007:265). It is for this same reason that postmodern theory seems to be unequipped to counter the fundamentalist and imperialist effects of neo-realism. As Crockett (2007:265) puts it:

Baudrillard's postmodernism is now in some ways a nostalgic postmodernism, because it appeals to a time and a sensibility where theoretical arguments about hyperreality could be imagined to be persuasive.

As alternative to theories of hyperreality — which have lost their persuasive ability — Crockett (2007:265) suggests a "desperate appeal to the Real, a Real that is being manipulated and distorted in sinister ways by neo-realists, neo-fundamentalists and neo-conservatives". The implication is that, in order to oppose the fundamentalism rampant in the contemporary political and social situation — a fundamentalism paradoxically made possible by cultural relativism and anti-foundationalism — a certain return to the real, or to realism, is necessary. To this end, Crockett (2007:268) argues for either a "revolutionary materialist ontology" (based on a line of thought stretching from Spinoza through Deleuze to Antonio Negri); or a "more speculative metaphysical ontology that is inspired by psychoanalytic theory" (based on a progression from Hegel, through Lacan to the work of Slavoj Žižek). A discussion of Crockett's argument would be outside the scope of this study, but suffice it to note the importance placed on respectively a materialist and metaphysical ontology, and the emphasis that both of these place on the "belief in the Real" (2007:280) as a solution to the "crisis of liberalism" which is "a crisis of belief, ultimately a crisis of belief in the Real, which brings about a loss of belief in the world". This crisis of belief is one that postmodernism both contributed and responded to (2007:80), but which it ultimately proved to be unequipped to "solve".

Another possible reason why postmodern theories regarding hyperreality have become obsolete is the effect of digitalisation on contemporary culture. Hayles and Gannon (2007:99) point to digitalisation as the main cause of postmodern theories about linguistic constructs and the textually constructed nature of reality losing their critical edge. For them, postmodernism died in August 1995, its demise signalled by the IPO of Netscape — the first commercial Web browser user-friendly enough to make its way into public use. With the consequent exponential growth of the World Wide Web, "experiences of virtuality ceased to be confined to high-tech research laboratories funded by military grants and became part of everyday life in developed regions around the globe" (Hayles & Gannon, 2007:99).

As a result, Fredric Jameson's notion that "space, mirroring the inconceivable complexities of the infosphere, had become fractally complex was not so much proved wrong as displaced by the increasingly banal activity of surfing the web" and Jean Baudrillard's idea that "reality had 'imploded' into hyperreality ceased to function as a transgressive theoretical conceit, displaced by the everydayness of navigating virtual spaces that somehow left no one in doubt reality was as 'real' as ever". In summary, "postmodernism has not so much disappeared as been swallowed up — or better, engulfed — by the flood of data,

associations, information, and cross-references unleashed by the World Wide Web" (2007:118-119).

In this sense, Hayles and Gannon (2007:100) assert that the turn from postmodernism to metamodernism is not signalled by the idea that metamodernism has somehow "solved" the problems of postmodernism, but rather by a simple shift in attention or focus:

The problems the previous era found compelling have not so much been solved as they have ceased to be interesting. The new sensibility can aptly be characterized as a change of feeling, a shift in the mode of address, a new focus of attention. Let us call it a mood swing.²

Kirby (2009:46) summarises the idea that the problems that postmodern theory engaged with are simply no longer relevant: "Postmodern texts try to get to grips with the Cold War and television; today's students take for granted Islamism and the Internet".

The effect of this new focus of attention is theoretical as much as aesthetical. Hayles and Gannon (2007:119) echo the feeling that postmodernism's analytical tools have ceased to be effective in dealing with a metamodernist cultural and social landscape. For them, this is also an effect of digitalisation:

The effect of an information landscape so vast and unruly has been to shift the focus for interpretive analysis to discerning patterns among its chaotic and unpredictable juxtapositions. (2007:119)

While there is a sense that postmodernism's critical and analytical tools are obsolete and cannot deal with a cultural landscape in which notions of hyperreality have become commonplace, there is at the same time the suggestion that it is perhaps no longer even necessary for the hyperreal aspects of culture to be treated as problematic, as something in need of critical interpretation. Timmer (2010:196, 255) argues that both Eggers' *A heartbreakingly work of staggering genius* (2000) and Mark Danielewski's *House of leaves* (2000) engage with the notion of experience as always already mediated, whether by pop culture, television or fiction — the implied "hyperreal" of Baudrillard. Neither of these novels,

² Hayles and Gannon explain in a footnote that the term "mood" has in recent years increasingly appeared in discourse regarding metamodernist architecture. Their choice of the word, as well as their characterisation of the new sensibility as a "change of feeling", echoes the statement of Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:2) that metamodernism signals "another structure of feeling". Taken together, statements like these contribute to the general notion that the emerging metamodernist discourse is more focused on AFFECT than its predecessors.

however, treat the loss of the real or the impossibility of an unmediated presence as something to be mourned (2010:255). Instead, the focus shifts away from a postmodern "lack of meaning" as a result of the "loss" of the real towards formulations in which this mediated experience is the "real real": that which people (postmodern subjects) experience as real.

In fact, mediation has become so prevalent and unavoidable that is simply taken as another frame of reality. While early postmodern authors used images from pop culture as referents or symbols in their fiction, and while later authors of the 1970s and 1980s started to treat pop culture and television as subjects in themselves, a younger generation of writers grew up with and have been formed by a culture always already mediated by images of pop culture: for them "television is not any longer something to look at but something to *live with*" (Timmer, 2010:196). Popular culture became not a subject to write about, but rather a "world" containing its own "real" characters — it no longer "functions as a separated fictional domain, but has become a frame of reference invoked in 'real' life, as a particular paradigm of experience" (Timmer, 2010:196).

As a result, or as a reaction against the mediated nature of experienced reality, the experience of the postmodern subject (growing up in a culture already shaped by postmodern theories and notions) is firmly grounded in the realm of emotion and feeling: "people are in the habit of treating as real that which *feels* real" (Timmer, 2010:255). This, as Timmer suggests, signals a shift "away from a postmodern preoccupation with ontological play and epistemological 'hurdles'" towards affect; towards what experience "*means* or *feels* like, instead of what really *is* the case" (2010:255).

As a further example, Timmer (2010:260) points out that *House of leaves* is indeed indebted to postmodernist literary strategies, but instead of using a strategy such as disruption of the logic of narrative hierarchy and causality to dismantle "the illusion of reality effects", *House of leaves* seems to follow a reverse process:

The already dismantled illusional stability of any reality is the starting point, from which the text then begins to explore possibilities of finding one's way against the background of such an instable "world".

Instead of focusing on the realness or textual constructiveness of any of the narrative events and settings, the text shifts towards "the *reactions* one can have" towards the events

narrated in the novel. The focus is on the emotional effect on the reader — which is visceral, subjective and "real" [AFFECT].

The second reason often cited for postmodernism's "failure" is that it became "the very thing it aimed to destroy" (Toth & Brooks, 2007:2). One of postmodernism's core values is taken to be "its opposition to all latent utopian impulses" (Toth & Brooks, 2007:3). However, this opposition has, in time, come to be a utopian impulse in itself. A "victory" over utopian and teleological impulses only meant that postmodernism became its own worst enemy: "postmodernism's increasingly dogmatic rejection of all utopian discourses began to seem totalitarian, if not dangerously utopian", and "its self-affirmation as an anti-ideological discourse" became ideological in itself (Toth & Brooks, 2007:6).

In the same way, Toth (2010:109) argues that postmodernism eventually found itself "asserting an anti-realist stance as the *most realistic, as the most moral*". By claiming that reality is unrepresentable and using metafictional devices and strategies to represent reality as unrepresentable, it found itself in the uneasy position of, in effect, claiming that its representation of reality is the most realistic (Toth, 2010:169, footnote).

Similarly, postmodernism's rejection of a modernist emphasis on originality and elitism and postmodernism's consequent over-emphasis on self-reflexivity became in its own way "elite". According to Toth (2010:22), the "now canonical postmodernists" employed a form of "corrosive self-reflexivity" in an attempt to subvert any claim or pretence to either originality or a sense of "genius". As a result, the typical postmodern subject was no more than a "Foucaultian 'author-function'", a "scattered collection of discursive fragments". However, an overexaggerated strategy of self-reflexivity and metafiction rendered the works of high postmodernism just as "monumental" and "elite" as the canonical masterworks of high modernism, thereby perpetrating the same binaries between "low" and "high" culture that postmodernism attempted to subvert:

postmodernism's passing is marked by the pronounced realization that the insistence on groundless self-reflexivity (in architecture, literature, or whatever) ironically became *another* ethical and "elitist" imperative, an imposing suggestion that "responsible" narratives *do not* allow a ground to persist. (Toth, 2010:22)

This (perhaps inadvertent) elitism of postmodernism had the effect that postmodern art tended to distance itself from a public or social discourse, rendering it inaccessible. However

the postmodern withdrawal from public and/or social discourse — that is, the postmodern imperative to be inaccessible, *to expose* as illusory the ideal of shared experience and communal understanding — becomes itself a very public (because dominant) claim. In other words, an aesthetic that aimed to dismantle binary distinctions, that attempted (more specifically) to destabilize the opposition between high and low culture, becomes (itself) a vacuous and in-effectual aesthetic of the elite... Thus, postmodernism's increasingly emphatic insistence on inaccessibility — on, that is, the utterly private nature of all discourse (or, rather, the futility of the social or public text) — became a dominant ideal, a hegemonic standard in both academia and the artistic community. (Toth, 2010:112)

With regard to the way in which postmodernism ended up perpetrating the very things it sought to subvert

postmodernism "failed" because it *continued to speak*, because it continued to make (and privilege) *truth claims* about the impossibility of making such claims (while, for the most part, failing to overtly articulate the fact that such claims were necessarily and ironically animated by the latent belief that the truth could finally be expressed). In short, postmodernism failed *because it didn't die* (as it should have). Instead, its increasingly loud movement toward silence and/or the absolute denial of objective truth claims became dogmatic, institutionalized and programmatic. (Toth & Brooks, 2007:7)

Ironically, then, postmodernism as a subversive discourse failed as soon as its dominance appeared to be evident (Toth, 2010:112):

the death of postmodernism speaks to its success, not its failure: only a truly avant-garde — and, thus, "moral" and/or "accurate" — movement could write itself to the brink of self-destruction. (Toth, 2010:108-109)

POSTMODERNISM'S ABSORPTION INTO POPULAR CULTURE

A point frequently raised in debates about the end of postmodernism is that it lost its critical edge after being absorbed into popular culture. Amian (2008:1) claims that postmodernism has become part of the mainstream in the 1990s as exemplified by the "popular appeal of *Dummies'* guides and Pepsi cola ads". As such, it has "exhausted its potential as a means of describing and understanding the shifting alliances of literary and cultural production in the new millennium". Similarly, Kirby (2009:7) argues that postmodernism can be said to have ended once it could "be seen to have reached (or passed) saturation point in its penetration of the arts, becoming mainstream and conventional".

As soon as postmodernism passed into the cultural dominant, it lost its critical edge. Kirby (2009:7) points out the fact that the majority of critical works published after 2000 take the term "postmodernism" as a "fixed quantity", its meaning known or at the very least assumed. These works are not aimed at contesting or renewing the term, for them postmodernism is "a settled and known matter, not a dynamic and growing entity" (2009:7). Deconstructive conceptual art, cynicism in popular music such as punk, new wave and grunge, disaffected minimalism in cinema, extreme formalism in architecture, and metafictional irony in literature and television are all examples of how postmodern strategies have become accepted as conventional within popular culture (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:56). The waning of these impulses, the sense that they are tired and worn-out, indicates the "sublation" of a postmodern moment which "has lost its sway on contemporary aesthetics and culture" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:56) — precisely because it has become too pervasive.

Because many of the theories associated with postmodernism had as their *raison d'être* a sense of being subversive, critical and destabilising, they lose their central tenet once they become widely accepted. As Toth (2010:111) puts it: postmodernism's critical devices ceased to be subversive simply because they have been repeated so often that they became "trite":

it is postmodernism's eventual omni-presence that seems finally to efface its efficacy as a subversive and revolutionary aesthetic program... postmodernism ultimately negates its own apparent function as an artistic imperative via its ultimately widespread dispersal as a dominant epistemic configuration. Postmodernism's final success as a pervasive and publicly embraced dominant negates its ability to foster a rejection of all things publicly embraced as the "truth". (Toth, 2010:113-114)

Gibbons (2015:31) also argues that postmodernism's "textual tricks" have not perished or receded into history, but merely lost their potency for having been repeated too often. As Kirby (2009:37) puts it, postmodernism did not end

with a coup, but with *absorption*. Indeed, to say that something is "dead" is the opposite of arguing that it never existed; it means that, no longer growing and vibrant, an entity has merged with the ever-expanding past and as such feeds into and inflects our present and future.

To illustrate this, Kirby analyses the prevalence of postmodernist strategies in popular children's movies. For Kirby (2009:8), the children's film *Toy Story*, released in 1995, has all the hallmarks of postmodernism — indicating the ultimate absorption of postmodernism into popular culture. Postmodernist strategies, in this case, are no longer the clever and informed instruments of criticism they had perhaps aimed to be, but had become absorbed to such an extent that it only

generates an apparent "cleverness" which is more like street-smartness; it's sharp and knowing, but in a largely negative and uninformed manner... a destructive rather than an enabling "cleverness" because it has been stripped of actual knowledge. Ironic, knowing, skeptical, aware of and ambivalent about narrative conventions and codes.

In the same way, the children's animation *Chicken Run* (2000) and the three Wallace and Gromit short films made between 1989 and 1995 by the same studio exhibit

postmodernism as natural and inevitable, as unstrained and as free as breathing. This form of postmodernism as pure entertainment for all the family bears witness on one level to the total permeation of society by a contemporary cultural movement, but on another level this mixture of sophisticated self-awareness and generous fun suggests the movement has nowhere left to go. (Kirby, 2009:11)

Similarly, the film *Shrek* (2001) — and, indeed, the majority of animation films since — also attests to a "prevailing and hugely enjoyable postmodern aesthetic" (2009:15):

what is more interesting is not the (finally inevitable) appearance of postmodernism in children's literature, but rather the cultural and historical significance of the arrival of children's literature in postmodernism: the fact that what had once denoted shifts in architectural theory now referred most vibrantly to the entertainment of prepubescents. This surely suggested a new and critical stage in the development of postmodernism, which by

the turn of the millennium had come to underpin a billion-dollar industry beloved by preschoolers. (2009:15)

Soon after the critical and cultural success of these films, however, postmodernism is cast aside — at least in the more successful films, Kirby lists many that continued to follow the postmodern aesthetic and failed — in favour of nostalgia, reverence for an older generation or a bygone era, more traditional modes of storytelling and sources of humour, a lesser focus on metafiction, a warm and sincere tone rather than ironic and knowing, as well as a recurring focus on environmental catastrophe (2009:18). As Kirby (2009:15-16) puts it: first, postmodernism was reduced to a child's plaything, then it became that child's "discarded toy, grown out of and left behind".

With regard to the domain of literature, Timmer (2010) confirms Kirby's argument that, once a postmodern interpretation of society and culture achieves dominance, it loses its critical function. In this case, an "ironic stance towards the world, the self and others becomes a social convention" (Timmer, 2010:32).

In short, then, due to the proliferation of postmodern theories in popular culture and society, the sociocultural milieu in which artists and writers work has changed, rendering postmodern theories obsolete. Timmer (2010:32) points out that the generation of critics and writers conventionally associated with postmodernism, for the most part, actually grew up in a more "conventional" milieu, before the advent of postmodernism. It is therefore understandable that they might have found the possibilities of a postmodern culture liberating. However, the current generation of writers, critics and thinkers were mostly born during the sixties and seventies, when postmodern ideas experienced its apex. For this generation, postmodern insights were already internalized, rendering it little more than "a cluster of clichés, 'framing' cultural thought, and framing, also, how we think of our selves".

On the level of textual formation, too, the changing contemporary milieu has turned many of postmodernism's most avant-garde strategies commonplace. Echoing the assertion by Hayles and Gannon (2007:118-119) that the "flood of data, associations, information, and cross-references unleashed by the World Wide Web" has, in effect, "swallowed up" or "engulfed" postmodernism, Timmer (2010:81) argues that the mass digitalisation of culture has irrevocably changed the way in which postmodern textual strategies are perceived:

factors such as interacting with hypertexts or simply being engulfed by fractured narratives that are now manifest also in the popular media, can possibly have a significant effect on how we handle texts and narratives.

For example, non-linear and non-causal narrative forms that were considered non-conventional during the postmodern era have now become dominant and conventional thanks to the wide-spread use of the Internet and hypertext (Timmer, 2010:94). Such narratives "should not be perceived as problematic *per se* but instead as perhaps even the most 'functional' form" for structuring the lived experiences of the metamodernist subject who grew up in a cultural setting where postmodernist theories and strategies were already accepted into the dominant discourse (Timmer, 2010:95). As an example, Timmer (2010:81-82) refers in a footnote to an interview she conducted in 2001 with Mark Danielewski, author of *House of leaves*, in which he remarked that younger readers took noticeably less time to read his novel than an older generation.

The difference, he said, was that those around the age of twenty were used to navigating a text subjectively, much in accord with how one would navigate the Internet or hypertexts — that is: they would follow their own path through the text, skipping those sections they find less interesting and instead reading only those parts they are interested in... where an older, traditionally trained reader would believe everything should be read in the 'right' order (Timmer, 2010:81-82).

In terms of ideological criticism as well as textual practices, then, it can be said that postmodernism's absorption into popular culture has caused it to lose its critical function. Certain cultural modes and forms of postmodernism have become so ingrained and accepted that they are now no longer taken as possible modes of criticism, but rather as the norm (Timmer, 2010:94), as "'common sense', as that which 'goes without saying'" (Kirby, 2009:6).

REJECTION OF POSTMODERNISM

With regard to a conscious rejection of postmodern theories, many critics point to the terrorist attack of 9/11 as the end of postmodernism. Although Toth and Brooks (2007:3) locate the epochal shift towards metamodernism as early as the late 1980s, with the fall of the Berlin Wall as a significant cultural signifier for this shift, they acknowledge that "the most obvious marker of a new cultural dominant must certainly be the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 and the culture of fear they initiated". In this, Toth and Brooks states a common sentiment, namely that the 9/11 terrorist attacks necessitated a moral and emotional reaction that simply could not be supported by a postmodernist worldview: "a culture demanding a shared sense of 'moral outrage' doesn't seem reconcilable with a sustained rejection of metanarratives and a demand for stylistic experimentation" (2007:3). They make it clear, however, that although the 9/11 terrorist attacks might have signalled the final burial of postmodernism, it had already been "terminally ill" in the late 1980s and early 1990s.³

Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) also insist that metamodernism does not directly stem from any kind of post-9/11 sentiment:

Terrorism neither infused doubt about the supposed superiority of neoliberalism, nor did it inspire reflection about the basic assumptions of Western economics, politics, and culture — quite the contrary. The conservative reflex of the "war on terror" might even be taken to symbolize a reaffirmation of postmodern values.

In contrast, the economic threat of the "credit crunch", the collapse of a political centre, and the environmental concerns raised with regard to climate change do indeed infuse doubt, inspire reflection and incite "a move forward out of the postmodern and into the metamodern" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5). Gibbons (2015:29-30) refers to "the recent fervor for ethical, political, social, and environmental commitments" as an indication of an epistemological shift away from "the superficiality of postmodern irony" and the onset of a metamodernist turn. As example, Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:2) refer to an increasing tendency of company CEO's and politicians to express a desire for greater social responsibility, often paired with an optimistic affirmation, with the most famous example

³ See Keulks (2007) for a discussion of a "sombre, fundamentalist, post-9/11 perspective" as it manifests and impacts postmodern as well as metamodernist strategies in Salman Rushdie's 2005 novel *Shalimar the clown*.

perhaps US president Barack Obama's statement "Yes, we can change. Yes, we can". Coupled with this is an urgent focus on environmental issues and a turn towards being more environmentally friendly. This leads to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's notion of an "*aesth-ethical turn*": a newer generation of artists are increasingly distancing themselves from

the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of *aesth-ethical* notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis... They express a (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse. (2010:2) [MYTH; OPTIMISM; SINCERITY]

In discussions about works of literary fiction that are interpreted as embodying metamodernist aesthetics, the themes that are most commonly addressed are the rejection of postmodern irony [SINCERITY], solipsism and the lack of a stable subject [SUBJECTIVITY] that limit the possibility of meaningful intersubjective communication [AUTHENTICITY], as well as what is perceived as postmodernism's inability to engage with matters of social responsibility and ethical concerns [ETHICAL CONCERNs].

With regard to metamodernism's rejection of a postmodern conception of subjectivity, Timmer (2010) provides the most elaborate discussion. She phrases metamodernism as "a move beyond or an escape from a postmodern frame of interpretation":

In the most ambitious literary fiction today... we can detect an incentive to move beyond what is perceived as a debilitating way of framing what it means to be human: the postmodern perspective on subjectivity. Most notable in the work of this younger generation is the emphatic expression of feelings and sentiments, a drive towards inter-subjective connection and communication, and also a sense of "presence" and "sameness". Their texts perform a complicit and complicated critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the subjective postmodern experience world, and envision possible reconfigurations of subjectivity that can no longer be framed, I believe, as "postmodern". (Timmer, 2010:13)

Connecting the solipsism of postmodernism with its preference for irony, Timmer (2010:14) refers to David Foster Wallace to identify this "debilitating way of framing what it means to be human" as constituted by postmodernist "sarcasm, cynicism, a manic ennui, suspicion of all authority, suspicion of all constraints on conduct, and a terrible penchant for ironic diagnosis of unpleasantness instead of an ambition not just to diagnose and ridicule but to redeem".

This new tendency in fiction echoes a similar direction in critical theory which aims to "re-humanize' subjectivity", and to infuse "the more radical (poststructural) approaches of the subject with 'humane', or 'humanistic' qualities", highlighting an "apparent need to attend to aspects of subjectivity, aspects of the experience of being human... that has been repressed, one could say, in the heydays of poststructural criticism" (Timmer, 2010:18,20).

Rebein (2007) raises similar points in his discussion of American author Jonathan Franzen's repudiation of postmodernism. Referring to interviews with and statements by Franzen, Rebein explains why this once promising young writer in the literary postmodernist tradition disavowed practically all postmodern ideals and strategies in order to turn to a "realist tradition that includes such writers as Saul Bellow, John Updike and Alice Munro" (2007:201). Rebein (2007:202) describes Franzen's rejection of postmodernism as "rooted as much in crisis and despair as in calculation or an underdeveloped sense of loyalty [to postmodern values]".

Firstly, Franzen started to doubt the efficiency of literary postmodernism for engaging with matters of society and community, judging that postmodern aesthetics were irreconcilable with a sense of social responsibility (2007:204,205). Secondly, Franzen shifted towards the local, the specific, the lovingly realistic representation of locale and characters — what a critic described as an "embrace of humanist platitudes"; coupled with a certain almost-religious belief in the solace of literature (2007:209-210). Rebein (2007:215-216) describes the central importance that Franzen (after his "turn") gives to character and locale as "the basis for an exploration of family identity, loyalty, and cohesion" with, instead of a "large, externalized plot", the focus of his novels being unapologetically on the characters and their problems, which are internal rather than external, thereby shifting the emphasis from plot towards a "thoroughgoing exploration of character" (2007:217). In this, Franzen provides a blatant criticism of postmodernism's "hostility" to character (2007:217).

Lastly, Franzen rejected a postmodern detachment from audience, which he perceived as a result of postmodernism's "fucked up' tendency to 'punish' readers with 'needless difficulty'" (2007:205); as well as the obstacle that this heavily coded "difficulty" presented to audience enjoyment and social engagement. Franzen identified himself "with rather than in opposition to readers", thereby taking a "large and decisive step away from the aesthetics of literary postmodernism" (2007:206).

In connection to the renewed focus on audience that Rebein identified in Franzen's attitude towards fiction, Timmer (2010:175) refers to David Foster Wallace's criticism of the

metafictional self-consciousness of postmodernist prose: "their form-consciousness blocks any real form of communication with the audience", indicating the "failure of postmodernist aesthetics to emotionally involve the audience (or readers)". Taking the emphasis on the author-reader relation a step further, Amian (2008:187) in her discussion of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* (2002) argues that the text enacts "'authorship' as a profoundly dialogic process of creation, invention, and exchange" with the reader.

RETURN TO MODERNISM

To the extent that metamodernism marks a REJECTION OF POSTMODERNISM, it appears to revive certain modernist strategies that had themselves been rejected by postmodernism. James and Seshagiri (2014:87) reckon that an increasing number of contemporary novelists — among them Julian Barnes, J.M. Coetzee, Ian McEwan, Cynthia Ozick, Will Self, and Zadie Smith — are "styling their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth century writing" and placing "a conception of modernism as revolution at the heart of their fictions". Arguing that a great many literary works from the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first "consciously respon[d] to modernist impulses, methods, and commitments" (2014:88), they refer to the "contemporary reactivation" of modernism. Calling for a study of an as-yet undertheorized relation between modernism and metamodernism, they raise the following questions for consideration:

At a moment when postmodern disenchantment no longer dominates critical discourse or creative practice, the central experiments and debates of twentieth-century modernist culture have acquired new relevance to the moving horizon of contemporary literature. What artistic issues emerge when innovators today open up alternative futures for fiction through engagement with their modernist past? In turn, what fresh light does today's writing cast on modernism's own generative moment, its always vexed beginnings, middles, and ends? (2014:87-88)

In the context of Afrikaans literature, Andries Visagie (2010:95) notes a certain theoretical weariness with postmodernism in Afrikaans literary criticism since the end of the 1990s, and suggests that post-millennial literary works are instead exhibiting modernist tendencies. He points to the reception of Koos Kombuis's novel *Raka die roman* (2005) to illustrate the feeling in Afrikaans literature that a shift has taken place, away from postmodernism towards

a certain revival of modernism, a phenomenon also visible in the work of a writer such as Jaco Fouché, whose novels *Die ryk van die rawe* (1996) and *Die avonture van Pieter Francken* (2005) exhibit strong similarities to modernist literature, according to Visagie (2010:97).

He traces this further in the work of Etienne van Heerden, specifically *In stede van die liefde* (2005) in which an emphasis on language and an experimental style are reminiscent of a modernist aesthetic. The novel also exhibits other modernist discourses and narrative strategies, such as a yearning for the transcendental, a preoccupation with essentialities, a rejection of postmodern irony and superficiality, a need for authenticity, and a nostalgia for the certainties associated with metamodernist metanarratives (2010:103,105,109).⁴ However, as Visagie (2010:106) also shows, the narrative environment of postmodern simulacrum complicates these texts, which makes something such as "true, authentic love" hard to find.

This indicates that, rather than being a straight-forward revival or reactivation of modernism, metamodernism engages with modernist strategies in a cultural context that is always already informed by postmodernism [MODERNISM INFORMED BY POSTMODERNISM; CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM]. In line with the resurrection of modernist strategies, however, some aesthetic projects at the end of the twentieth century explicitly claimed a nostalgic return to modernist ideals and aesthetics as an antidote to the ills of postmodernism.

The first of these, the Dogme 95 movement — an "avant-garde film-making project" founded by Danish directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg — issued a manifesto in 1995 in which the illusory nature of contemporary films is derided as "barren", an "illusion of pathos and an illusion of love", "the last grains of truth [washed] away in the deadly embrace of sensation" (quoted by Kirby, 2009:18). Dogme 95 vowed to have as "supreme goal" to "force the truth out of" characters and settings (Kirby, 2009:19). Kirby (2009:20) interprets this manifesto as almost militantly "anti-postmodernist" in "its wholehearted embrace of values that postmodernism believed it had set in quotation marks forever".

⁴ Compare Van Vuuren's suggestion (2008:171-172) that Ingrid Winterbach's *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (2006) can be viewed as a transplant, transposition, hybridisation or "verafrikanisering" (africanisation) of the monument of modernist literature, James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The Dogme 95 movement professed their belief in "a supposedly unproblematic and transcendent concept of Truth. With Truth came Reality, also apparently uncomplicated and universal". In this sense, Kirby (2009:20) argues that Dogme 95's "rejection of postmodernist strategies is revealed as a dreamy and impossible nostalgia for modernism instead". The movement was short-lived, with a press release in 2002 announcing its official end (Kirby, 2009:21). As Kirby (2009:21) remarks: "the successor to postmodernism, whatever it may turn out to be, will be many things, but not its predecessor".

Dogme 95 served as inspiration for the second movement that Kirby (2009:22) identifies, the British New Puritans. According to the manifesto they issued with their collection of short stories, *All hail the New Puritans* (Blincoe & Thorne, 2000), they endorse "textual simplicity" and eschew "devices of voice" such as rhetoric and metafictional strategies. They believe the function of literature to be "faithful representations of the present", thereby rejecting any form of "improbable or unknowable speculation about the past or the future", and claim that their texts should and will "feature a recognizable ethical reality". To this end, they privilege content over form, in the service of "integrity of expression" (as quoted by Kirby, 2009:22). Kirby (2009:23) dismisses the aesthetic and literary accomplishments of the New Puritans as little more than a "PR stunt", but points out the historical significance of their "semiexplicit and would-be epochal repudiation of literary postmodernism" for what it implies about the contemporary cultural climate after postmodernism.

The third movement that Kirby (2009:24) mentions for their renewed focus on modernist values is the so-called Stuckists, a "radical art group founded in January 1999". The Stuckist manifesto is even more direct in its embrace of modernism, going as far as naming the new epoch "remodernism", based on the notion that modernism has "lost its way" and degenerated into postmodernism. In answer, "the Remodernist takes the original principles of Modernism and reapplyes them" (quoted from the Stuckist manifesto of 2000 by Kirby, 2009:25). For the Stuckists, "remodernist" art would be driven by the values of truth to self and to experience, clarity and directness, in service of representing a meaningful insight into and acceptance of humanity — a project that Kirby (2009:24) claims is based in a "belief in the easy, accessible, and universal concepts of truth, self, meaning, humanity and reality" which attempts to deny or at least circumvent most of twentieth-century thought, criticism and art.

While all three these movements were short-lived and accomplished minimal aesthetic and cultural success, their ideals are notable as an indication of the general cultural perception of

postmodernism — at least as it was during the late 1990s up until the end of the millennium. These movements brought about a pervasive sense of a firm rejection of postmodernist aesthetics as somehow barren or sterile, detached from the lived experience of reality. At the same time, they manifested a yearning for a renewed faith in the possibility of meaning and truth [AUTHENTICITY; MYTH], and a call for greater REALISM and social engagement in the form of moral or ETHICAL CONCERNS.

MODERNISM INFORMED BY POSTMODERNISM

Related to a view of metamodernism as a continuation of postmodernism and, by extension, modernism, is the idea that, if metamodernism is indeed a revival of modernism, then it is a revival tempered and informed by the lessons of postmodernism.

Author Tom McCarthy claims that

[t]he task for contemporary literature is to deal with the legacy of modernism. I'm not trying to be modernist, but to navigate the wreckage of that project. (2010, in Purdon)

Similarly, Toth and Brooks, in their introduction to *The mourning after: attending the wake of postmodernism* (2007), describe the currently emerging cultural paradigm as an act of "mourning", both for postmodernism's passing and for the failed project of modernism, the cultural wreckage of which contemporary artists still have to face. Metamodernism for Toth and Brooks (2007:7) is thus

a type of mourning, which is also (and of course) a type of resistance... a still emergent period of "renewalism" [which seems] to carry on a certain postmodern project while (all the while) critiquing elements of that project as ineffectual, irresponsible, dangerous, absurd, "feckless", etc. (2007:7)

Many of the writers and film directors that espouse this "renewalist" project seem "unabashedly nostalgic and 'realistic' (if not, perhaps, openly logocentric, humanistic and/or onto-theological)" — notions that are very much reminiscent of the heyday of modernism (Toth & Brooks, 2007:8). However, despite this nostalgia — perhaps similar in kind to the nostalgia for the values of modernism that Kirby (2009:18-27) identifies in the Dogme 95 movement, the New Puritans and the Stuckists [RETURN TO MODERNISM] — Toth and Brooks (2007:8) argue that it is not a "simple 'knee-jerk' reaction to the dominance of a seemingly

nihilist and socially irresponsible cultural trend [postmodernism]". Neither is it a "matter of blind and reactionary repudiation", because (as Kirby (2009:24) points out as well), what has been "inherited from postmodernism cannot be simply denied, or rejected outright".

The challenge of how to move beyond the perceived limits of postmodernism without merely falling back on the (by now) archaic values and aesthetics of modernism might prove to be one of the defining characteristics of metamodernism. One of the central arguments put forth by Timmer in *Do you feel it too? The post-postmodern syndrome in American fiction at the turn of the millennium* (2010) is that a newer generation of writers⁵ is struggling to find something to replace the "tyranny" of postmodernism, even while they are unable to ever completely detach themselves from the norms and structures of a postmodern cultural framework. If the early stages of metamodernism as emerging paradigm are analogous to a wake and if its main project is indeed a work of mourning (as Toth and Brooks (2007) and Toth (2010) argue), then no-one can be seen to be more bereaved than these late twentieth-century writers.

Caught in a "debilitating way of framing what it means to be human" according to the postmodern perspective on subjectivity, the newer generation of writers are (in some cases quite desperately) struggling to reconstruct a subjectivity based on humanity, affect, connectedness and a certain sincerity of feelings (Timmer, 2010:13) [AFFECT; SINCERITY; SUBJECTIVITY]. As they are seemingly unable to "return to an innocent mimesis", Timmer raises the question:

But why would writers want or even need to return to an "innocent" mimesis? That they do not or cannot is, I believe, not necessarily a deficit, but instead symptomatic of a larger cultural "condition". (2010:25)

In as far as Timmer's focus — subjectivity — is concerned, an important part of this "cultural condition" is the decentralisation of the subject (2010:52), especially as espoused by poststructural theories and the so-called "linguistic turn" heralded by thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Roland Barthes (2010:35). Following these theoretical developments,

⁵ Timmer (2010) specifically refers to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996); Dave Eggers' *A heart-breaking work of staggering genius* (2000) and Mark Danielewski's *House of leaves* (2000). It is my feeling that — in comparison to the post-millennial literary works identified in this study, and once the currently emerging epoch has been more clearly demarcated — the novels of Wallace, Eggers and Danielewski would perhaps more accurately be labelled "early metamodernist". However, a discussion of this matter falls outside the scope of this study.

the subject is no longer seen as self-determining or self-contained, and it no longer occupies a central position as moral authority or meaning-maker (2010:35).

In terms of the subject's sense of self, Timmer (2010:52) describes the way in which metamodernism seeks to free itself from the perceived limitations of postmodernism, which — with its rejection of irony and focus on the importance of being true and honest and the value of empathetic sharing and identification with others (2010:167-168) — can easily be taken as sentimental nostalgia for a pre-postmodernist era. However, she stresses that it is not

a naïve return to the more traditional view of the self as centered and autonomous meaning-maker... but neither is the absence of an "inner center" any longer uncritically reiterated. (Timmer, 2010:52)

Just as Timmer identifies a return to a more modernist concept of selfhood and intersubjective relations that is nonetheless informed by postmodern theories of subjectivity, Toth (2010:133) indicates the emergence of narrative forms that "renew the realist faith in mimesis" of modernism, while "simultaneously deferring and frustrating that faith via the irony and stylistics of a now past, or *passed*, postmodernism". Rather than a simple disavowal of postmodernist theories, these metamodernist narratives seek "to reestablish the possibility of mimesis and universal understanding while remaining wary of the dangers that postmodernism struggled to expose and move beyond".

The implication in the work of Timmer, Toth and other critics is therefore that metamodernism does incorporate modernist values, but not blindly or naïvely, and not by disregarding or denying the developments in theory, thought and art of postmodernism. In this sense metamodernism can be said to continue the project of modernism as well as postmodernism [CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM].

CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

The notion that metamodernism (though seeming to be yearning for the perceived "innocence" of an era before the cynicism and irony of postmodernism) does not simply revert to the ideals of modernism connects with the idea put forward by various thinkers, most notably Josh Toth's *The passing of postmodernism* (2010), namely that metamodernism carries the inheritance of postmodernism in the same way that postmodernism carries that of modernism. The current epochal shift from postmodernism to metamodernism is viewed as a "reenaction" of the way in which postmodernism broke with modernism, and is therefore — as with all such shifts, breaks or "epistemic ruptures" — simultaneously complete and partial (Toth, 2010:5).⁶

This idea that a certain modernist project continues throughout postmodernism into metamodernism is part of a long tradition that views postmodernism as an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to break with the assumptions and principles that animated modernism (Toth, 2010:7). There is an increasing sense in recent critical work that postmodernism's claim that it has located "an absolute break in all human experience between the disappeared past and the stranded present" — referring to the so-called "end of history" claimed by postmodernism and consequently mocked by its critics — has since lost all plausibility (Kirby, 2009:2).

In fact, Boxall (2012:685-686) argues in this regard that both modernism and postmodernism were merely responding in different ways to the same thing, namely "a culture that was entering a late phase"; a fact which an overemphasis on the supposed "break" between them tends to obscure. Or, as Kirby (2009:2) states:

Like Habermas, my feeling is that, ever more crisis ridden, modernity continued throughout this period [postmodernism] as an "unfinished project".

The debate on whether or not postmodernism can be seen to be continuous with modernism is a lively one, with some critics going as far as to claim that what has been termed "postmodernism" was in fact only late modernism, and that the prefix "post-" was therefore a misnomer in the sense that it did not designate "beyond" or "after". Distinguishing between

⁶ Some critics even suggest that what (still) animates metamodernism is in fact an Enlightenment project that has been passed on through modernism and postmodernism to the present (Toth, 2010:88).

the accepted term "postmodernism" as indicative of an epoch, and "POST-modern" as an as yet undefined, unrealised epoch that would truly be "beyond" or "after" modernism, Toth (2010:13) summarises the argument as follows:

Either, as critics like Gerald Gaff have suggested from the beginning, late modernism has been mis-recognized as POST-modern — that is, the *true end* of modernism; *or*, postmodernism was *indeed a break* with modernism, but it was ultimately unable to be what the majority of critics claimed it was: post-ideological... Given the recent development of an epoch/episteme that has emerged *after* postmodernism, it would seem that the "rupture argument" [that postmodernism was a radical rupture or break with modernism]... can only be maintained if the effect of the rupture is considered a failure, an unsuccessful and ultimately temporary postmodern — an *almost-(truly)POSTmodern*.

As an alternative to this bind, Toth (2010:13) refers to Andreas Huyssen's suggestion that the "either/or sensibility animating much of the postmodern debate" indicates a failure to understand "the most useful insights of Derridean deconstruction":

the postmodern — rather than being *either* continuous *or* wholly discontinuous with modernism — is *both* continuous *and* discontinuous.⁷

In the end, it seems that one of two possibilities has come to pass, as Toth (2010:15) argues with reference to the theories of Linda Hutcheon: either what has mistakenly been identified as postmodernism is dead and we are now moving towards an epoch that is truly "after" modernism and no longer implies a connection to the past; or the "postmodern we correctly identified was unable to live up to our expectations". Either way, "the fact remains that a truly POSTmodern epoch, with a name of its own, remains to be seen" (Toth, 2010:15).

In order to explore this idea further, Toth (2010:15) — in a way that mirrors the central arguments of Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010) regarding metamodernism — decides to "employ a theory, or rhetoric, of ironic continuity/discontinuity as a means of understanding the death of postmodernism (as well as postmodernism itself)". This strategy acknowledges the sense of a "rupture" between modernism and postmodernism, as well as between postmodernism and metamodernism, but does not merely reaffirm the modernist, teleological notion of an uninterrupted trajectory or historical progress.

⁷ See Toth (2010:13-15) for a criticism of some of Huyssen's further arguments.

If it is assumed that postmodernism was unsuccessful in completely breaking with modernism and still retains a certain modernist inheritance, it can be argued that metamodernism inherited this unfinished project of modernism from postmodernism, thereby making it continuous with both modernism and postmodernism. While metamodernism's rise can be dated back to the 1980s (the beginning of the end of postmodernism), Kirby (2007:226) argues that

its roots lie deep in our society and time, and... much is traceable to the origins of modernity itself, and all can be understood as the tangled and difficult legacy of a played-out postmodernism.

This statement echoes Linda Hutcheon in the epilogue to the 2002 new edition of her seminal work *Politics of Postmodernism*:

[T]he postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on — as do those of modernism — in our contemporary twenty-first century world.

Simply put, then, the legacy or "project" of modernism is continued — via postmodernism — in metamodernism. Toth's analogy for the way in which every subsequent epoch remains informed by its deceased predecessor echoes Hutcheon's words: while the death of postmodernism is a "passing, a giving over of a certain inheritance... this death (like all deaths) is also a living on, a passing on" (Toth, 2010:2).

Similarly, Toth and Brooks (2007:1-2) use the task of mourning at a wake as analogy for the way in which metamodernism stands in relation to postmodernism:

[W]hat new period of cultural production is this that seems (quite necessarily) to be defined by its commitment to an inevitable work of mourning, a work of mourning the passing (on) of an epistemological trend that defined the past 50 years of cultural and theoretical production?

"Mourning" here refers not only to grief, or even lamentation, but also to an act of remembrance, of putting to rest, and of moving on. Describing the state of the currently emerging cultural paradigm as a wake, Toth and Brooks (2007:2) refer to it as "this ongoing work of waking, of enduring the wake, of *waking*, of *waking up*". In this sense then, the mourning is not only for the passing of postmodernism:

[T]his emergent epoch seems to "mourn" the apparent loss of the very idealistic alternatives that postmodernism strove to efface... this period can be defined by its desire to get over — or, rather, to finally lay to rest — that which came before. (Toth & Brooks, 2007:3)

Toth also starts his work *The passing of postmodernism: a spectroanalysis of the contemporary* (2010) with the statement of Linda Hutcheon quoted above. Focusing on her claim that "the postmodern moment has passed", Toth (2010:2) then elaborates on the "metaphysical connotation of 'passing'" to raise the following questions with regard to the epoch following in the wake of postmodernism:

[P]ostmodernism is, according to critics like Hutcheon, dead. It has *passed*. It has, in other words, *given up the ghost*. Such phrasing, though, resounds with ambiguity, inviting a number of questions: What ghost? Given? Passed on? — where?, to whom? When, or where, did this passing/giving begin? Is this ghost that postmodernism has "given up", is this thing that has "passed on", that which Hutcheon claims continues to "live on"? Is it the same thing that lived on after modernism, and therefore lived on (in) postmodernism? This seems to be, then, a question of the paranormal, of possession? What is this thing that lives on, moving from host to host?

For Toth (2010:4), metamodernism is itself a testament to the fact that postmodernism persists, even after its apparent demise. However, it is not merely a matter of metamodernism being informed by postmodernism — nor is it simply a throwback to modernism, tempered by the lessons of postmodernism — but rather

the current epistemological, or cultural, reconfiguration — a reconfiguration that maintains many postmodern "traits" — betrays the inevitable persistence of what Jacques Derrida might refer to as the "inheritance", or "specter", that animated postmodernism in the first place.

Following Derrida's notion of the spectre in his analysis of Marxism, *Specters of Marx* (1994), Toth (2010:4) utilises the spectre as "a past revenant, or ghost, of 'emancipatory and messianic affirmation, a certain experience of the promise'". The spectre occupies a strange, even impossible, temporality — comparable to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's claim that a metamodernist sensibility is a deliberate being out of time, an intentional being out of place, and a pretence that both atemporality and displacement are possible even though it is not (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:12).

Quoting Derrida, Toth explains in a footnote (2010:152) that "the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back". Toth (2010:152) elaborates by claiming that the spectre serves as a metaphor for the promise, and as such, its arrival is

always a type of return, a coming back. A ghost, after all, is a "revenant". It is a return of what is already past/passed. But in returning, the ghost, as in what has "passed", is never the same, just as the ghost of Hamlet is not the King himself. Thus, "what seems to be out front, the future, comes back in advancement from the past, from the back"... The specter promises the future (i.e. the messianic return), a time when the work of mourning (what is past) is over, a time when the specter (of what is past) is finally put to rest. The promise, then, as specter, is always a promise from/of the past, but (at the same time and however paradoxically) it always returns anew, beckoning us toward the future. A ghost is always, in short, a matter of "repetition and first time".

Postmodernism, as spectre, was itself haunted by "a certain teleological aporia, a promise of the end" (Toth, 2010:4) that it inherited from modernism. This "end" was to be the "end of history" as claimed by American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama. His 1989 essay "The end of history?" was written on the eve of the collapse of socialism as symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Fukuyama claimed that history had "ended" because, with the collapse of socialism and the perceived triumph of Western capitalism, "the universal legitimacy of liberal-democratic order" had been finally confirmed and "the pinnacle of possible social formations had been attained" (Oxford dictionary of critical theory, 2010).

As a result, the last decades of the twentieth century were marked by a "deeply ingrained sense of cultural agedness"; a feeling of "historical completion or exhaustion"; "the growing old and tired of Western modernity itself" (Boxall, 2012:681; 682).

Cultural theorists of remarkably different political and philosophical persuasions, from Theodor Adorno to Gilles Deleuze, from Francis Fukuyama to Fredric Jameson, have registered what Frank Kermode has succinctly characterized as a "sense of an ending" in our collective historical consciousness, a sense of belatedness that has expressed itself in the terms by which we have sought to describe postwar twentieth-century culture: the recurrence of the adjective *late* in compounds such as "late capitalism", "late modernism", and "late modernity", and the experience of aftermath so powerfully evoked by the application of the prefix *post* to virtually all aspects of Western cultural life. (Boxall, 2012:681)

However, it has since become clear that history did not in fact end. Around the globe, different economic and social developments under the label of global capitalism combined and influenced each other in order to "kick-start History" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:56). If anything, history is now "moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:2); leaving us with "a present that is so young, so rapidly growing and changing, that it is difficult even to inhabit it, to hold it still long enough to glean a clear understanding of its features", a "future that has arrived 'ahead of schedule'" (Boxall, 2012:681).

Apart from the fact that the end of history seems to have been a very premature claim to make, the fact that this could be claimed at all betrayed a certain faith in historical progress and a utopian impulse — the very ideals of modernism that postmodernism sought to disprove. In this sense, postmodernism's inability to completely disavow the very ideas that it criticised in modernism is one of the ways in which it can be said that postmodernism failed [POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE].

Perhaps partly as a reaction to postmodernism's claim of the "end of history", a central theme can be said to link all of metamodernism's emerging aesthetics: renewalism. In a sense, the aesthetic strategies identified as part of a metamodernist paradigm — AFFECT; AUTHENTICITY; ETHICAL CONCERNS; MYTH; OPTIMISM; REALISM; SINCERITY; SUBJECTIVITY — are all related to certain modernist principles or ideals. Indeed, Toth and Brooks identify what they term "a still emergent period of 'renewalism'" (2007:7), a shift characterised by a "renewed faith in the possibility of what postmodernism [sic] narrative has repeatedly identified as impossible: meaning, truth, representational accuracy, etc." (2007:8-9). However, this is not simply a backlash against postmodernism, and neither is it

a reactionary return to the (ethical) imperatives of modernism nor a revival of the traditional forms of realism and ethical discourse that proliferated in nineteenth century. What comes after postmodernism, then, is (perhaps) best described if we recall the ethical paradoxes explored by Derrida in his most recent work; this period of renewal, of renewalism, is, in other words a period of "faith without faith", of "religion without religion", of "mimesis without mimesis", etc., etc. In short, Postmodernism, to a certain degree, persists. We, undoubtedly, continue to mourn. (Toth & Brooks, 2007:9)

The notion that metamodernism busies itself with a revival of certain modernist aesthetics in a period irrevocably informed by postmodernism leads Vermeulen and Van den Akker

(2010:5) to claim that metamodernism occupies an uneasily defined space in relation to both modernism and postmodernism:

[I]nspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility.

For this reason, Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:2) suggest that "metamodernism should be situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism" — hence their designated term for the emerging cultural paradigm as "metamodernism", with the nuances of "with", "between" and "beyond" captured by the prefix "meta".

To this end, Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) also utilise the notion of metamodernism as an "awakening" of something that had been lying dormant during postmodernism. For them, artists and politicians are currently engaging in a "narrative of longing structured by and conditioned on a belief... that was long repressed, for a possibility (a 'better' future) that was long forgotten". Again, this is not seen to be a simplistic and untempered revival of modernism, but rather a compromise between, or a hybrid of, modernism and postmodernism, occupying an in-between space. Amian (2008:188) refers to this as

a contemporary desire to have it both ways: to embrace the liberating potential of a radical postmodernist uncertainty on the one hand, and to reclaim meaningful (inter)subjectivities on the other and to explore new ways of conceptualizing "agency", "meaning", and "truth" in a post-postmodern age.

In order to "have it both ways", metamodernism at times seems to be embodying an impossible fusion between modernism and postmodernism:

[I]f, simplistically put, the modern outlook vis-à-vis idealism and ideals could be characterized as fanatic and/or naive, and the postmodern mindset as apathetic and/or skeptic, the current generation's attitude — for it is, and very much so, an attitude tied to a generation — can be conceived of as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5)

In comparison to postmodernism's disavowal of a predetermined teleological "end" to human progress (a disavowal that has been shown to be inherently paradoxical, as Toth (2010) and Kirby (2009) point out), metamodernism "acknowledges that history's purpose will never be

fulfilled because [the purpose] does not exist" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5). In line with metamodernism's "informed naivety" and "pragmatic idealism", however, metamodernism "takes toward [the purpose] as if it does exist". If modernism and postmodernism can be said to be epistemologically aligned with Hegel's notion of a "positive' idealism", then metamodernism is more closely linked to a Kantian notion of idealism, based on "'as-if' thinking":

That is to say, humankind, a people, are not really going toward a natural but unknown goal, but they pretend they do so that they progress morally as well as politically. Metamodernism moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find. If you will forgive us for the banality of the metaphor for a moment, the metamodern thus wilfully adopts a kind of donkey-and-carrot double-bind. Like a donkey it chases a carrot that it never manages to eat because the carrot is always just beyond its reach. But precisely because it never manages to eat the carrot, it never ends its chase, setting foot in moral realms the modern donkey (having eaten its carrot elsewhere) will never encounter, entering political domains the postmodern donkey (having abandoned the chase) will never come across. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5)

For this reason, metamodernism can be said to oscillate ontologically between modernism and postmodernism, between modernist enthusiasm and postmodernist irony, "between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5-6).

Gibbons (2015:32) elaborates on the way in which this oscillation between modernism and postmodernism manifests in metamodernist fiction:

While modernism was fuelled by an enthusiasm for utopian thinking and an enlightened idealization of reason, and while postmodernism rejects such optimism in favor of nihilistic irony and distrust, metamodernism is flavored by the simultaneous and paradoxical sense of hope and future failure. Irony in metamodernist writing is, therefore, not a derisive apolitical performance but unreservedly committed to both promises that the locutionary act sets forth, both the surface meaning and its intended opposite. Another means in which metamodernism achieves its oscillation is through the assimilation of high and low cultural references. As a technique this might appear rather postmodern, yet it is employed in metamodernist writing not merely to create eclectic textuality but to present juxtapositions that evoke a reflection on contemporary culture. Similarly, metamodernist writing often

contains everyday references, such as the explicit use of brand names, in a cloaked acknowledgement and criticism of commercialized culture.

What should be clear, however, is that this oscillation is not a static balance, but rather a constant negotiation between two poles that are in constant motion and flux. Ontologically as well as epistemologically, metamodernism is "at once modern *and* postmodern and neither of them" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:6) — it exhibits a certain "both-neither" dynamic with regard to both its ancestors. This "both-neither" should not be confused with a "postmodern in-between (a neither-nor)" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:10), but rather points to the way in which metamodernist artists use postmodern techniques and tropes "precisely in order to surpass the postmodern", by "bringing the postmodern into the realm of what one might call the modern... and vice versa by dragging the modern into the realm of the postmodern" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:62).

As an example of how fiction interpreted as metamodernist negotiates the space between modernism and postmodernism, or inhabits the "both-neither" dynamic identified by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:10), Keulks (161-162) makes the following statement in his discussion of Salman Rushdie's *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the clown* (2005):

[these novels] dramatize the perennial problems between postmodern simulacra, indeterminacy, and referentiality and classical configurations of agency, autonomy, romance, and redemption. By embedding battles between relativism and historicity in their plots, these novels dramatize an artistic disequilibrium between engagement and despair, prophecy and textuality. That both novels falter — or fail — to resolve this quandary is beside the point. Their struggle between style and subjectivity, hyperbole and humanism, portrays the complex aesthetics that writers must face in mapping a literature *after* or *beyond* postmodernism. In Rushdie's hands, this has become a contradictory, sometimes unbalanced poetics that rejects opportunistic retreats to realism while striving to reconstitute select humanist ideals, primarily love, agency, and autonomy.

While Keulks see Rushdie's "artistic disequilibrium" and "unbalanced poetics" as a failure to resolve the "quandary" between postmodernism and modernism; Amian (2008) puts forth an interpretation of this struggle that is more closely aligned to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's notion of metamodernist aesthetics as committed to an "impossible possibility" (2010:5), as well as Toth and Brooks' idea of "faith without faith" (2007:8).

Discussing Jonathan Saffran Foer's novel *Everything is illuminated* (2002) as a prime example of metamodernist aesthetics, Amian (2008:193) makes the following statement:

As *Everything is illuminated* explicitly reworks the Peircean "will to believe" as a will to "believe anyway", belief becomes cast as a performance which provides an affective-creative response to a never-ending state of epistemological doubt.

In this interpretation, metamodernism does not solve or disregard postmodern doubt — it is perceived to be inevitable — but it nonetheless chooses to "believe anyway". Even though it is acknowledged that whatever there is to believe in likely does not exist, metamodernism takes towards it as if it does. This idea is also put forward in Toth's interpretation of Mark Leyner's *The tetherballs of Bougainville* (1998) which embraces the "impossible possibility" of certain modernist promises. While postmodernism focused on deconstructing and exposing as illusory these modernist promises, metamodernist acknowledges that they are necessary to any critical or aesthetic enterprise:

Leyner (like, we might say at this point, a late-Derrida) actively resists the apparent nihilism of postmodernism by identifying the impossibility of certain spectral lures as impossible. While the preface and, indeed, the text as a whole seems to accept the postmodern lesson that certain teleological ideals — communication, mimesis, shared understanding — are illusions of a now defunct project of modernity, it simultaneously embraces the possibility, or promise, of such ideals. Of course, I do not want to suggest that postmodernism was simply and utterly ignorant of, or blind to, the fact that such illusions are essential animating factors, but I would like to highlight the way in which a text like Leyner's distances itself from postmodernism proper by overtly embracing the impossible possibility of certain teleological promises. (Toth, 2010:77-78)

In the end, metamodernism can be said to embrace, consciously and purposefully, the paradoxes it inhabits by being situated ideologically in between modernism and postmodernism. As can be seen as a recurring theme in the various aesthetic characteristics that constitute metamodernism [AFFECT; AUTHENTICITY; ETHICAL CONCERNS; MYTH; OPTIMISM; REALISM; SINCERITY; SUBJECTIVITY], metamodernism is committed to the "impossible possibility" of both modernism and postmodernism. It neither affirms the teleological and humanist ideals of modernism, nor rejects it as postmodernism did. Instead, metamodernism focuses on the promise of and faith in these ideals (cf. Toth, 2010:80), and it accepts the possibility and simultaneous impossibility, the presence and simultaneous absence of these notions (cf. Toth, 2010:34). In this way, perhaps, metamodernism will be able to avoid the fate that befell postmodernism: becoming as dogmatic, hegemonic and ideological as what it has tried to renounce.

As Toth (2010:122) puts it:

Rather than simply rejecting the spectral promise as illusory ideals — and thus, like postmodernism, becoming hegemonically opposed to the very promise that necessarily animates any anti-ideological movement — [metamodernism] endorses an ethics of indecision; it overtly embraces the need to believe in the spectral promise of the certainly right decision while simultaneously embracing, à la postmodernism, its infinite deferral.

aspects of metamodernism

AFFECT, noun. (also **AFFECTIVE, adj.**)

"A feeling or subjective experience accompanying a thought or action or occurring in response to a stimulus; an emotion, a mood". Also "the outward display of emotion or mood". As adjective, "affective" is used in reference or relation to "the affections or emotions", especially "as contrasted with the intellectual or rational faculty" (OED, 2015).

In contrast to postmodern solipsism, detachment and irony, metamodernism is seen to be more socially involved, engaged, and committed. Postmodern exhibitionism has made way for metamodernist engagement (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5). For Gibbons (2015:29-30), it is exactly "the recent fervor for ethical, political, social, and environmental commitments" that serves as an indication that an epistemological shift has taken place, "away from the superficiality of postmodern irony". Gąsiorek and James (2012:610), in their introduction to a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* that focuses on post-millennial fiction, go as far as to suggest "commitment" to be the characterising feature of metamodernist fiction that sets it apart from its predecessors.

This shift sees the metamodernist revival of themes that have been discredited by postmodernism in general and poststructuralism in particular, such as notions of emotion and sentimentality. Kirby (2009:34), for example, refers to Terry Eagleton's *After theory* (2003) as an exploration of themes that had been rejected by postmodernism, such as love and self-fulfilment, and a call for these themes to be revived in the arena of theory. Keulks (2007:146) discusses the author Salman Rushdie's later work to suggest that "sentimentalized love" is one of the tropes that is currently being revived; Hayles and Gannon (2007:101) point to a renewed interest in the relation of architecture and affect as part of a "new structure of feeling" that signals the passing of postmodernism into metamodernism; and James (2012:865) identifies the problematic of contemporary fiction as finding a way to "integrate mode and feeling, lyricism and observation" after decades of postmodern irony.

For Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:7), this metamodernist turn towards emotion and affect can be read as a revival of Romanticism, as is seen in cultural critic Jörg Heiser's assessment of contemporary art as exhibiting what he calls "Romantic Conceptualism".

According to Heiser, the "rational, calculated conceptual" art of postmodernism is increasingly replaced with the "affective and often sentimental abstractions" of a newer generation of "Romantic Conceptualists". While the postmodernists busied themselves with simulacra, the obscene, and a criticism of subjectivity, the newer generation of artists is concerned with reconstruction. To this end they create "affective illusions that can never materialize", exhibit a concern with the "increasingly obsolete", and celebrate the "felt heterogeneity of identity" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:7).

Underlying the emphasis on affect in metamodernism is the problematic of subjectivity and intersubjective relations caused — or brought to light by — poststructural theories of subjectivity. Describing the so-called affective turn [AFFECT THEORY], Moore (2011:par. 271) refers to "embodied experiences" and the need after postmodernism for "new ontologies, new ways of conceiving of the human subject and their relation to the world". In this sense, the turn to affect is a reaction against two related limitations identified in postmodernist theories, namely the lack of a stable subject [SUBJECTIVITY] and the consequent impossibility of meaningful intersubjective relations, the combination of which manifests in the problem of authentic self-expression [AUTHENTICITY].

Timmer (2010) identifies three novels that she interprets as embodying metamodernist aesthetics: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996); *A heartbreak work of staggering genius* (2000) by Dave Eggers; and *House of leaves* (2000) by Mark Danielewski. From these novels, she infers a certain "symptom" of metamodernism: the metamodernist subject's "inability to appropriate feelings, while feeling them nevertheless" (Timmer, 2010:43). While the subject of modernism was mostly characterised by a feeling of alienation, the postmodern subject was characterised by fragmentation, leading in the extreme sense to a complete absence of a stable, coherent notion of self. This was coupled with a cultural context that required a certain ironic, knowing and almost world-weary attitude, where "to be sentimental and naïve and show 'real feelings'" was considered to be "taboo" (Timmer, 2010:30).

The metamodernist subject, in contrast, experiences "real feelings" and is not absent at all: "as a vague presence, it haunts and disrupts the well functioning of the 'subject' in a cultural setting which privileges ungrounded, commodified desire" (Timmer, 2010:44). The result is that, even though based on poststructuralist theories there is "no longer a self present to do the feeling... these feelings are experienced nevertheless". Contemporary fiction expresses

this tension in the form of attempts to restructure affect "without resorting to older conceptions of the self as a simple container of feelings" (Timmer, 2010:44-45).

The fact that affect cannot simply be restructured unproblematically — informed as it is by postmodern irony — leads Timmer (2010:45) to describe the metamodernist shift as a shift towards a "much more melancholic structure of affect, revolving around a 'loss' which has, paradoxically perhaps, a very strong 'presence' (a *traumatic* presence, Foster would probably say)". This sense of loss perhaps echoes the Romantic melancholy identified by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:7): more than a simple, naive return to unproblematised expressions of affect, it is a creation of "affective illusions" that can never be materialised.

This "loss" is also a "feeling of *being lost*", and this is connected to the notion of the "lack of the human" felt in postmodernism (Timmer, 2010:45). Affect is structured around feelings emerging from human psyches that, nonetheless, remain fractured. The notion of a fractured self informs the other problem regarding metamodernist affect: the paradoxical yearning and need for intersubjective relations, while recognising that these are always already problematised, if not impossible — and the equally paradoxical fact that, simultaneously, the only way the fractured self can engage meaningfully with affect is through others.

The difficulty of situating feelings either "inside" or "outside" ("free floating"), the apparent difficulty the selves have with appropriating feelings while they can neither comfortably expel them as some sort of intruding force imprinting them, is exactly what triggers the search for an alternative way of structuring self-narratives... [T]o make sense of "feelings", the self in these texts needs *others*. Feelings... are not "private" and "inner" but neither are they "free floating"; they are *inter-personal*. They can only be vicariously made sense of, it seems. (Timmer, 2010:45)

Referring to a short story by David Foster Wallace, Timmer (2010:45) discusses the way in which the narrator turns to a "you" and, alluding to something "urgent and human", asks: "Do you feel it too?" Even though the "it" is never explained or specified,

the feeling starts to function as an *index*, "it". It no longer refers to a private feeling encapsulated somewhere in an isolated mind but actually points to a potential (or hypothesized, "what if") *intersubjective connection*... It works as a way to reach out, we could say, as a way to hypothesize a potential structure of a "we" which revolves around the possibility of *sharing feelings*. (Timmer, 2010:46)

The self-narratives in metamodernist fiction seems to be structured "not around a centered and stable self-concept" (something which is regarded as impossible after postmodernism), but rather "around *feelings* which, once shared, can lay the foundation, possibly, for beginning to make sense of 'what it means to be me'" (Timmer, 2010:46). Through an "awkward leap of faith", a "we" is tentatively constructed as "a structure activated only by a form of responsiveness" to the other (Timmer, 2010:46).

Amian (2008:182) illustrates this by pointing to the urgency exhibited by a novel such as Jonathan Saffran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* (2002) to (re)construct a sense of "we". This "frail textual 'we'" is structured around a sense of correspondence between subjects that is framed as a matter of "feeling" or

a question of being able to "also feel it", to "share" a "sense" of involvement in "*the same story*" without ever articulating or even knowing for sure wherein this "sameness" actually lies. (Amian, 2008:182)

In post-millennial literature the need to (re)construct a sense of "we" — in combination with the ethical demand to respond to the challenges of the globalised world [ETHICAL CONCERNS] — can be seen in the proliferation of fictional works that have trauma as theme, as well as critical studies about trauma in literary works. This seems to be especially true in non-Western literatures, perhaps as a result of the material historical events of the twentieth century. Clough (2007:par. 324) claims that the focus on trauma is ultimately a reconstructive project, which is why it is often found in the literature of historically oppressed peoples. Affective theories [AFFECT THEORY] regarding trauma enables critical theory to shift its focus from merely deconstructing the Western subject of modernity, and towards the restructuring of multiple, non-Western subjectivities, histories and modernities, especially those expressed by diasporic subjects (Clough, 2007:par. 324) [SUBJECTIVITY].

The abundance of critical works dealing with trauma in South African literature attests to the role affect plays, explicitly or otherwise, in the cultural milieu at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Examples are *Woordeloos tot verhaal: trauma en narratief in Nederlands en Afrikaans* (Ester et al., 2012), which deals with the literary processing of trauma; the study of trauma in war narratives such as Christoffel Coetzee's *Op soek na generaal Mannetjies Mentz* (1998) in Fourie (2014) and Ingrid Winterbach's *Niggie* (2002) in Human (2009); as well as Karel Schoeman's *Verkenning* (1996) in Van den Berg (2011), Marita van den Vyver's *Stiltetyd* (2006) and Nanette van Rooyen's *Chinchilla* (2007) in Johan Anker (2008). In terms of South African poetry, the work of poets such as Antjie Krog (Botha, 2014),

Henning Pieterse (Jacobs, 2013), and Pieter Boskma (Hamman & Viljoen, 2015) are further examples of literary works that are critically read in terms of trauma and trauma processing.

The demand for a (re)construction of a sense of "we" also reflects on the perception of the author-reader or text-reader relation, which informs the metamodernist view of the function and power of literature. The contemporary novel establishes an "intersubjective reading position" to elicit an emotional and moral response from the reader (Amian, 2008:188) — a reading position which demands of the reader to think of the novel as "a form that does more than simply reproduce our own disenchantment" (James, 2012:872). The metamodernist novel can offer writing which can "enthral and unsettle with equal measure" because "it works on an affective level that far surpasses the textual involutions of metafictional self-scrutiny". For James (2012:857), the metamodernist novel provides the promise and affirmation that the novel

after an era of being subjected to self-reflexive deconstruction and epistemological doubt, still has the capacity to simulate and thereby intensify our attention to the aesthetic dimensions of ordinary experience, while probing the political and ethical implications of inhabiting those dimensions anew.

This leads to a renewed faith in the capacity of fiction to engage with and affect a reader. Marlene van Niekerk, in her short story "Die swanefluisteraar" from *Die sneeusslaper* (2009:9) raises questions about the use and value of literature: "Is 'n verhaal iets wat 'n mens kan troos?" ("Is a story something that can comfort someone?") — a question which Van der Merwe (2012a) indicates to be one of the themes of the whole collection. James explicitly argues for metamodernist fiction's capacity to provide "solace" (2012:871) or "to console" (2012:871); while Jones (2012:85) refers to metamodernist fiction as "a redemptive and humanising practice", a "point of communal unity, an occasion for communication". Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2015:58-59) suggest that metamodernism eschews postmodernism's "ahistoricity, depthlessness, inauthenticity and the waning of affect", thereby activating social situatedness and responsibility, engaging with readers and their social context, and creating affective structures in order to approach what Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2015:59) term "art as social salvation". Through affect, metamodernist fiction is not only capable of engaging with readers, it becomes imperative that it does so [ETHICAL CONCERNS].

Metamodernism is often taken to be naive, nostalgic, sentimental or childishly innocent in its focus on affect and the emotions. In this regard, it is sometimes seen as a revival of

Romanticism — a perception which frequently fails to take into account that Romanticism also had a propensity for (and a certain admiration of) the sublime, characterised by passion, violence, and rage. It would therefore be a mistake to view metamodernism's turn to affect solely in "positive" terms such as healing, comfort, consolation, and communal togetherness. The strong ethical drive of metamodernism allows it to utilise affect also to criticise, to shock, or to incite anger. In this regard, any number of post-millennial South African works can be cited for their depiction of violence, trauma or a dystopian view of society, whether past or present. Examples here are Jaco Botha's *Miskruier* (2005); *Horrelpoot* (2006) by Eben Venter; *Buys* (2014) by Willem Anker; and *Vlakwater* by Ingrid Winterbach (2015) [cf. ETHICAL CONCERN; OPTIMISM].

Another recent example of affect in post-millennial literature is the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for fiction awardee, *The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen. Reviews describe the novel in terms that draw on the author's agency in a distinctly un-Barthesian way⁸ — referring to it as a novel "born out of anger" (Streitfeld, 2016), "full of rage against US imperialism" (Tran, 2015), its "fundamental anger" weltering "at the heart of the politics and protests and public discourse of America today" (Robert Olen Butler in Streitfeld, 2016).

The Sympathizer is indeed sharply critical of America and its role in the Vietnamese peoples' struggle for freedom, and on a metatextual level, it criticises the way in which the Vietnam war has been represented in American narratives that for decades were the only accessible representation of the historical events. In an interview with Paul Tran (2015), Nguyen makes it clear that emotional considerations were part of the impetus of the novel when he says that "the first instinct of the book" was to be critical of the role of the Americans in Vietnam, and

⁸ In this regard, the fact that the author is Vietnamese American surely plays a role, as most of the interviews and reviews take pains to draw a connection between the events of the novel and Nguyen's ethnicity and personal history, to an extent that one would not normally expect with regard to a white American author. Compare the disproportionate amount of attention lavished on Marlon James' nationality, sexuality and childhood in discussions of the 2015 Man Booker Prize winner, *A brief history of seven killings* (2014) (Cocozza, 2015; Harvey, 2015; Morris, 2016) — even though James' socioeconomic background is vastly different from any of the characters in the book and even though gay identity does not play a significant role in the novel. For a discussion of the relation between author agency and personal history on the one hand and a perceived minority experience on the other, as well as the demand for "AUTHENTICITY" this engenders, see David Gunning (2012). It would be interesting to trace the ways in which metamodernist notions of AUTHENTICITY plays into notions of SUBJECTIVITY in a backlash against poststructuralism, thereby contributing to a social climate of identity fetishisation, but this falls outside the scope of this thesis.

"not to adopt the usual position of Vietnamese Americans, which is either to be grateful to be rescued by Americans, or conciliatory, not directly confrontational in the literature".

Even though Nguyen deliberately took pains not to single out America, but to "hold everyone accountable", including South Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese communism (Tran, 2015), *The Sympathizer* was written as a response to a great body of Asian American literature, which is

often times not very angry. There's not a lot of rage, at least not in the past few decades. And if there is anger or rage, it has to be directed at the ignorant: the Asian country of origin or Asian families or Asian patriarchs. While all that is important, I sensed a reluctance to be angry at American culture or at the United States for what it has done. That's why, in the book, I adopt a much angrier tone towards American culture and the US. (Nguyen, in Tran, 2015)

In sharp contrast to postmodernism's overemphasis on textuality, as well as its social detachment and disaffection, a novel such as *The Sympathizer* indicates how notions of affect, SUBJECTIVITY and ETHICAL CONCERNs intersect and manifest in a shift in author-reader or text-reader relations. By using affect to establish an intersubjective reading position, metamodernism not only acknowledges that fiction *can* have an emotional effect on its readers, but demands that it *should*. It is part of the metamodernist ethical imperative that fiction should express an emotional response to a societal problem, while at the same time eliciting an emotional and moral response from its reader. (See AFFECT THEORY for a more detailed discussion on how a novel such as Willem Anker's *Buy's* (2014) draws on notions of affect to activate an understanding of ontology and relationality towards an ethical end.)

AUTHENTICITY, NOUN. (ALSO AUTHENTIC, ADJ.)

"The fact or quality of being true or in accordance with fact; veracity; correctness", it can also refer to an "accurate reflection of real life, verisimilitude". Connecting with the notion of SINCERITY, authenticity can also denote the "quality of truthful correspondence between inner feelings and their outward expression; unaffectedness" (OED, 2015).

Related to notions of SINCERITY and REALISM, there is a noticeable demand for authenticity⁹ in metamodernist texts. Whereas postmodernism is associated with inauthenticity, depthlessness and surface play, ahistoricity and a lack of affect (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:58), metamodernism pursues the possibility of an authentic expression of inner depth or a true self. While this is in a certain sense reminiscent of Romanticism [cf. AFFECT; MYTH], as with almost every aspect of metamodernism it is less an uncomplicated revival of prior aesthetics than it is always already informed by the lessons of postmodernism.

Moore (2011:par. 88) describes the renewed emphasis on authenticity as a global phenomenon, part of an increasing interest in "self-making" and "self-stylization" which reaches beyond a mere "self-cultivation as a form of individualization or the embrace of possessive individualism". Instead, it more properly embodies Foucault's notion of a "desperate attempt to imagine the present" as being other than it is, in order to transform "not by destroying it, but by grasping in it what it is". For Moore, this impetus is part of a drive to give form to the self, as well as to the world and relations with others. As a search for a "style of existence, a way of being", it is a "palpable commitment to the value of the present"; a "drive towards, and demand for, the 'real"'; a "massive drive towards authenticity, truth and reality that is observable in so many different domains of life around the globe".

⁹ Authenticity in this sense should not be confused with the notion of "authenticism". "Authenticism" indicates the way in which novels by authors who are considered to be "minorities" are judged according to their perceived verisimilitude or adherence to what is perceived to be the "authentic minority experience" (Gunning, 2012:780). In this regard, the literary works of "minority" writers are "consumed... as offering a particular object of knowledge, the relation of the text to the imagined figure of the author". The novel is thus reduced to the particularities of its author's ethnicity, gender, class, etc. Gunning's central argument (2012) deals with how several black British and British Asian writers sought to unsettle this ascription of "authenticity" to their work by focusing on instances of empathy as a way to engage with broader ethical and political questions, thereby breaking out of the narrowly ascribed category of "minority writers".

However, this drive towards authenticity, truth and reality is always already problematised — and sometimes frustrated — by theories of postmodernism, as they have been absorbed and to an extent taken for granted in a postmodern cultural milieu. Maltby (2007:29), for example, points to the self-reflexive nature of contemporary popular culture, as manifested in parodies and self-consciousness about genre, genre stereotypes and audience expectations; as well as in "media coverage of media coverage" — all of which signals a "hyperconsciousness about how we communicate today... a sense of entrapment in a media culture saturated with catchphrases, platitudes, factoids, and PR hype".

The proliferation of simulacra disrupts communication in both directions: Gibbons (2015:38) points out that metamodernist art has set as its own goal to critique "the real" and the "unreal", because of the overwhelming feeling that "the prolific reshaping of events by media discourses... prevent us from really knowing what is going on in the world". At the same time, as Maltby (2007:29) argues, the oversaturation of culture by media discourses, along with the hyperconsciousness about how we communicate, result in a "heightened suspicion that we can no longer speak authentically or innocently".

The metamodernist anxiety about *wanting* to speak (or to be) authentically and innocently [cf. SINCERITY] is embodied by characters such as Adam Gordon, the protagonist of *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011) by Ben Lerner. As a twenty-something white male American, Adam can be said to be representative of a certain type that populates the novels of authors such as David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers, and Mark Danielewski (cf. Timmer, 2010). Wood (2011) describes Adam — a young American poet who is spending a fellowship year in Madrid, for which he had received funding based on largely false premises — as follows:

Adam — at once ideological and post-ideological, vaguely engaged and profoundly spectatorial, charming and loathsome — is a convincing representative of twenty-first century American *Homo literatus*. He is a creature of privilege and lassitude, living through a time of inflamed political certainty, yet certain only of his own uncertainty and thus always more easily defined by negation than affirmation, clearly dedicated to poetry but unable to define or defend it (except to intone that poetry isn't about anything), and implicitly nostalgic for earlier, mythical eras of great strength and surety.

Adam is the typical (American) postmodern subject, in the sense that Timmer (2010:320) uses it to indicate the generation that was born after postmodernism had already reached its apex and who consequently has internalised a postmodern frame of thought. As far as Adam is concerned "we are all trapped in modes of inauthenticity, all of us mediated by discourses

more powerful than the mere individual's..." (Wood, 2011).¹⁰ The central question of the novel regards its protagonist's many layers of pretension, his deception and his (deceptive) claims to be no more than a poseur: "If Adam Gordon were able to summon himself into authenticity, would there be anything to see? Are we in fact constituted by our inauthenticities?" Or as one of the characters asks of Adam: "When are you going to stop pretending that you're only pretending to be a poet?" (Lerner, 2011)

The metamodernist struggle regarding questions of authenticity is closely related to issues of subjectivity. The seeming impossibility of authenticity is partly a result of the problematic of self-expression in an age where the subject has been deconstructed and demystified to be no more than an unstable product of discourse. This leads to two interrelated problems: firstly, if the decentred subject is theorised as a "lack", then who or what is experiencing, and to whom can lived experiences and emotions be attributed? (cf. Timmer, 2010:360) [AFFECT; SUBJECTIVITY]. Secondly, given that emotions and reality are still being experienced, how can they be expressed in an authentic manner? As Timmer (2010:112) argues: the postmodern cultural milieu is characterised by a certain framework of contemporary socio-cultural practices in which it is not only deemed inappropriate to express feelings, but nearly impossible to do so in any authentic, honest, or sincere way.

The three novels that Timmer (2010) discusses — *Infinite jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace, *A heartbreaking work of staggering genius* (2000) by Dave Eggers, and *House of leaves* (2000) by Mark Danielewski — all struggle to restructure a sense of self from the "empty subject position" of postmodernism (2010:108) that is characterised by silence. The focus is on the subject's search for "something real" and a way in which to represent this "something" in an authentic manner (2010:109). However, the

"something real" can obviously not be simply and straightforwardly presented but only circumscribed; it lies beyond the reach of a more postmodern writing practice, but another way of narratively presenting this "something" has not been really figured out (yet). (Timmer, 2010:109)

¹⁰ Wood (2011) notes that this "seems a very American, very privileged kind of impotence", an "expensive weakness" which the novel "deliberately contrasts" with "the fervor and political ardency of the Spanish artists and poets whom he befriends, a fervor that can seem both naïve and courageous alongside Adam's knowingness".

The difficulty of negotiating authentic selfhood after postmodernism is clear in Timmer's discussion of *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace. Timmer (2010:167-168) refers to the novel's "unresolved tension":

a tension that one critic summarized by asking: "Can Wallace have his human beings and his anti-humanism at once?" That is, the novel on the one hand focuses on human experiences, on human emotions — many reviewers have remarked on the (apparently noteworthy) attention to character that the book displays — but on the other hand these human aspects are always almost anxiously presented, embedded in highly self-conscious prose, which highlights the difficulty or impossibility of straightforwardly presenting emotions in a novel written at the end of the millennium, a novel grounded in a postmodernist tradition... I believe the AA narrative format, with its focus on the experiential level and not on sophisticated stylistic tricks, in *Infinite Jest* indeed functions to re-introduce some aspects of storytelling that may have seemed "trite" for the sophisticated reader especially at the time the book was published, such as the ban on irony, the importance of being true and honest, the aspect of "sharing" and the necessity of empathetic identification with others.

In the same way, the novel *The tetherballs of Bougainville* (1998) by Mark Leyner that Toth (2010) discusses deals with the search for "accuracy" as a "vehicle for shared understanding, the best and perhaps *only* mode of accurate communication" (2010:77). The novel is "earnestly engaged in an outright rejection of what is typically understood as the postmodern impulse toward narrative paralysis, or authorial suicide" and "refuses to reject the possibility of communication with the other; it refuses, that is, to abandon the impossible as *impossible*" (Toth, 2010:77) — however difficult that might be.

The use of the epistolary form in metamodernist fiction is a symptom of this belief in the possibility of communication with the other. Amian (2008:67) refers to the epistolary format as having traditionally provided "powerful discourses of subject formation" in order to "construct its readers as reading subjects engaged in processes of exchange" [SUBJECTIVITY]. Referring to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* (2002), Amian argues that the epistolary format embodies certain "epistolary tropes" (cf. 2008:199) related to authenticity:

The subject fashions itself as subject as it "confesses" its "true self" to an "other" and performatively enacts its own inscription in a set of discursive formations that combine such powerful tropes as "honesty", "intimacy", "truth", and the aforementioned "authenticity" with notions of an "essence" [or] "core". (2008:177)

As a result

[t]he "self" here emerges as the product of a discourse of "self-expression" that perpetuates the familiar tropes of "authenticity" and "essence" as it pursues the subject's construction along the lines of a performative struggle to communicate its "innermost" feelings and convictions. (2008:179)

The metamodernist subject struggles with the self-conscious knowledge that they are performatively enacting their own inscription in discourse, as this knowledge constantly threatens to undermine their attempts at confessing a true self in an honest and authentic manner.

An example of such a subject is the character Nao in Ruth Ozeki's *A tale for the time being* (2013). The novel contains Nao's story in the form of diary entries, where Nao is constantly "editing" her own textual self. Addressed directly to a reader addressed as "you" (which can refer both to the reader of the novel and, as it later becomes apparent, to Ruth, another character in the novel who is reading the diary of Nao), Nao writes and rewrites her story, for example:

Ugh. That was dumb. I'll have to do better. I bet you're wondering what kind of stupid girl would write words like that. (Ozeki, 2013b:4)

Are you still there? I just reread what I wrote about the otaku salaryman, and I want to apologize. That was nasty. That was not a nice way to start.

I don't want to give you the wrong impression. (2013b:5)

In *The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen, the protagonist (identified only as "the Captain") believes that in order to communicate authentically, form is just as important as content — or, to borrow Amian's formulation (2008:179), the Captain believes that the subject's "performative struggle to communicate his innermost convictions" can only take place through a textual construction in which the form cannot be separated from the content.

The novel opens with a confession of the duplicity of the self:

I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I am also a man of two minds. I am not some misunderstood mutant from a comic book or a horror movie, although some have treated me as such. I am simply able to see any issue from both sides.

Sometimes I flatter myself that this is a talent, and although it is admittedly one of a minor nature, it is perhaps also the sole talent I possess. At other times, when I reflect on how I cannot help but observe the world in such a fashion, I wonder if what I have should even be called talent. After all, a talent is something you use, not something that uses you. The talent you cannot *not* use, the talent that possesses you — that is a hazard, I must confess. But in the month when this confession begins, my way of seeing the world still seemed more of a virtue than a danger, which is how some dangers first appear. (2015:1)

What follows for the next eighteen chapters is indeed a "confession", addressed to "my dear Commandant". It soon transpires that the Captain has been incarcerated by said Commandant in a cell where he is now writing the "confession". The Captain proceeds to tell his story as a communist spy working for the Southern Vietnamese police force. The story starts with the fall of Saigon and details the escape of the Captain along with his commander, the General, and others to America, and eventually the Captain's return to Vietnam where he is captured by the Vietnamese communist forces.

Written entirely in the first person, the narrative comprises many of the tropes one would associate with a confession, such as the Captain's doubt and guilt about the men he had to kill, his first sexual experience, infatuation with the General's daughter Lana. The narrative relies on intertext and irony, but is also interspersed with speech acts that perform the narration as a confession, e.g. "I confess that the name still hurts" (2015:19); "I can only testify that he was a sincere man" (2015:22); "I confess that I admired him, even though he was my enemy" (2015:30); "I confess that I could not help but feel pity" (2015:66); "[t]o this matter I confess that I had not devoted much thought" (2015:39); "I confess I took pleasure in doing what I was supposed to do and not supposed to do, interrogate him until he broke" (2015:185); "I confess that my plan was to give her the money in my pocket" (2015:196); "in that moment, I confess that burning the letter was also sending it to hell" (2015:255).

After almost 300 pages, however, it becomes apparent that far from being a spontaneous outpouring of an innermost self, this "confession" has been carefully edited and rewritten over the course of many months and already comprises many different versions. Some of the revisions were done by the Captain himself, some by the Commandant who "was a diligent editor, always ready to note my many errata and digressions and always urging me to delete, excise, reword, or add" (2015:296).

The Commandant explains the problem with the confession:

If your confession was even just satisfactory, the commissar would let you proceed with what he calls your oral examination, he said. But my opinion of what he calls your written examination is that it hardly seems like a genuine confession to me.

Haven't I confessed to many things, Commandant?

In content, perhaps, but not in style. Confessions are as much about style as content, as the Red Guards have shown us. All we ask for is a certain way with words. (2015:299-300)

As far as the Commandant is concerned, the confession is not "genuine" — it lacks authenticity. The Commandant argues that the Captain has been contaminated by the decadence of the West (2015:300), that despite his claims that he has been labouring for the communist ideal, his language betrays him as one of the bourgeois (2015:307), as his words are "not clear, not succinct, not direct, not simple. It is the language of the elite", not written "for the people" (2015:306).

The Captain, on the contrary, firmly believes that, rather than obfuscating his "genuine" self and beliefs, the style of his confession is an inseparable part of his authentic expression:

I was recalcitrant, for I could have shortened my unwanted stay by writing what he wanted me to write. *Long live the Party and the State. Follow Ho Chi Minh's glorious example. Let's build a beautiful and perfect society!* I believed in these slogans, but I could not bring myself to write them. I could say that I was contaminated by the West, but I could not inscribe that on paper. It seemed as much of a crime to commit a cliché to paper as to kill a man, an act I had acknowledged rather than confessed, for killing Sonny and the crapulent major were not crimes in the commandant's eyes. (2015:305-306)

The Commandant's definition of authenticity in writing — being clear, succinct, direct and simple, free from stylistic and rhetorical embellishments — can be read as a pre-modern ideal of mimesis, or a Romantic belief in the possibility of true expression. In comparison, the Captain's insistence on the correct form in service of authenticity can be framed as a metamodernist negotiation between the desire to speak authentically and the self-reflexivity and self-consciousness inherited from postmodernism. Instead of claiming, as a postmodern subject might have done, that it is impossible to express the self in an authentic manner due

to the hypermediation of culture, the metamodernist subject embraces this self-reflexivity and subsumes it into its quest for authentic speaking.¹¹

On a more thematic level, certain metamodernist works react against postmodern notions of mediation and inauthenticity by turning to history¹² to conjure a time that is regarded as "simpler" and more "authentic" than our digitalised, consumerist present. In terms of art and art history, Backhuis (2013) explains that "authenticity" is often used with regard to non-Western art that dates from before colonialism, and which is therefore seen to be free from Western influences. Drawing on the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Backhuis suggests that the "us-them" mentality as remnant of colonialism gives rise to a romantic and nostalgic yearning for an earlier time and the authentic Other as escape from the fast-paced globalised, modern world [cf. MYTH].

Authenticity in this sense can thus be taken as a response to the postmodern preoccupation with the mediated nature of reality, and is in this way related to a renewed call for REALISM in art. In two post-millennial works of historical fiction — Philipp Meyer's *The Son* (2013) and Willem Anker's *Buys* (2014) — the call for "authenticity" is framed in terms of the tension between "savagery" and "civilisation", nature and culture. Consequently, these novels can be read as criticising notions of Western imperialism and narratives of the "civilisation" of "primitive" or "wild" lands.

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the family saga *The Son* (2013) is described as "an epic of the American Southwest" (Blythe, 2013). Charles (2013) summarises it as "the tale of the United States written in blood across the Texas plains, a 200-year cycle of theft and murder that shreds any golden myths of civilized development".

Eli McCullough, the first of the novel's three narrators, lived in Texas in the mid-nineteenth century as the child of pioneer settlers who was abducted and adopted into a Comanche

¹¹ Likewise, Gibbons (2015:35) maintains that many metamodernist writers hold form and style to be central "in enabling literature to engage with world affairs" – implying that not only content but form and style as well are to an extent determined by an underlying ethical imperative.

¹² See Young (2011) for the ways in which metamodernist historical fiction moves away from historiographical metafiction's preoccupation with postmodern textuality in order to engage with affective and ontological questions of authenticity. Rather than busying itself with epistemological questions such as the accuracy or veracity of representations of history, metamodernist historical fiction emphasises affective structures — how historical events "felt" like — with the goal of providing an "authentic" representation of reality.

band after his family was killed. As part of this band, hunting and killing at will, enjoying the many sexual relations available to him, he "celebrates and mourns a vibrant, violent way of life that seems more authentic to him than the pampered, regulated existence that he lives to see in the 20th century" (Charles, 2013).

On a textual level, Blythe (2013) lauds the authenticity with which Meyer allows his characters to be true to themselves [see SUBJECTIVITY in this regard], rather than forcibly imposing contemporary values on them, thereby allowing the novel's

otherness and its characters the dignity of blundering through the world as it was. These are not heroic transplants from the present, disguised in buckskin and loincloths. They are unrepentant, greedy, often homicidal lost souls.

For Charles (2013), the novel's depiction of its nineteenth century characters "arrives like a flaming arrow in the bleeding liberal heart of political correctness" as it shows the unrepentant depiction of cruelty on both sides, and refuses to turn the indigenous peoples into "romanticized victims".

Buys (2014) is the narration of the life story of the historical figure Coenraad de Buys, once known as the most dangerous man in the Cape colony of the late eighteenth century (Human, 2014). In his celebration of violence and the baser human drives, Buys resembles the character of Eli McCullough. Described as a story about the origin of humankind where the insanity of humans and their subconscious is given free rein (Snyman, 2014), Buys's story can be read as a form of resistance not only against colonial oppressors, but against the limitations that civilisation seeks to force on humanity. Van Schalkwyk (2014) points out that the dissident and transgressive nature of Buys's rebellion against the colonial powers also manifests in the many borders (literal borders as well as borders of decency and humanity) that he crosses as he deliberately leaves order behind.

Discussing this aspect of Buys's character in terms of Nietzsche's notions of slave morality — morality which seeks to repress the baser human emotions such as lust, selfishness and violence — Van Schalkwyk (2014) argues that Buys can be read as a "higher" individual in the Nietzschean sense. Buys unrepentantly follows his animal instincts — the rationalistic and moralistic inhibition of which is no less than delusion, an "excess" of civilisation (Van Schalkwyk, 2014). Read in the Nietzschean terms that Van Schalkwyk (2014) ascribes to him, Buys can be said to embody the "*Übermensch*" from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the idols*

(1889) — a super-human being who is able to live an authentic life by casting off delusions of morality and honestly embracing his base human drives.¹³

Buy's unapologetic belief in the honesty of the hunt, of violence and savagery, is indicated in his worldview, for example when he claims that war is the only remaining honesty in the wilderness (2014:104); or when he states that rumours and stories (words) are meaningless because the only certainties are those of nature and violence:

Hier op die grens kan jy skree wat jy wil. Stories en gerugte wis mekaar uit. Die enigste feite is die bosse en miershope en lood en lemme. (2014:127)

[Here on the border you can shout what you want. Stories and rumours obliterate each other. The only facts are the bushes and anthills and lead and blades. (2014:127)]¹⁴

Virtues such as respect for others or for yourself are disdained as being feeble and delusional in comparison to the brutal, blunt reality in which Buy's moves. As he tells the missionary Kemp:

Respek? In hierdie woesterny moet jy nie loop soek vir respek nie, Kemp. Hier is bloot vleis en bloed en kut. (2014:213) [cf. ONTOLOGY]

[Respect? In this wilderness you shouldn't go looking for respect, Kemp. Here are only meat and blood and cunt. (2014:213)]

Buy's insistence on authenticity — and his belief that it can only be found in surrendering to natural human instincts and drives — finds a counterpoint in the missionary Kemp, who believes in the salvation brought by civilisation. Buy's constantly attempts to disabuse Kemp of his idealistic notions. When they are told that one of their companions had killed two Bushmen who were suspected of being cattle thieves, Kemp is outraged, but Buy's reckons:

Daar is geen lewe hier sonder bloedvergieting nie. As hy dink hy, of die leërskare sendelinge wat die Kolonie binnestroom, gaan die mense op een of ander wyse veredel, dat

¹³ Compare Kirby's (2009:124-125) description of MYTH in metamodernist art: the preoccupation with "predemocratic" societies, the prevalence of "crypto-fascistic and sub-Nietzschean" superhumans, and romanticised and archaic figures.

¹⁴ All translations are my own.

eendrag moontlik is in hierdie wildernis, dan is hy in die moeilikheid. Hier vreet ons mekaar. (2014:219)

[There is no life here without bloodshed. If he thinks that he, or the legion of missionaries streaming into the Colony, will somehow ennable the people, that harmony is possible in this wilderness, then he is in trouble. Here we devour each other. (2014:219)]

Despite Buys's blunt belief in the uncomplicated laws of instinct and violence, the novel also engages with the metamodernist difficulty of how to express authentically. The narrative problematises the postmodern notion of reality as a linguistic construct and the impossibility of there being anything outside of the textual by making an embodied claim on the reader [AFFECT THEORY]. In contrast to postmodernism's anti-realist stance which claimed that reality is unrepresentable (cf. Toth, 2010:169) and employed metafictional strategies to emphasise the textually constructed nature of both characters and story [REALISM], metamodernism allows for the possibility that, although reality might be unrepresentable fully in language, it can be experienced authentically by means of affect and the body.

For example, regarding the relationship between Buys and Maria, the narrator Alom-Buys addresses the reader directly:

Betrag ons goed, loer ons af as jy kan, want ná twee eeue kan ek steeds nie ons liefkosings onder woorde bring nie. Woorde soos drif en allesverterend maak geen prente van haar tepels nie. Geertruy het my ordentlik leer lees en skryf; ek weet wat dit werd is. Knoop eerder die voorflap van jou broek los of glip 'n hand onder jou rok in en kyk hoe span haar rug. (2014:37)

[Observe us well, spy on us if you can, because after two centuries I still cannot put our caresses into words. Words like passion and all-consuming make no pictures of her nipples. Geertruy taught me how to read and write properly, I know what it is worth. Unfasten the front of your trousers instead or slip a hand under your dress and look how her back arches. (2014:37)]

In the end notions of sincerity and authenticity, while both purported to be metamodernist ideals, are haunted by postmodernist ideas and theories in such a manner that a simple return to modernist (or even just pre-postmodernist) values is rendered impossible. Instead, metamodernist authenticity can be said to employ something akin to a strategic naivety comparable to the self-consciousness of metamodernist sincerity: a willingness to engage

with the *possibility* of authentic expression even while recognising the ultimate unattainability of it.

ETHICAL CONCERNS — ETHICAL, *adj.* (also ETHICS, *noun.*)

A quality of or relating to moral principles, values or rules, especially as used to make value judgments about wrong or right, or to inform matters of personal responsibility; also that which is "morally right; honourable; virtuous; decent" (OED, 2015).

Although metamodernism is not necessarily any more or less influenced by religious concerns than previous epochs, and although it certainly does not hold up the beliefs of organised religion as the reason for its ethical concerns, it does reflect a certain renewal of theism in arts and culture (cf. Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:6). Geddes (2007:70) remarks that, since at least the early 1990s, literary and cultural theory have increasingly turned their attention to matters of ethics, in particular questions of suffering — topics that had been "neglected (if not considered taboo) in the previous few decades". Referring to the ideas of Geoffrey Harpham, Geddes (2007:70) argues that postmodernism considered ethics to be a binary and universalising discourse belonging to the Enlightenment — an assumption that was thrown into crisis with the discovery that literary theorist Paul De Man had written several articles published in a collaborationist newspaper during the Holocaust. With this discovery, the relationship between theory, ethics and suffering was problematised and became a central topic of discussion in theoretical discourses once more.

Toth and Brooks (2007:2,3) points to the shift in Derrida's later theory towards "distinctly ethico-political issues" in works such as *Force of law* (1990), *The other heading* (1991), *Specters of Marx* (1994) and *Politics of friendship* (1994) — works that emphasise themes of ethics, justice and the messianic — and which to a great extent influenced and informed theoretical discussions after the 1990s. In addition, religious thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas began to attract a certain amount of critical attention in recent years (Toth & Brooks, 2007:2); as did theorists who focus on issues of "community, religion and ethical responsibility", like Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-Luc Marion, John D. Caputo and Slavoj Žižek (Toth & Brooks, 2007:5). Also the work of Terry Eagleton, specifically his *After theory* (2003),

exhibits a turn towards truth, meaning, ethics, mortality and "the good life" (Kirby, 2009:28-36).

Although the presence of these themes is by itself already of interest, the assumption that these themes are valid and essential matters with which theory *should* concern itself is perhaps an even clearer indication of the shift that has taken place within cultural theory. Examples of this shift are the surge of critical discussions regarding ethics and the work of J.M. Coetzee (e.g. Attridge (2004), De Jong (2004), Anker (2006), and Marais (2012)), and the proliferation of critical works dealing with trauma in South African literature (e.g. Johan Anker (2008), Human (2009), Van den Berg (2011), Ester, Van der Merwe and Mulder (2012), Jacobs (2013), Fourie (2014), and Hamman and Viljoen (2015)).

Part of the turn to ethical concerns is a deliberate rejection of what is perceived to be "postmodernism's apparent solipsism and irresponsibility, its ethical and social vacuity" (Toth & Brooks, 2007:4); its creation of a "moral vacuum" (Toth, 2010:14). While postmodernism was characterised by a "narrative and theoretical production that is typically read as the effect of a subversive and nihilistic epistemological trend", metamodernism embraces a discourse that is "no longer compelled to *focus on* (or endorse) the impossibility of the subject (or author) and the need to avoid a grounded, situated, commitment to the ethical, political and/or religious" (Toth & Brooks, 2007:5) [SUBJECTIVITY].

In contrast, social commitment and a deep sense of responsibility marks metamodernist fiction. Referring to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's notion of the "aesth-ethical" (2010:2), Gibbons (2015:31) asserts:

Aesth-ethical commitment pervades what I am here calling metamodernist writing: it is opposed to the injustices of global capitalism, concerned by the increased digitalization and hyper-reality of society, conscious of the shifting social relationships in a globalizing world, and it hopes for a shared sustainable future, however untenable that may be. In other words, metamodernism is concerned with global ethics... [M]etamodernist writers share with global ethicists a commitment to justice, though while global ethicists seek to shape debates and find solutions, the writing of metamodernist authors has the ability to raise the consciousness and conscience of the general public: fiction thus becomes a vehicle through which to increase awareness of contemporary insecurities — environmental, social, political.

The concern with ethics and justice gives rise to the contemporary novel as "inextricably linked to the world" (Fjellestad & Watson, 2015:6). Perceiving fiction to be connected with the world in this way is only possible if literature (and art in general) is believed to have the

power to engage with its audience in order to elicit an emotional and moral response from them [AFFECT]. This belief manifests in new or "refurbished" genres that can be lumped under the umbrella term "political fiction" — fiction which names a "literary response to a social factor" and which is situated very firmly within its political, cultural and material contexts (Fjellestad & Watson, 2015:4).

Examples include

speculative realism (Colson Whitehead and Junot Díaz), cli-fi (Peter Matthiessen, Lydia Millet, Nathaniel Rich), the credit-crunch novel (Paul Auster, Peter Mountford, Joshua Farris, Jess Walters), the world-systems novel (Dave Eggers, Moshin Hamid), the neuronovel (Richard Powers, E.L. Doctorow, Rivka Galchen, Jonathan Lethem), hysterical realism (David Foster Wallace, Denis Johnson, Jeffrey Eugenides, Michael Chabon). (Fjellestad & Watson, 2015:4)

Apart from a literary response to global ethical problems, the metamodernist commitment to ethics has profound implications for notions of subjectivity. In this regard, postmodernism's critique and dismantling of power structures are often cited. Although the view that postmodernism was somehow "anti-ethical" is prevalent in discussions about its demise and succession, Geddes (2007:70-71) argues that postmodernism has not been completely apathetic to matters regarding ethics.¹⁵ She indicates the debate that surfaced in the early 1990s about whether or not postmodernism was ethically accountable, with one side arguing that postmodernism is a "relativistic, narcissistic hermeticism written in elitist discourse that is blind or indifferent to suffering", and the other that postmodernism "began in ethical concerns, as a critique of oppressive power, and has proceeded by deconstructing and destabilizing the very structures that oppress, repress, and obscure".

As Geddes (2007:71) points out, however, the importance of the debate does not necessarily lie in which side's arguments are correct or valid, but rather that "both sides agree that a concern with ethics is a good thing", that both sides used "criteria that value ethics", and that both sides argue that "theory *should* have ethical concerns" and that the lack of engagement with ethical matters on the part of theory is seen as a failing.

Geddes' argument regarding the place of ethics in postmodernism and metamodernism confirms the notion that postmodernism has reached its limits (thus proving its own

¹⁵ For an extensive criticism of the notion that postmodernism is anti-ethical, also see Flax (2007).

success), and that metamodernism is now continuing the postmodern project. Postmodernism was instrumental in bringing matters concerning ethics to the attention of theorists, but is itself unequipped to respond in a meaningful way to the issues it has brought to light:

By exposing the cracks in seemingly comprehensive totalities and reading authoritative texts against themselves, postmodernism's critiques created space in which previously marginalized and silenced voices were able to speak. What these voices had to say brought to scholars' attention a whole range of ethical issues, experiences of suffering, and aspects of human experience (including the religious) that had not previously garnered attention. Interestingly, these revelations called for ways of thinking, reading, and responding that exposed the limits of postmodernism's approaches... [T]he very delegitimizing of grand narratives by postmodern thought opened up space that allowed and encouraged the particular narratives of those not in power to be told and heard, but... in doing so, this "delegitimizing" gesture has brought forth narratives that describe, express, and protest a range of suffering, injustice, and evil that postmodernism has been ill equipped to respond to — hence its turn to questions of ethics, suffering, and religion. (2007:72-73)

In short, for Geddes (2007:77) the current turn towards ethics is part of a "kind of responsiveness to the other that is not reducible to a presumptuous or distanced knowing" (2007:77) [AFFECT], since postmodernism in its most dominant form was so focused on criticising, exposing, fragmenting and dismantling power structures that it lacked "modes of engagement that can attend and respond to the suffering spoken by those for whom it has made way".

In response to this perceived lack in postmodern criticism, metamodernism turns towards "the allied issues of relationality and complicity" (Gibbons, 2015:31) in its preoccupation with global ethics. Relationality, as Gibbons uses it here, "signifies our human connectedness in the globalizing world and consequently our ethical obligations to each other" and demands the acknowledgment of our "complicity in the state of global affairs"¹⁶, which includes "intersubjective memories" as well as "awareness of our participation in various political, economic, and environmental networks" (2015:31).

¹⁶ See for example reviewers' responses to Philipp Meyer's *The Son*, which is praised for exposing "our own likely complicity in the sins of a former age" (Blythe, 2013) and for emphasising how "the prosperity we enjoy today" came at the expense of those who had been silenced by history (Charles, 2013).

The renewed focus on ethical matters in metamodernism manifests in literature in various ways. Josh Toth (2010:3), for example, refers to Klaus Stierstorfer's ideas to indicate the intersection between subjectivity, ethical concerns, and realism. The implication is that scholars, critics and writers need to navigate a notion of identity that has been problematised by postmodern deconstruction, while at the same time needing a concept of common ground which can serve as foundation for ethical arguments. As a result, some notion of referentiality is needed, as well as a sense of subjectivity that is more coherent than the fragmented self of poststructuralism (cf. Timmer, 2010) [REALISM, SUBJECTIVITY].

Notions of identity and referentiality combine in a renewed interest in and commitment to a politics of representation. (See REALISM for a discussion of how Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) asserts a belief in representational accuracy in the context of the politics of representation.) Jones (2012:84) identifies such a commitment in recent novels by Scottish authors, which challenge "complacent ways of seeing and portraying the world", deploying "strategies associated with the iconoclastic impulses of postmodernism" to this end.

Referring to the work of writer A.L. Kennedy, Jones (2012:84) argues that the "ethical seriousness" of Kennedy's "method and intent" seem to undermine the "deft rendering of her metafictional preoccupations with the purpose of writing". Rather than simply a technical display or indulgence in postmodern knowingness, Kennedy's work is often taken to be expressive of a more humanistic agenda:

The imputation here of the lesser moral intent and effect of postmodern writing implies that an ethical discourse can only be adequately realised in more humanist modes which deal in a recognisable world of referents and values, and a shared reality. (2012:84)

However, Kennedy's fiction (and metamodernist fiction in general)

does not promote the return to a straightforward humanist discourse but employs the techniques of postmodernism to counter its own most radical effects. Her work does not present a singular, indisputable reality or truth, but invites us to arrive at an ethical interpretation of an ambivalently depicted situation; postmodern literary writing enables this precisely because of its privileged doubleness and irony. (2012:84)

Connecting to the need for a sense of "common ground", community, or intersubjective relations [SUBJECTIVITY], Amian (2008:199) frames the notion of social responsibility enacted by a newer generation of writers in terms of a call to response, or moral engagement, which

also brings notions of AFFECT into play. According to Amian (2008:188), literary works that can be identified as metamodernist negotiate a "profound 'moral' or 'ethical' responsibility" and engage in a discourse of moral responsibility that is interdependent on the "performative enactment of 'meaningful' (inter)subjectivities" and a discourse of "authentic selfhood" — all of which are illustrated by tropes of intimacy, authenticity, honesty, truth and ethical questions of responsibility. The notion of a reader-author or reader-text relation is also activated, as Amian discusses the use of dialogic forms which inscribe an "intersubjective reading position" to elicit an emotional and moral response from the reader — a response which is regarded as a moral function of fiction.

In a similar way, Gibbons (2015:38) maintains in her discussion of Adam Thirlwell's novel *Kapow!* (2012) that Thirlwell deliberately aimed to "evoke solemn thought from the reader", to "elicit contemplation from the reader of their awareness and/or ignorance of global injustices", to demand of the reader to "acknowledge their complicity in world affairs and their global responsibilities"; thereby placing "the reader at the center of both the book and the greater aesthetic politic he is expounding". This is indicative of the complicity and relationality (defined as "our involvement and our responsibility in the global systems, the social and political realms, that define the globalized world of the twenty-first century") that are "the ethical burdens" metamodernist art places on its audience (Gibbons, 2015:38).

The emphasis on the importance of social responsibility in literature and the activation of reader-author or reader-text relations in service of social responsibility are recurring themes in discussions of literary works regarded as metamodernist. Timmer (2010:appendix A) identifies the need for "sharing" as a way of "identifying with others" as a core characteristic of metamodernist fiction, enacted not only between characters, but between text and reader. Toth (2010:78) interprets Mark Leyner's novel *The tetherballs of Bougainville* (1998) as a claim for the ability of narrative to be "a productive form of social, or public, exchange" (2010:78).

Not only does metamodernism regard narrative as capable of being a form of social exchange, it requires this of fiction in order to fulfil a sense of social responsibility. As example, Rebein refers to novelist Jonathan Franzen's identification "with rather than in opposition to readers" (2007:206) to enable a sense of "sharing" and social response — which correlates with Franzen's overt rejection of literary postmodernism on the grounds that it is inefficient for engaging with matters of society and community and irreconcilable with a sense of social responsibility (2007:204,205).

Buys (2014) by Willem Anker provides an example of a metamodernist model for ethical relations between self and other. It operates on an intersection between subjectivity and ontology, has implications for EPISTEMOLOGY, and reflects a relational understanding of SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES.¹⁷

The passage that recounts the first night Buys's second wife, Nombini, spends at his house, gives the clearest example of this. Buys took her from her husband, the Xhosa chieftain Langa, during a raid to take back cattle that Langa had allegedly stolen from him.

The night at the dinner table with Maria (Buys's first wife), Nombini's gaze — intractable and inscrutable — is emphasised. Her eyes are far away (2014:94), and Buys claims that the Lord alone knows what a woman thinks when she is looking like that (2014:97). The word "kyk" (to look) and other verbs of looking — "loer", "dophou" — are repeated through the passage, for example: "Nombini kom orent en kyk na my" (2014:92); "Ek praat met haar in Xhosa en sy sê nie veel nie. As ek ophou praat, kyk sy dadelik af en maak haarselv onsigbaar" (2014:93); "Sy haal 'n rooi kraal uit die voue van haar karos, laat dit val in die bakkie en kyk hoe die kraal al om die bodem tol" (2014:93); "Maria kyk hoe ek kyk vir hierdie vreemdeling toegewikkeld in haar karos" (2014:93); "af en toe loer ek vir Maria" (2014:93); "Ek hou vir Maria dop, weet hoe ek met elke heilige woord haar probeer streele en paaie en sien hoe die verdomde goed dan niks uitgerig kry nie" (2014:93).

[Nombini rises and looks at me (2014:92); I speak to her in Xhosa and she doesn't say much. If I stop talking, she immediately looks down and makes herself invisible (2014:93); She takes a red bead out of the folds of her kaross, drops it into the bowl and looks at the bead rolling around the bottom (2014:93); Maria looks at how I look at this stranger wrapped in her kaross (2014:93); now and then I peep at Maria (2014:93); I keep my eye on Maria, know how I am trying with every holy word to caress and coax her and see how the damn things accomplish nothing (2014:93).]¹⁸

A traditional epistemological framework — based on the uneven power relation between seeing, knowing subject and seen, known object — privileges a detached, distanced viewpoint that reduces the other to the epistemological product of the subject's interpretation [EPISTEMOLOGY]. Despite Buys's best efforts to know his new wife — thereby to fully possess

¹⁷ This intersection between ethics, subjectivity, and ontology also characterises metamodernist theories such as AFFECT THEORY, CHAOS THEORY and POSTHUMANISM.

¹⁸ All translations are my own.

and own her — the narrative constructs Nombini's subjectivity in a way that frustrates this kind of epistemological violence.

According to a relational mode of being, the other is recognised as a subject and allowed the "freedom to appear, always, as... too inconclusive, too multiple, too unfinished ever to be totally loved" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:68) — where to be loved implies to be known and possessed. A relational mode challenges the notion that seeing is a unilateral action, performed by the seeing subject on the object and reducing the object to a reflection or projection of what the subject desires it to be. While Buys is looking at Nombini, she is looking at him, and he cannot fathom her gaze. He wonders if she saw him in Langa's kraal, placing himself in the position of seen object to her subject: "Het sy gesien hoe ek uittroon tussen hulle, my baard, my maanhare?" (2014:94-95); "Kon die meid sien, daar waar sy gestaan het, hoe hierdie groot Kristen se hande langs sy sye bewe?" (2014:96)

[Did she see how I towered among them, my beard, my mane? (2014:94-95) Could the girl see, there where she was standing, how this big Christian's hands trembled at his side? (2014:96)]

The traditional subject/object relation is further frustrated through the extensive use of questions in the narrative. This strategy makes it clear that Buys does not and cannot know Nombini, something which he acknowledges himself when he confronts the reader:

terwyl ek lees, wonder ek oor my nuwe vrou se veraf oë. Ek weet wat jy dink: Sy is bang, sy is 'n kind en sy is ver van die huis. Twak! Jy was nog nie dae lank saam met haar op 'n wanie. Jy weet nie wat in daardie fraai koppie maal nie. (2014:94)

[while I read, I wonder about my new wife's distant eyes. I know what you think: She is afraid, she is a child and she is far from home. Bull! You've never been with her on a wagon for days. You don't know what is going on in that pretty little head. (2012:94)]

By involving the reader in the extensive guessing game as Buys tries to puzzle Nombini out, the narrative suggests that being unable to know Nombini's mind cannot simply be ascribed to a lack on Buys's part. It is not simply his failure of empathy — emphasised by his helpless question, apparently addressed to the reader, "Moet ek haar jammer kry?" (Should I feel sorry for her?) (2014:94) — that renders her unknowable. Just as Buys cannot know Nombini, the reader also should not assume to know her or what she thinks. Instead, the narrative permits Nombini — as the narrative's "other" to Buys's subject — to be presented

and apprehended as *she is*. In this way, the narrative allows space for her objective existence that is outside of Buys's view of her (and his desire for her) [REALISM].

Wonder sy wie vanaand die seer uit Langa se rug vryf?... Siestog, sien sy in haar Heidense geestesoog hoe die Kristene haar kraal binnery op hul groot perde, die hoewe wat stof skop in die kalbasse water wat sy en die ander jong meide van die rivier af gehaal het?... Wie se kraletjie skommel sy so in die bakkie?... Sien sy sterre as [Langa] in haar spuit? Was sy trots op haar man toe hy uit sy hut kom en regop gaan staan en sy karos afhaal en sy ou bors uitstoot en ons, die Kristene, tegemoet stap? (2014:94)

[Does she wonder who is rubbing the pain out of Langa's back tonight?... Shame, does she see in her mind's eye how the Christians rode into her kraal on their big horses, the hooves that kick dust into the calabashes of water that she and the other girls fetched from the river?... Whose bead is she turning in the bowl?... Does she see stars when [Langa] spurts in her? Was she proud of her husband when he comes out of his hut and stands up straight and takes off his kaross and puffs out his old chest and walks towards us, the Christians? (2014:94)]

Although most of the questions are about what Nombini is thinking or feeling, the narrative also uses rhetorical questions to describe the events that took place at Langa's kraal. Similar to the way in which this strategy is used to affectively construct the reader as watching and complicit presence during the massacre of the Bushmen,¹⁹ the questions here construct Nombini as a watching, seeing subject.

Was Nombini bekommerd toe die Kristene en Langa en sy kapteins in 'n nou kring gaan staan, die pratory sagter, dringender?... Het sy gesien wat gebeur het, die hou gehoor? Ek weet sy het gesien toe ek op hom afstap, wydsbeen oor hom gaan staan, hom optrek en hom teen die grond slaan... Ek is nie trots daarop nie, maar wat weet sy van beeste ruil en gesteelde beeste terugvat? Jy moet jouself laat geld in die eerste minute. Wat weet sy? Ek het iets vir Langa gesê en hom gestamp. Waar was sy toe? Het sy gesien en wat sien sy in die rooi kraletjie wat al woedender sirkels maak onder in die kommetjie? ... Kon die klimmeid sien hoe haar Kaffers terugbaklei, hoe die vuishoue val en die swepe klap en 'n assegaailem flits? Hoe ons Kristene ook verdomp houe vat en bloedlaat, tot iemand 'n geweer lig?... Het sy saamgelag? Ek het hulle hoor lag, die Kaffers wat skater vir die mal wit man wat sy eie Hottentotte te lyf gaan. Het sy toe weggekyk? (2014:94-96)

¹⁹ See AFFECT THEORY for an in-depth discussion of that scene.

[Was Nombini worried when the Christians and Langa and his captains went to stand in a narrow circle, the talking softer, more urgent?... Did she see what happened, heard the blow? I know she saw when I walked towards him, stood over him, pulled him up and hit him against the ground... I am not proud of it, but what does she know of exchanging cattle and taking back stolen cattle? You have to assert yourself in the first minutes. What does she know? I said something to Langa and shoved him. Where was she then? Did she see and what is she seeing now in the little red bead that makes ever more furious circles in the bottom of the bowl?... Could the girl see how her Kaffers fought back, how the fists fell and the whips cracked and an assegai blade flashed? How we Christians also damn well took blows and let blood, until someone raised a rifle?... Did she laugh along? I heard them laugh, the Kaffers that guffaw at the crazy white man that assaults his own Hottentots. Did she look away then? (2014:94-96)]

Sy sit die bakkie neer op die tafel. Die Here alleen weet wat 'n vrou dink as sy so kyk. Onthou sy hoe ek haar op my perd getel het? Hoe haar ou man gespoeg het op die grond en niks verder gedoen het nie? Hoe haar mense haar aangegluur het? Hoe ons nog twee ander meide op die Hottentotte se perde gelaai het. Hoe die ander twee meer terugbaklei het en Van Tondere se gesig gekrap het? Hoe ons die beeste bymekaar gejaag het? Hoe een van die jong Kaffers in ons pad gestaan het en met ons geweerkolwe en sambokke verniel is? Hoe ons weggyery het en niemand ons agtervolg het nie? (2014:97)

[She places the bowl on the table. The Lord alone knows what a woman thinks when she looks like that. Does she remember how I lifted her onto my horse? How her old husband spat on the ground and did nothing further? How her people glared at her? How we loaded two other girls on the Hottentots' horses. How the other two fought back more and scratched Van Tondere's face? How we gathered the cattle? How one of the young Kaffers stood in our way and was laid to waste with the butts of our rifles and our whips? How we rode away and no-one followed us? (2014:97)]

The narrative strategy to recount even mundane events — for example gathering the cattle together — through rhetorical questions resonates with metamodernism's demand for a sense of communal, shared experiences [SUBJECTIVITY]. Timmer (2010:45) argues that metamodernist subjectivity is constructed around a shared feeling — as in the question "Do you feel it too?" — where, even though the "it" is never specified, the feeling "starts to function as an *index*" that points to a potential intersubjective connection and reaches out "as a way to hypothesize a potential structure of a 'we' which revolves around the possibility of *sharing feelings*" (Timmer, 2010:46) [AFFECT].

In the same way, the questions in this passage from *Buy's* function as a sort of index that points to the possibility of a shared reality, or a shared recognition of reality (cf. Toth, 2010:79). The questions are addressed to the reader, but are refracted through Nombini's perception, framed in terms of what she saw and heard and remembers, thereby resisting an empiricist or positivist representation of reality. At the same time, by posing the potential structure of an objectively observable reality — as it is observed by *Buy's*, Nombini, and through *Buy's* interpellation the reader as well — even if this reality cannot be fully known or understood, the narrative also rejects postmodernism's extreme anti-realism [REALISM]. This notion of a shared reality thus enables a metamodernist ethical structure that demands common ground and a recognition of shared referents (cf. Jones, 2012:84).

Lastly, the use of questions responds to Bersani's notion of an ethically "non-projective presence" (2006:164), formulated by Bersani and Dutoit (2004:144) as a "certain mode of registering the world" without "injuring" it through an insistence on interpreting, knowing, and possessing [EPISTEMOLOGY]. This mode does not call for an unreflective, unquestioning way of interaction with the other, and does not negate questions about the other, but "inaccurately replicate[s] those questions as a viable relation to the world" (2004:143). The questioning subject not only allows space for the other to respond, but by doing so extends and opens itself so that this mode of questioning affects the observer as much as that which is being observed.

In the end, even though this passage provides an ethical model of relating to the other without committing epistemological violence in the form of either assimilation or reducing the other to a reflection of what the subject desires, *Buy's* fails to initiate a truly relational mode of engaging with Nombini. The relation between them will always be one of distance (*Buy's* later claims that he had lost Nombini even before he took her (2014:368)) — a play of surfaces in which everyone is ultimately unknowable, a state of being reminiscent of the postmodern conception of the subject:

Die weerlig slaan en buite skyn die wêreld. In die helder blik van die bliksem bly niks versteek nie en sien ons spul aan tafel mekaar soos ons is en die oppervlak van elkeen se aangesig word vir 'n oomblik verlig en verraai geen diepte nie en is volkome onkenbaar en dan is dit weer donker en die skaduwees trek sagte gemaklike maskers oor ons gesigte. (2014:98-99)

[The lightning strikes and outside the world shines. In the bright gaze of the lightning strike nothing remains hidden and we at the table see each other as we are and the surface of

each one's face is lit for a moment and betrays no depth and is completely unknowable and then it is dark again and the shadows pull soft comfortable masks over our faces. (2014:98-99)]

However, the multiple references to AFFECT in the passage, especially when Buys recounts his first night with Nombini (2014:97-98) — as well as the affective interpellation of the rhetorical questions regarding what she felt during the raid — constructs a metamodernist subjectivity that is contingent on empathetic, relational understanding, even though it is recognised that this might not be completely successful or even possible.

MYTH, noun (also MYTHIC, MYTHICAL adj.)

The mythical can be understood as pertaining to a "superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding", where myths are regarded as stories or narratives "containing deeper truths, expressing collective attitudes to fundamental matters of life, death, divinity, and existence (sometimes deemed to be 'universal')" (Oxford dictionary of literary terms, 2008).

Within metamodernism, there is a revival of myth which ranges from a proliferation of simple narratives of heroism of varied scales, transcendental values and an apparent faith in universal truths, grand narratives of differing forms, notions of the sublime, wonder, enchantment, the strange and uncanny, historicity, and depth, to the belief in the power of literature, meaning, and art.

The revival of myth is a response to postmodernism's "anti-transcendentalism", described by Maltby (2007:42) as an "unwavering scepticism and cynicism towards appeals to absolute criteria (God, the Good, Truth, History, etc.)". This "anti-transcendentalism" flows from postmodernism's emphasis on the "cultural and historical particularism of meaning and value", as well as an insistence on the "instability and contingency of language" which renders any text or narrative without a final, lasting meaning and which deconstructs any unifying, totalising master narrative. The relativism and disconnection that are the result of postmodernist irony (for which beliefs are contingent and particular, rather than universal and able to withstand time and change) amount to "a radical and pervasive state of disenchantment" (Maltby, 2007:42) [SINCERITY].

Metamodernism's return to the mythical is in the first place an attempt to revive a sense of enchantment and mystery — a return to a worldview where a sense of the sacred or spiritual experience can be integrated into a "conception of the self beyond the here and now", "grounded in some universal or transhistorical criterion of truth or certainty" (Maltby, 2007:43). In the second place, there is the notion that this enchantment and a sense of "universal" or "transcendent" values enable communication, togetherness, contact, "a point of communal unity" (Jones, 2012:85).

Chris van der Merwe, in his discussions of *Die reise van Isobelle* (1995) by Elsa Joubert (Van der Merwe, 2011) and *Die sneeuwlaper* (2009) by Marlene van Niekerk (Van der Merwe, 2012a), shows the connection between these two functions of myth as it manifests in a notion of mysticism which is based on "an act of union" — whether with God, a universal principle, or something undefined. Through this act of union, the mystical experience also activates a sense of the sublime, or an "ultimate reality": the deepest level of reality that cannot be relayed into any further, deeper being, which is either unknowable or unrepresentable, and which cannot be contained in language or grasped with rational thought [cf. CHAOS THEORY]. Because of the potential of communal presence and belonging, as Van der Merwe (2011) points out, the use of myth or mysticism in recent literary works does not point to escapism, since the value of the mystical experience is shown not to lie in the emotional experience in itself, but rather in the ethical result that comes from it [ETHICAL CONCERNS].

In addition to the ethical function of myth, it also has aesthetic implications for the way in which art is viewed. Related to the potential of a common value to serve as a contact point between people, the revival of myth renews a sense of faith in the ability of art to serve as "a vehicle for spiritual truth" (Maltby, 2007:44), herein echoing notions of Romanticism. Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:8-9) also emphasise the Romantic influences on metamodernism and state that the renewed focus on myth manifests in an "emergent neoromantic sensibility" visible in the work of a long list of contemporary visual artists and critics. For them, Romanticism is about "the attempt to turn the finite into the infinite, while recognizing that it can never be realized". Metamodernism's oscillation between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony, between "attempt and failure" (since it is committed to an impossibility), gives rise to its romantic inclination towards the "tragic, the sublime, and the uncanny" (2010:8).

In art and in various media, this apparent Romantic sensibility is expressed in aesthetic categories "lingering between projection and perception, form and the unformable, coherence and chaos, corruption and innocence"; in "negotiations between the permanent and the temporary"; through a questioning of reason by means of the irrational; the "re-appropriations of culture through nature"; an "adaptation of civilization by the primitive"; an "obsession with the commonplace ethereal" and "the quotidian sublime"; attempts to capture the unconsciousness, recreate longings and fantasies; attempts to "retrieve an irrevocably irretrievable past" and to "rekindle the naivety and innocence of childhood" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:8-9).

What all these varied but interconnected examples have in common is the use of tropes of "mysticism, estrangement, and alienation" to "signify potential alternatives", as well as the conscious decision "to attempt, in spite of those alternatives' untenability" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:9) [cf. OPTIMISM].

If these artists look back at the Romantic it is neither because they simply want to laugh at it (parody) or because they wish to cry for it (nostalgia). They look back instead in order to perceive anew a future that was lost from sight. Metamodern neoromanticism should not merely be understood as re-appropriation; it should be interpreted as re-signification: it is the re-signification of "the commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite". (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:12)

In connection to the focus on the transient, ethereal and sublime, the irrational, nature and the primitive, and the yearning for an "irrevocably irretrievable past" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:8-9), Kirby (2009:124-125) turns to recent works of literature and cinema to identify a yearning for an irretrievable era of fantasy, informed by the narratives of legends, fairy tales, sagas, and by a longing to recreate the wonder and innocence of childhood. These works, especially the ones from popular culture, often represent a "predemocratic conception of society", populated with figures of kings, queens, princes, princesses (mostly in a medieval or feudal inspired setting); or vigilantes operating outside of the normative legal social structure, like "crypto-fascistic and sub-Nietzschean 'super heroes' or 'supermen"'; and romanticised, vanished and archaic figures, such as dinosaurs, knights, pirates, cowboys, mummies and other mythical creatures (Kirby, 2009:126). This can be read as a symptom of a return to Romantic sensibilities, something which is "symptomatic of something more seismic" — namely a shift "toward narratives that break out from both realism's bankruptcy and postmodernism's antirealist impasse" (Kirby, 2009:139) [REALISM].

Rather than a simple return to Romantic values, however, metamodernism revives myth in a way that is always already problematised by postmodern notions. Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) link myth to metamodernism's abandonment of postmodern tactics such as pastiche and parataxis in favour of metaxis. They frame metaxis as indicative of the irreconcilable tension between human existence as a participation in finite processes on the one hand, and an "unlimited, intracosmic or transmundane reality" on the other — a tension that can be summarised as a search for meaning, or a focus on the transcendental. In other words, rather than a simple acceptance of or belief in the presence of values or deeper truths expressed by myths, the emphasis is on the *search for* these "deeper truths" and the tension between lived, localised reality and "deeper", "universal" truths.

This tension is expressed through the acceptance of an unexplainable, unattainable transcendental mystery, as well as through an reenchantment of the mundane and everyday. As an example of the renewed focus on truth and the transcendental — or at least, a focus on the *possibility* of these notions — Dion (2007:224) points to the belief found in contemporary culture that "the truth is always out there". Part of the "new demands" of "the post-Postmodern world" is that science should be able to provide "the Answer, the one truth, a series of signs pointing us in a single direction" (2007:224). For Dion (2007:224) this is partly a result of the way in which science in general and mathematics in particular have started to converge on and merge with spirituality at the end of the 20th century:²⁰

Mathematics after Relativity and more so after the Quantum and Chaos theories, has been gradually moving toward the mysterious, embracing the unexplainable rather than trying to force an ultimate solution. Spirituality, on the other hand — having lost some its hold on people as a result of its numerous conflicts with science — has started to make itself seem more scientific.

However, in a statement that again echoes Vermeulen and Van den Akker's assertion that a deliberate and conscious decision to search for something transcendental characterises metamodernism, despite the understanding that this will inevitably always be out of reach, the universal "answer" to which Dion refers is not given and cannot be discovered: "unlike

²⁰ Some recent literary works draw on ideas from quantum and/or chaos theory to express a notion of myth, such as David Mitchell's multi-award winning novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004), or Ruth Ozeki's 2013 novel *A tale for the time being* (which is discussed in more detail in CHAOS THEORY). See also Slethaug (2000): *Beautiful chaos: chaos theory and metachaotics in recent American fiction*.

Postmodernism, in this new era the possibility of an answer is not denied; it is promised, it is just not provided for us" (Dion, 2007:242).

Another way in which metamodernism reactivates myth in a way that does not simply return to a naive, uninformed idealism is by turning the focus to wonder in everyday life. Elias (2012:743) refers to claims formulated by Bourriaud in his *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) that metamodernism does not replicate "radical utopianism, with its future projections and abstractions" [OPTIMISM], founded in an obsession with "teleology and idealized space". Instead, it engages with "a new, but not naive, humanistic commitment to everyday experience" and investigates the ways in which "art can shape and participate in everyday life".

The participation of art in everyday life finds expression in the reenchantment of the mundane — that is, looking for magic not by yearning for something irretrievable, but in the commonplace everyday occurrence. James (2012:845) illustrates this in relation to Marilynne Robinson's Orange Prize-winning novel, *Home*, (2008): "a highly localized work that epitomizes Robinson's long-standing effort to illuminate everyday observations, to render the mundane both strange and sublime".

This novel, he maintains, is an example of what has emerged in recent years:

a form of writing that seems at once new and old, an emergent practice that at the same time bears the mark of adaptation. This mode is a fresh departure to the extent that it moves beyond the timbre and tactics of representational self-scrutiny that were postwar metafiction's stock-in-trade. (James, 2012:845)

This mode, which James names the "crystalline", after a term coined by Iris Murdoch in 1961 (James, 2012:847), values "sublimity within the ordinary". Simultaneously a throwback to modernism and a reaction against postmodernism, it works "very much in the spirit rather than the letter of modernism" in its "inclination to extend the phenomenological repertoire of fictional discourse in depicting moments of perceptual wonder, moments of engagement with the immediacy of the lived world as *it is*" (James, 2012:851). As such, it advances the possibility that after postmodernism's stifling cynicism "fiction can mobilize perceptions of the mundane made marvelously strange" by retrieving

in poignant yet unsentimental terms moments of sublimity from the onrush of daily experience so as to explore how such moments become the occasion for both individual and shared discernment that arises out of quotidian wonder. (James, 2012:846)

By emphasising how finding sublimity in the quotidian can give rise to a shared sense wonder, the crystalline mode of narrative is testament to the fact that contemporary novelists are "reconsidering how aesthetic attention in contemporary fiction can perform ethical and political work" (James, 2012:846) [ETHICAL CONCERNS]. With this, the belief in the power of art is rekindled: drawing on notions of art as vehicle of spiritual truth (Maltby, 2007:44); art's redemptive potential (Jones, 2012:85); and art as contact point for communal unity (Jones, 2012:85), there is once again faith in art's power to console (James, 2012:872) [AFFECT], driving the novel's "social mission" (James, 2012:851).

Going beyond the obvious, commonplace and concrete is not to be seen as an act of escapism, however [cf. OPTIMISM]. The ethical imperative underlying the revival of myth ensures that

novelists aren't simply reaching outside the immediate sphere of concrete social actions to savor sublime events for their own sake. On the contrary, and more pointedly, they imply that narrative fiction remains perhaps the most effective and resilient artistic medium we have for proving why we should value such moments [of shared wonder] as socially or ethically instructive in the first place. (James, 2012:846)

In its social mission, which is based on an ethical imperative and is expressed relationally through its objective to connect, crystalline fiction utilises affect to code moments of transcendental sublimity and myth in the everyday. In this way, contemporary readers are encouraged to regard the novel as a form "that does more than simply reproduce our own disenchantment" (James, 2012:872). Metamodernist fiction thus makes a "significant literary-historical point" by positing that writing indeed can — and perhaps should — "enthral and unsettle with equal measure". This is something which it can do only because "it works on an affective level that far surpasses the textual involutions of metafictional self-scrutiny" and "parodic reflexivity" (James, 2012:872) — to look beyond towards a deeper, universal, connective truth, whether it can be found or not.

In post-millennial fiction, Afrikaans writer Ingrid Winterbach's work — especially the triptych consisting of *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (2006), *Die benederyk* (2010) and *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* (2012) — is often cited as making use of mystic themes²¹ and a style that relates closely to the use of myth in metamodernism.

²¹ Van der Merwe (2011, 2012b) reckons that mysticism and religion have been prominent themes in Afrikaans literature from 1960 to 2010, although it is grossly under-theorized. He refers to religious

Spruyt (2014:45) for example discusses *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* from a theosophical and Kabbalistic viewpoint, linking it to themes from the fields of esoterica and mysticism. Van Vuuren (2008:165) characterises *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* as a search on many levels — something which Van der Merwe (2012b), referring to *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens*, frames as a "quest", reminiscent of the medieval romances of chivalry. On a literal level, the story revolves around Helena Verbloem's search for her missing shells, and on a scientific level it involves the search for the origin of life. These themes indicate a spiritual and psychic search for meaning, or at least for an interpretative framework that can provide meaning (Van Vuuren, 2008:165).

As is common in Winterbach's novels, however, the search is unsuccessful. Helena never quite finds what she is looking for, and the novel provides no ultimate answers — indicating Vermeulen and Van den Akker's claim (2010:5) that the search for an ultimate meaning which is expected not to be found is characteristic of metamodernism. *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* dramatizes the search as a function of metamodernist metaxis — the irreconcilable tension between human existence as participation in finite processes and participation in transcendental, transmundane reality — by juxtaposing the mystical and spiritual meaning that Helena has invested in her shells with evolutionary discourse.

Van Vuuren (2008:166) suggests that the paradox that ensues is typical of the novel: the evolutionary discourse appeals to Helena, and she finds meaning in it, but at the same time she finds almost religious comfort in her shells and the thought of family members who have passed away.

Rather than setting up the mystical and scientific as an oppositional binary, two irreconcilable poles between which humankind must choose for comfort or meaning, the motif of the shells connects the two frames of reference in a way that suggests their interdependence. The shells serve as the intersection between the two discourses when Helena claims that the shells are "like my ancestors" (2006:83) — even though she suspects

elements in works of literary fiction such as *Kennis van die aand* (1973) by André P. Brink, *Toorberg* (1986) and *30 Nagte in Amsterdam* (2008) by Etienne van Heerden, as well as the novels of Karel Schoeman and Anna M. Louw. Although Van der Merwe (2011, 2012b) does not state it explicitly, it is likely that the suspicion which he identifies towards religion in general and specifically a discussion of it in the literature during this period is related to, or even a symptom of, postmodern scepticism and the rejection of metanarratives. If this is the case, the fact that Van der Merwe (2011, 2012b) views the appearance of religious, mystical, and spiritual themes in literary works as a phenomenon deserving of discussion and study is in itself an indication of a (metamodernist) shift in theory.

that in evolutionary terms that statement might not be completely correct. At the same time, her interest in the evolutionary explanation of the origin of life clearly has an almost mystical aspect for her, as it mirrors her search for the meaning of existence. In this, *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* can be read as illustrative of the metamodernist notion which Dion (2007:224) has identified, namely the conflation of spirituality and science.

Winterbach's next novel, *Die benederyk* (2010), relates to *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* thematically, as Human (2010) suggests, and also deals with family relations, love, death, betrayal and loss. The intertexts that Human (2010) identifies indicate the rich tradition of myth embedded in the novel, the most notable intertext being Thomas Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder* in which the Biblical narrative of Genesis, spanning from Jacob to Joseph, is reworked. By using this work as intertext, all the myths regarding the underworld on which *Joseph und seine Brüder* is based are also activated: Orpheus and Euridice, Osiris and Set, Hades and Persephone, Inanna (Ishatar), Enki and Dumuzi. The descent to the underworld and the consequent spiritual renewal is a central metaphor in Mann's work, and thereby also in Winterbach's *Die benederyk*.

Pieterse (2013:186) also identifies the descent to the underworld and the presence of other "realms" (those of the dead, demons, dreams, and other dimensions) as a theme in all three novels — *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat*, *Die benederyk* and *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens*. In *Die benederyk*, there is a literal descent to and return from spheres that are associated with suffering, while the theme of the search is embodied in the search for a lost brother, and for the reasons behind a sister's suicide in *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens*. Lastly, Pieterse (2013:186) indicates that series of "coincidences" bring the protagonists in contact with enigmatic characters and worlds in both *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* and *Die benederyk*.

The worldview that is construed through the narrative of *Die benederyk* is one with many hidden, secret levels within, a world with a sphere besides the every-day of which most people do not have any experience, a world containing worlds beyond the perceptible, a different material dimension (Pieterse, 2013:187; cf. Winterbach, 2012:208) — the "ultimate reality" which Van der Merwe (2011) regards as characteristic of a mystic understanding.

The search as theme related to mysticism also appears in all three novels of Winterbach's triptych, most notably in *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* (2012). Van der Merwe (2012b) reads the theme of the journey here in relation to a pre-modern motif in literature, namely the quest motif, which formed the basis of the Medieval romance of chivalry ("ridderroman"). In

this sense, the novel can be seen to relate to the way in which metamodernism makes use of tropes of "an irrevocably irretrievable past" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:9), as well as Kirby's characterisation (2009:124-125) of metamodernism as infused by fantasy and legend.

There is also an ethical aspect to the quest motif. According to Van der Merwe (2012b), the quest is often a search for an object of value and has the broader goal to restore order which was disrupted. In this regard, *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* echoes 17th century Christian travel narratives like John Bunyan's *The pilgrim's progress*. These narratives relate man's journey from earth to heaven and utilise a religious vocabulary to communicate essential aspects of what it means to be human; they are populated with figures such as knights and demons, with souls that are saved and others that are lost (Van der Merwe, 2012b).

Despite containing echoes of worlds gone by and themes of searching for the essence of life, eternal ethical values, the meaning of life, and the nature of good and evil, Van der Merwe (2012b) reads *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* ultimately as a postmodern work. He qualifies it, however, as a postmodern "pastoral" novel: pastoral in the sense that there is indeed a longing for a lost world filled with certainties, where the struggle between good and evil was unambiguous and spirituality could soften the terror of death; yet postmodern in its ambivalence, irony and uncertainty.

Van der Merwe might have in mind here the fact that the questing characters only partly fulfil the goals of their respective searches and that the novel does not provide any final, definitive answers or resolutions to the issues it poses — rendering it ultimately "ambivalent" and "uncertain". After all, Maria does not arrive at any final closure regarding her sister's death, her reunion with her troubled son does not resolve everything, and although Karl finds his brother, it is uncertain whether Iggy can still be saved. Van der Merwe (2012b) reckons that the only unquestionably meaningful result is that both Maria and Karl come to accept responsibility for a loved one, thereby freeing themselves from their self-absorption and isolation in order to turn towards the other in compassion.

The interplay between ambivalence and grand structures, surface irony and deeper interpretative frames in the triptych *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat*, *Die benederyk* and *Die aanspraak van lewende wesens* culminates in Winterbach's latest novel, *Vlakwater* (2015), which Visagie (2016a) views as possibly the first metamodernist novel in Afrikaans. Engaging with the notion of myth as metanarrative, a lasting frame of interpretation or

structure of depth,²² the novel presents the tension between surface and depth in a way characteristic of metamodernism: by activating notions of postmodern surface play without being depthless, and pursuing the possibility of deeper meaning without naively adhering to a metanarrative (cf. Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:58).

Being a meditation on the power and validity of fixed frames of reference, Winterbach poses the postmodern question about the validity of metanarratives in a "literary gesture" that is reminiscent of the question about the validity of contingency versus lasting frames of interpretation in *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (Visagie, 2016a). The title *Vlakwater* already indicates that the novel distances itself from modernist structures of depth in favour of embracing postmodern surface play (Visagie, 2016a).

It is, however, not as simple as this. For Visagie (2016a), despite the era of fragmentation in which they live, the characters still yearn for the comfort of frameworks that can help them make sense of life. In this way, he suggests, metanarratives might not have completely lost their claim to validity.

Visagie (2016a) argues that *Vlakwater* engages with a metamodernist aesthetic in the way it moves forward with renewed naivety and optimism while acknowledging the absence of a certain endpoint and appropriate discourses with which to embrace a new sincerity — voicing the need for a naive enthusiasm while being unable to completely abandon postmodern cynicism. In this regard, Visagie points specifically to the novel's depiction of "omnipresent violence". While the artist character Niek tends to be sceptical towards the use of metaphysical structures and narratives to explain the tumultuous and violent present, he creates depictions of violence in an attempt to understand his milieu better, and finally has to admit that violence challenges the disbelief in underlying causes and narratives.

While there is a desperately felt need for an interpretative framework that can provide an explanation for the violence of contemporary society, the complexity of reality constantly undermines the possibility of such a framework. As Visagie (2016a) puts it, *Vlakwater* indicates that there is an ethical demand on the rational human to engage with the challenges of contemporary South Africa, and the discomfort that the novel expresses points to the inability of existing frames of interpretation to respond to the urgency of current society — without the luxury of postmodern relativism.

²² See Van Schalkwyk (2004) for a discussion of myth in this sense, with specific reference to South African and Dutch narrative texts of the late twentieth century.

Even though Winterbach's four recent novels exhibit ambivalence, uncertainty and irony, these strategies are not used to parody, undermine or trivialise the quests or issues central to the novels. Instead, as textual strategies, they serve to highlight the yearning for certainty, clear-cut divisions between good and evil, a deeper frame of reference, and the comfort of spirituality or community — with the emphasis being on the constantly deferred process of "yearning" without ever reaching that which is desired. The novels mentioned here engage with a certain belief that the sacred or spiritual can be integrated into a conception of the world beyond the here and now (cf. Maltby, 2007:43), but they never completely abandon a postmodernist scepticism towards "absolute" ideas such as God, good, evil, truth and meaning, and they always still allow for contingency and the absurdity of randomness. In this sense, Winterbach's recent novels can perhaps be said to embody metamodernist notions of myth: oscillating between attempt and failure in their commitment to impossibility, attempting to turn the finite into the infinite while recognising that it can never be realised (cf. Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:8-9).

OPTIMISM, NOUN. (ALSO OPTIMISTIC, ADJ.)

"Hopefulness and confidence about the future" and "a tendency to take a favourable or hopeful view"; also a "view or belief which assumes the ultimate predominance of good over evil in the universe" (OED, 2015).

The postmodernist epoch was haunted by "a certain teleological aporia, a promise of the end" (Toth, 2010:4), a zeitgeist exemplified by American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama's 1989 essay "The end of history?". Boxall (2012:681) describes it as a "deeply ingrained sense of cultural agedness" and connects it to Frank Kermode's "sense of an ending":

a sense of belatedness that has expressed itself in the terms by which we have sought to describe postwar twentieth-century culture: the recurrence of the adjective *late* in compounds such as "late capitalism", "late modernism", and "late modernity", and the experience of aftermath so powerfully evoked by the application of the prefix *post* to virtually all aspects of Western cultural life.

However, Boxall (2012:681) points out that the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first were also marked by a tension in the way history and time were perceived. The "apprehension of historical completion or exhaustion" was experienced at the same time that the present was felt to be

so young, so rapidly growing and changing, that it is difficult even to inhabit it, to hold it still long enough to glean a clear understanding of its features. Historical time is old, sluggish, and exhausted slouching its Yeatsian way to Bethlehem, but it is also new and unformed, so much so that it is difficult to resist the idea that the future has arrived "ahead of schedule", in Don DeLillo's phrase (*Players* 84), that the Derridean time to come has contaminated the obsolescent present. (Boxall, 2012:681)

This "Derridean" sense of arrival yet to come — or as Toth (2010:143) puts it, the promise that "the future to come is the future of perhaps", "the future of the specter, of that which is *and* is not, that which we know we can never know yet somehow believe we will know... *perhaps*" — informs a certain metamodernist optimism which has replaced postmodern melancholy as the pervasive mood of the present (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5).

This optimism can be viewed as a combination of three factors: firstly, the feeling that contemporary time is "new and unformed" (Boxall, 2012:681), coupled with the realisation that history did *not* end, as many in the late twentieth century believed it would, but is in fact "moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:2). Secondly there is the need to move beyond postmodernism's nihilistic sense of an end (cf. Toth, 2010:77) and its debilitating, disenchanting irony [SINCERITY]. Lastly, metamodernist optimism remains informed by the spectre of postmodernism, whose claim of the possibility of an end to history betrays despite itself a certain faith in a teleological historical progress and utopian impulse, as Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:2) point out (compare also Toth & Brooks, 2007:3;6).

The end result is that, despite a sometimes crushing awareness of and preoccupation with global societal problems, metamodernism seems infused with optimism — albeit of a cautious sort often tempered with doubt, despair, and outrage. In the face of seemingly overwhelming social issues and ETHICAL CONCERNs, metamodernism nonetheless insists on imagining "the future of the present" (cf. Fjellestad & Watson, 2015:6). Moore (2011:par. 88) frames it as performing a "desperate attempt to imagine the present" as other than it is [AUTHENTICITY]; while James (2012:849) points to the tendency of metamodernist fiction to

"present imagined alternatives and possibilities", utilising AFFECT and notions of MYTH to this end.

Metamodernist optimism can therefore perhaps be explained by its commitment to an "impossible possibility"; the way in which it attempts despite recognising its inevitable failure; how it seeks a truth it does not in fact expect to find; and acknowledges that no final teleological purpose exists, yet takes toward it as if it does (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5). In other words, metamodernism represents what Toth (2010:62) calls "faith without belief", the willingness to overtly embrace

the need to believe in the spectral promise of the certainly right decision while simultaneously embracing, à la postmodernism, its infinite deferral. (Toth, 2010:122)

This sense of optimism can be seen in the fact that, in recent years, the "figure of utopia" has reappeared in the arts,

often alongside a renewed sense of empathy, reinvigorated constructive engagement, a reappreciation of narrative and a return to craftswo/manship. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:55) [AFFECT; ETHICAL CONCERNS; SUBJECTIVITY]

Postmodernism claimed to avoid utopia as "suspiciously totalitarian" and instead transformed it into "its generic 'dystopian' cousin" or shattered it through "the operations of deconstruction", both instances serving to critique the communism or capitalism of the age rather than being attempts to evoke an imagined, possible alternative future (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:57). In contrast, metamodernism turns to utopia to express a belief in an alternative future.

In an expression of the metamodernist "faith without belief" or commitment to an "impossible possibility", this optimistic belief is partly founded precisely on the felt despair at the state of the twenty-first century world [ETHICAL CONCERNS]. The current utopian turn in the arts signifies "the re-emergence and multiplication of utopian desires" of various kinds in contemporary culture, as a "radically unstable and uncertain world" weighed down with a myriad of political, financial and ecological problems necessitates the "reimagining" of utopia (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:57)

Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2015:64) hasten to clarify that they do not regard the return to utopia to be an "escape mechanism":

During the postmodern years of relative peace and plenty, few artists felt the need to imagine alternative societies or cultivate a utopian desire. Even those artists that were critical did not look elsewhere but rather set their sights on problems *within* society. Now that conflicts are pending and poverty is increasingly widespread within the West, looking elsewhere for solutions suddenly seems like a viable option again. As an impossible possibility, utopia should not be perceived as a new ideological blueprint, however. Much rather, it should be understood as a tool, say, a looking glass, for scanning this world and others for alternative possibilities. It is not invoked to get us away from something according to this or that dogma; it is evoked out of a renewed utopian desire. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:64-65)

Instead of a simple "escape mechanism" (cf. Kirby, 2009:124-165 regarding MYTH), metamodernist optimism thus becomes possible precisely through its engagement with the physical and the material reality of the world, in a way that parallels the renewed focus on the intersection between ONTOLOGY, corporeality, and ETHICAL CONCERNS found in theories as varied as AFFECT THEORY; CHAOS THEORY and POSTHUMANISM. The optimism of metamodernism is therefore not a blind faith in some ultimate utopia, waiting in the future; neither is it a belief in historical or teleological progress towards some better future when its ideals would be fulfilled, nor a grand transcendental narrative. Instead, its optimism is simply the impetus of movement towards a (perhaps infinitely deferred) goal that is situated in the lived reality and tangible corporeality of our surroundings.

In post-millennial Afrikaans literature, different themes surface that connect with metamodernist optimism in complicated and intersected ways. Burger (2014) argues that, in times of crisis, a common sociological reaction in art is either nostalgia for a time past [MYTH], or optimism. In Afrikaans literature, Burger (2014) points to optimistic reactions that are not simply naively looking towards a better future, but rather creatively engage with reality to investigate alternative possibilities of existence. These include the short stories of Izak de Vries; *Klimtol* (2013) by Etienne van Heerden; Elsa Joubert's *Die reise van Isobelle* (1995); and the prose of Antjie Krog and Breyten Breytenbach.

However, the prevalence of post-millennial dystopian novels in Afrikaans, as well as discussions of utopian/dystopian literature in South African literary theory, demonstrates a more complex tension existing between the perceived bleakness of the present — informed by the traumas of the past (see AFFECT) — and the "impossible possibility" of an alternative future as expressed in fiction. According to Barendse (2013:233), dystopian literature has undergone a revival in the post-millennial South African context, a phenomenon which

Visagie (2009:54) ascribes to the fact that, since the end of apartheid — which can be viewed as an example of a modernist utopian project — utopian thought is regarded with suspicion in the political and cultural life of Afrikaners. If the apartheid narrative is taken to have been an expression of a form of "utopia", then the dissolution of this utopian dream and the consequent disillusion has led to a state of dystopia for Afrikaners. At the same time, the belief in a post-apartheid South Africa was in its own way a utopian dream for many South Africans, one that has also to a certain extent dissolved, giving rise to a dystopian mood among contemporary South African writers.

Dystopia in this context bears a relation to the postmodernist aversion to utopia as "suspiciously totalitarian" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:57). In this formulation, dystopian literature would provide a critique of the ills of the present without allowing for the possibility of an alternatively imagined future.²³ Because of this, dystopian literature working within a postmodern aesthetic can be said to fetishise a certain helplessness or powerlessness to affect change — perhaps as an escape mechanism, which would be comparable to postmodernist disaffection and removal from social reality.

Post-millennial dystopian Afrikaans literature, in contrast, engages with the ethical and socially involved imperative of metamodernism to — paradoxically — express an ultimately optimistic belief that things can be different from the bleak situation that is being portrayed. For example, discussing *Miskruier* (2005) by Jaco Botha, Barendse (2013) argues that this novel is in fact an example of a "critical dystopia": a representation of dystopia which contains at least in part a utopian hope, or which points to the possibility that the dystopia could be replaced by utopia. The past, history, memory, responsibility and reconciliation are all common themes in a critical dystopia, with history in particular necessary for the activation and maintenance of hope (in contrast to a classical dystopia, which is entirely without hope and where history and the past is characterised by nostalgia and historical amnesia) (Barendse, 2013:233).

²³ See West-Pavlov (2014) for a discussion of the perceived pessimism of recent African literature. Referring to the preoccupation with the past found in novels such as Peter Slingsby's *The joining* (1996), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999b), Zakes Mda's *Heart of redness* (2000), Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004), and Nadine Gordimer's *No time like the present* (2012), West-Pavlov (2014:7) argues that instead of engaging with the trauma of the past in a meaningful way in order to break out of despair and apathy, novels like these seem to become mired in the past without any hope for reconciliation with the present. Based on the publication dates of the novels he indicated, it could be interesting to compare them works with later novels to determine if these works perhaps represent an initial response to South African reality, one that is still based in a postmodern aesthetic.

A critical dystopia has the potential to discover hopeful possibilities and new sources for initiative in the current situation, even though there is no guarantee of success (Moylan, in Visagie, 2009:56). It provides a sceptical, critical questioning of the current society as well as an investigation as to how society can be transformed. In other words, it represents a combination of the traditional dystopia's necessary pessimism and a militant utopian vision — thereby averting, in a self-reflexive way, the temptation of an anti-utopian structure that is always already included in a dystopian narrative (Wegner in Visagie, 2009:56).

Barendse's characterisation of the critical dystopia (following Baccolini, 2003) connects it to notions of REALISM (in the way it engages with history) as well as ETHICAL CONCERNS (as a constructive engagement with the past leads to individual moral responsibility) (Barendse, 2013:237).²⁴ Critical dystopian novels seldom have a comforting, happy ending, rather making use of an open ending that confronts the protagonist with his/her options and responsibilities (Barendse, 2013:252).

In his discussion of Eben Venter's 2006 novel *Horrelpoot*, Van Schalkwyk (2009) demonstrates the tension between dystopia and hope in a way that resonates with a metamodernist notion of hope despite itself, the impossible possibility. Despite it having been described as a "nihilistic" novel by some reviewers (see Visagie (2009:53-55) for a summary of *Horrelpoot*'s reception), Van Schalkwyk (2009:96) argues that

the gloom of *Horrelpoot* is, after all, in a paradoxical way, connected to the "play of possibilities" that Ricoeur (1991) has written about, in that the continuous exposure to *Horrelpoot*'s darkness and evil kindles in the reader a true desire for, and a renewed appreciation of, light, illumination, hope, and good. Van Schalkwyk's (2004:187) research has demonstrated that the ubiquitous contemporary discourse on "positive thinking" actually forms part of the nihilistic tendency toward non-engagement with reality, since negative, stark or disconcerting facts are "denied" or "suppressed". In this sense, *Horrelpoot* stands out as an authentic work of art through its bold engagement with the real, with the historic moment.

Horrelpoot maps "the interplay of fear, (in)tolerance, and extremity/extremism", and "responds to the various forms of degeneration in present-day South Africa"; it is "an exploration of reciprocity, (self-)acceptance, and, by implication, of tolerance" (Van

²⁴ The dystopian novel lends itself well to engaging with ethical matters, since it tends to deal with collective social and cultural phenomena, rather than focusing only on individual characters or character psychology (Wegner, in Visagie, 2009:56).

Schalkwyk, 2009:85). As such, it stands as a novel that orientates itself relationally²⁵ and opens itself up to reality, to the moment in history (Van Schalkwyk, 2011:204).

Drawing on notions of affect, *Horrelpoot* fulfils the ethical imperative of metamodernism: to engage with and respond to social reality as it is lived and experienced (see also REALISM). Rather than a blind faith in utopia or even in a teleological progress towards a "better" future, metamodernist optimism is fully aware of and engaged with the ills of the present — yet it insists on the possibility of an alternatively imagined future and embraces the impetus of movement towards what might well turn out to be an infinitely deferred goal.

Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) also contains a paradoxically optimistic belief in an alternatively imagined world. The novel portrays two extremities of dystopia: the deeply racist, consumerist and capitalist America of the 1960s on the one hand, and post-war communist Vietnam on the other. As an example of a critical dystopia, the novel provides a scathingly satirical criticism of both worlds, yet indicates an impossibly hopeful potential for transformation and an alternative future — even though it is never quite clear what shape this future would take.

The novel's protagonist, identified only as "the Captain", is a communist agent for the Viet Cong who works undercover in the South Vietnamese Army's Special Branch and is expatriated along with his commanding officer, "the General", to America where he continues to serve as a spy for the Vietnamese communist forces. Having been a student in America when he was younger, the Captain is well familiar with the culture, and very critical of the underlying racism and the way his fellow refugees are misled by the so-called American dream.

When the General decides to send a small reconnaissance mission back to Vietnam to gather information on the Viet Cong, the Captain's childhood friend Bon volunteers without any expectation of returning alive. The Captain decides to go along for the sake of trying to save Bon. The party is captured by the communist forces and incarcerated in a prison camp. Despite being a communist fighter himself, the Captain is deemed to have been contaminated by Western decadence and is subjected to brutal interrogation as part of his "reeducation".

²⁵ See DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD for a detailed discussion of how *The Sympathizer* activates notions of relationality to enable its own (impossibly-possible) utopian ending.

The commandant of the camp wants the Captain to confess to his complicity in the capture and torture of a communist agent by the Special Branch. The Captain had in fact tried to warn the agent before her capture, but the warning was too late, and he could not risk his cover by helping her (2015:9). For years, he had kept "her faces" — her photo at her time of capture, and one of her after three years in a Special Branch prison cell — on his desk, because he should have been the one to liberate her when the communist forces emerged victorious, as penitence for not saving her (2015:9).

However, the Captain suffered a head injury in an accident on the movie set where he had worked after being sent to America, and lost a portion of his memory (2015:195), including what had been done to the agent. While he is being tortured, he regains his memory and is able to confess his crime — having done nothing to save her — but only once he is divested of his sense of self:

I was divided, tormented body below, placid consciousness floating high above, beyond the illuminated ceiling... Seen from this altitude, the vivisection being done to me was actually very interesting, leaving my wobbly body's yolk shimmering beneath my viscous white mind. (325:341)

This state — "simultaneously subjugated and elevated", being "the supernatural Holy Spirit, clairvoyant and clairaudient", and at the same time being "subhuman" (2015:341) — is the cause as well as the effect of having confronted the memory of the agent, and — in the Captain's memory — her gaze and his guilt. Through this, the Captain's sense of self is undone: the illusion that the subject is self-contained with clear boundaries, set apart from others based on difference [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. Through finding himself in the place of the victim, he can relate affectively and intersubjectively to the suffering of the agent, correspond to her in terms of a shared vulnerability, and thereby confront his complicity in her suffering as well as his own mortality [FINITUDE].

In terms of a relational mode of being, the Captain has suffered a psychic loss — the trauma of being dispersed, of the individual ego being discarded — which leads to an ontological gain. What the dispersed subject gains is the ability to recognise and apprehend the formal correspondences between self and world: the realisation of being embedded in a web of relations, of being connected to everything in the world — being not an individual, but a multitude of connections:

My cell divided, and divided, and divided again, until I was a million cells and more, until I was multitudes and multitudes, my own country, my own nation, the emperor and dictator of the masses of myself... (2015:352-353)

The novel's ultimate optimism is a direct result of this dispersal and consequent connectedness. In the beginning of the novel, the Captain introduces himself as "a man of two faces... a man of two minds... able to see any issue from both sides" (2015:1). On one level, this refers to his role as undercover agent, but it also indicates his status as a bastard — his father having been a French priest — something which is a source of much discrimination and shame throughout his life.²⁶

Looking down on my self, I could still see the child in the man and the man in the child. I was ever always divided, although it was only partially my fault. While I chose to live two lives and be a man of two minds, it was hard not to, given how people had always called me a bastard. Our country itself was cursed, bastardized, partitioned into north and south, and if it could be said of us that we chose division and death in our uncivil war, that was also only partially true... No, just as my abused generation was divided before birth, so was I divided on birth... (2015:347)

The last question the Captain has to answer is posed by the commissar — the faceless man, who is in fact Man, the Captain's childhood friend and his handler as agent, who was disfigured in a napalm strike. The question he poses is: "What is more precious than independence and freedom?" (2015:318). The answer is, of course, "nothing", as is stated in the revolutionaries' slogan: "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom" (2015:310).

However, the "nothing" that the commissar wants as answer is the "punch line" to "[f]he joke" (2015:355), which can only be understood by "a man with no face" (Man) and "a man of two minds" (the Captain). This joke, which the Captain compares to enlightenment (2015:353), is "how a revolution fought for independence and freedom could make those things *worth less than nothing*" (2015:361), "how our revolution had gone from being the vanguard of political change to the rearguard of hoarding power" (2015:360). In this "transformation", they were

²⁶ The implied monstrousness of this is indicated by the fetus, floating in formaldehyde, that the commandant keeps in a jar on his desk: a "chemical defoliant invented by an American Frankenstein" led to a baby with "one body but two heads, four eyes shut but two mouths agape in permanent, mongoloid yawns. Two faces pointed in different directions, two hands curled up against the chest, and two legs spread to reveal the boiled peanut of the male sex" (2015:303).

"not unusual", as the French and Americans, "[o]nce revolutionaries themselves" have done exactly the same, becoming imperialists and colonists taking away the freedom of others (2015:360), just as the communist forces, having "liberated ourselves in the name of independence and freedom" then "deprived our defeated brethren of the same" (2015:360).

Once the Captain realises this "nothing" — this paradoxical truth about the revolution — his reeducation is complete, according to Man (2015:354). Half-mad after his ordeal, the Captain now refers to himself as "we":

I was that man of two minds, me and myself. We had been through so much, me and myself. Everyone we met had wanted to drive us apart from each other, wanted us to choose either one thing or another... (2015:361)

Man allows the Captain, along with their friend Bon, to be released from the camp and arranges their escape from Vietnam. Even though the Captain has realised that the revolution betrayed him and Man and the ideals they were fighting for, he is not disillusioned and refuses to simply embrace the dualistic opposite, namely capitalist Western democracy. Inhabiting the precarious space in between two ideological extremes, no concrete answers are provided, and the questions are left open and unanswered. All that remains are compassion and a shared sense of vulnerability in suffering:

Having answered the commissar's question, we find ourselves facing more questions, universal and timeless ones that never get tired. What do those who struggle against power do when they seize power? What does the revolutionary do when the revolution triumphs? Why do those who call for independence and freedom take away the independence and freedom of others? And is it sane or insane to believe, as so many around us apparently do, in nothing? We can only answer these questions for ourselves. Our life and our death have taught us always to sympathize with the undesirables among the undesirables. Thus magnetized by experience, our compass continually points towards those who suffer. (2015:365)

Even so, as is characteristic of metamodernism, this sense of optimism is tempered by the realities of human nature and the awareness that even compassion might prove to be too fragile to uphold. The novel ends with the following words:

If and when we reach safe harbor, it will hardly be a surprise if we, in turn, turn our backs on the unwanted, human nature being what we know of it. Yet we are not cynical. Despite it all — yes, despite everything, in the face of *nothing* — we still consider ourselves revolutionary.

We remain that most hopeful of creatures, a revolutionary in search of a revolution, although we will not dispute being called a dreamer doped by an illusion. Soon enough we will see the scarlet sunrise on that horizon where the East is always red, but for now our view through our window is of a dark alley, the pavement barren, the curtains closed. Surely we cannot be the only ones awake, even if we are the only ones with a single lamp lit. No, we cannot be alone! Thousands more must be staring into darkness like us, gripped by scandalous thoughts, extravagant hopes, and forbidden plots. We lie in wait for the right moment and the just cause, which, at this moment, is simply wanting to live. And even as we write this final sentence, the sentence that will not be revised, we confess to being certain of one and only one thing — we swear to keep, on penalty of death, this one promise:

We will live! (2015:366-367)

This passage captures one of the main insights of the novel, which corresponds with a metamodernist optimism. The search for revolution is the "most hopeful" of things, even if the ideals of revolution are perhaps by its very definition always already deferred and thus unlikely to be reached. Yet, even the acknowledgment that this search might only be a dream or a misleading illusion does not foreclose the attempt itself — despite what might well be its inevitable failure. Indicating the metamodernist faith without belief — that hopeful faith in a spectral promise of certainty even while its infinite deferral is embraced — hope and optimism are to be found simply in the connectedness of the world: being not alone, sharing hopes and dreams with "[t]housands more", even if the only commonality is being alive and wanting to live.

REALISM, *noun.* (also **REALISTIC**, *adj.*)

Realism in terms of art is defined as a mode of representation that "gives the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life" and is often linked to a notion of verisimilitude (Oxford dictionary of literary terms, 2008).

Historically, realism's emphasis on "fidelity to the observable" aspects of human life is often contrasted with the idealisation found in romance or melodrama (Oxford companion to English literature, 2009), or the expressionist and absurdist tendencies of high modernism (Oxford dictionary of literary terms, 2008). In its contemporary sense, as will be shown, it is reliant on mimesis and claims a sort of "willing suspension of disbelief" with regard to characters and story as reflective of reality. This is in contrast with postmodernism's anti-realist stance which claimed that reality is unrepresentable (Toth, 2010:108) and employed metafictional strategies to foreground the fictional and textually constructed nature of characters and story.

The changing cultural mood can be gauged by the way in which realism has been viewed over the course of the past 150 years. Since its popularity in the mid-19th century, realism has long been "condemned" on various grounds: first as being "too pessimistic and distressing", later as being "materialistic", and finally, with the advent of post-structuralism, as "ideologically regressive" — especially in the sense that it was regarded as primarily an aesthetic of pre-modernism (Oxford Companion to English literature, 2009) [RETURN TO MODERNISM].

Despite its vilification, however, the realist tradition has continued throughout the twentieth century. Critics such as Fjellestad and Watson (2015:2) welcome the "weakening of the grip of postmodernism on accounts of contemporary fiction", believing that an excessive focus on postmodern experimentation "occluded throughout the so-called postmodern decades the continuation of a realist tradition adept at adapting to the times and the emergence of different ethnic literary traditions" — what they refer to as "postmodernism's others".

Saldívar (2011:14, quoted in Fjellestad and Watson, 2015:2) argues that the commonly believed timeline which stretches from "naive realism to plodding social realism, to triumphant modernism and demystified parodic postmodernism" is inaccurate, and that, despite what literary history of the past forty years would have had us believe,

[w]hen placed within a horizon that includes naturalism and realism, social realism, surrealism, magical realism, and perhaps speculative realism, Realism emerges as the substratum of narrative that has never been superseded entirely within the history of narrative forms.²⁷

In its revived form as it manifests in metamodernism, realism is seen as hopeful [OPTIMISM], as it aims to liberate the subject from the limits of textual construction and decentralisation [SUBJECTIVITY] by means of mimesis — in a way which can be argued to be materialistic (compare Crockett's notion of a "materialist ontology" (2007:268)). Regarding notions of subjectivity, there is a renewed appreciation of realism's ethical capacity to engage with politics of representation by expressing notions of identity. In more general terms, realism is taken to be part of a social commitment and an ethical imperative to engage with and represent reality as it is [ETHICAL CONCERN; ONTOLOGY].

If postmodernism was marked by its rejection of realism, then the revival of realism in metamodernism is regarded by some critics as the very thing that heralds the end — or the beginning of the end — for postmodernism. Josh Toth (2010:2) refers to the rise of a new type of realism as the beginning of "the deathwatch" of postmodernism. He points to a 1983 publication of the British Journal, *Granta*, with an issue entitled "Dirty Realism: New Writing in America" in which this "new" realism was marked as the first step beyond the "pretensions of postmodernism" with its metafictional devices and self-conscious experimentation. This shift to a new form of "realism" was emphasised in 1989 by Tom Wolfe in his "literary manifesto for a new social novel", in which he rejects postmodernist ideals as being decadent and elitist, lacking the means to be either captivating or socially relevant (Toth & Brooks, 2007:4).

²⁷ "Indeed, a broad survey of contemporary fiction reveals not only that realism has not been superseded, but also that writing linked to particular forms of identity continues to proliferate. Authors such as Jonathan Franzen, Marilyne Robinson, Edward P. Jones, Ha Jin, and Louise Erdrich may be difficult to group together; nevertheless taken together they attest to the importance of realism and cultural pluralism to contemporary fiction." (Fjellestad & Watson, 2015:2-3)

Based on their argument, it would be interesting to investigate whether the privileging of Western (white-centred and male-dominated) postmodern fiction in mainstream literary theory of the past forty years, together with the traditional relegation of so-called "minority" writers to "postcolonial theory", might have played a role in the common conception that realism has been "superseded" during postmodernism.

Wolfe's manifesto was followed by the First Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies, and the start of what Toth and Brooks (2007:5) describe as a "shift in stylistic privilege" from the "ostentatious works of postmodern metafiction" to "more grounded (or 'responsible') works of neo-realism". As a result of these developments, "by 1989, the demise of postmodernism was, for most, an inevitability", as Toth (2010:2) claims.

As a conscious, deliberate rejection of postmodern values, the revival of realism touches upon many of the issues that metamodernism identified as lacking in postmodernism: notions of accuracy and truth [AUTHENTICITY; MYTH]; social responsibility and ETHICAL CONCERNS; AFFECT; and SUBJECTIVITY.

In terms of narrative, the revival of realism reflects a shift away from

stylistic elements that have been typically read as emanations of... a subversive and nihilistic epistemological trend have been undermined by a new discourse that is no longer overtly concerned with the impossibility of the subject and/or author and the need to avoid a grounded, or situated, commitment to the political. (Toth, 2010:3)

With this agenda in mind, the shift from postmodern metafiction indeed calls for some form of mimesis, or, as Toth (2010:3-4) phrases it: "some type of renewed faith in the possibility of what postmodernism (*sic*) narrative has repeatedly identified as impossible: meaning, truth, representational accuracy". The feeling is that, with this renewed faith and "the recovery of various 'logocentric' assumptions" (Toth, 2010:3), a focus on social issues regarding community and ethical responsibility is again made possible.

Sartwell (2015) refers to this shift as a "recommitment to the world"; a preoccupation with the "external features of the world that constitute the content of our experiences and the context of our social practices". This is part of a movement within philosophy and criticism that busies itself with "various forms of realism" (Sartwell, 2015) — claiming that reality exists independently, not merely as the product of human consciousness and perception, language or interpretation. In this sense, the renewed focus on realism serves as a backlash against the era of seminal postmodernist thinkers such as Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty: the school of "anti-realist" thought which asserted that "truth was a matter of linguistic practice rather than referring to a reality outside of language", and that "objective truth, determinate meanings, noncontingent values, a material external world" are not possible or in any sense real (Sartwell, 2015).

Although this shift might seem to be privileging pre-postmodern (or even premodern) ideologies, they do not reject the ideas of postmodernism entirely, having been "tempered by the lessons of postmodernism" (Toth, 2010:3) [RETURN TO MODERNISM; MODERNISM INFORMED BY POSTMODERNISM]. Referring to a statement by literary critic James Wood, who claims that postmodern fiction is in a crisis caused by the "absence of convincing ways to return to an innocent mimesis", Timmer (2010:25) then raises the question:

But why would writers want or even need to return to an "innocent" mimesis? That they do not or cannot is, I believe, not necessarily a deficit, but instead symptomatic of a larger cultural "condition".

Rather than a simple return to the "traditional" realism of the 19th century, the revived realism of metamodernism remains inflected by the lessons of postmodernism in that it is stylised and informed by a sense of irony that is by turns elusive and discomforting (Toth & Brooks, 2007:4). In her discussion of recent novels by Scottish authors, Jones (2012:84) identifies "a commitment to a politics of representation which involves challenging complacent ways of seeing and portraying the world". Even though it is aligned in this way with the aesthetic principles of metamodernist realism, this kind of fiction nonetheless deploys strategies "associated with the iconoclastic impulses of postmodernism" in its pursuit of these principles. Similarly, Fjellestad and Watson (2015:3) argue that contemporary fiction combines a renewed passion for realism with a "lingering desire for formal innovation" reminiscent of postmodernism, as can be seen in the "weird worlds" of writers such as Blake Butler, Brian Evenson, Ben Marcus, and George Saunders, the "experimental minimalism" of Lydia Davis and Jenny Offill, and the "formal experiments" of someone like Mark Danielewski.

In fact, Gąsiorek and James (2012:617) maintain that, in post-millennial fiction, the term and notion of "experimentalism" can "no longer be taken for granted or set in some simple opposition to a supposedly more politically committed mode of realism". For example, metamodernist fiction draws on postmodernist notions of subjectivity and a dispersed, decentralised selfhood to provide "a cloaked critique of the notion of a panoramic, omniscient narrative perspective" as found in "purest realism" (Gibbons, 2015:39). Being neither simply a reaction against postmodernism, nor a result of postmodernism, metamodernist realism can rather be said to "succeed" postmodernism (Crockett, 2007:264): using postmodernist strategies to its own ends, metamodernist is the successor as well as heir of postmodernism.

As an example of the way in which metamodernist realism negotiates the tension between postmodern anti-realism and "conventional" realism, Keulks (2007:152) discusses Salman Rushdie's *Fury* (2001). For Keulks, *Fury* manages to reject "relativist extremism and ahistoricism as well as conventionalized or sentimental realist and humanist ideals", thereby inhabiting an "under-defined middleground between — but not *beyond* — each of these labels" (2007:152). The novel does this by reconstructing "mimetic categories of character, subjectivity, love, and redemption", but it nonetheless avoids being labelled a "realist text" because

its portraits of contemporary reality orient not toward any positivist or empirical reality but rather to the hallmark sites and technologies of the postmodernist age: television, popular culture, and the internet. (2007:152)

Whereas postmodernism contrasted positivism or empirical reality (as it was understood in a premodern sense) with the notion of Baudrillard's "hyperreality" to show that presence is always already mediated by technology, metamodernism distances itself from an easy binary between empiricism and hyperrealism. Timmer (2010:255) suggests that metamodernist fiction no longer views the proliferation of mediation by what Keulks (2007:152) calls the "hallmark sites and technologies of the postmodernist age" as somehow indicative of a "loss of the real", the loss of the possibility of an unmediated presence [POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE]. Instead, metamodernism takes this mediated reality to be "the real real" — since it is that which people experience as real [AFFECT; AUTHENTICITY]. It is in this sense that Keulks can point out that, paradoxically, "emotional honesty thrives more successfully in these false, spectacle-driven, duplicitous worlds than in the presumptively 'real' environments of the characters" (2007:152).

Burger (2014) captures this paradox in his argument for what he terms "realiteitshonger" — a hunger for reality — in twenty-first century fiction, which he relates to the proliferation and popularity of reality television (compare the argument of Kirby (2009:141-144) about the demand for the demand for "apparently real TV"). This hunger for reality, according to Burger (2014), gives rise to fiction that appeals to a wide audience and encompasses a variety of hybrid forms which combine different aspects of reality — such as found in essays, memoires, biographies, ethnographies, journalistic and academic writing — with fiction. As illustration, he indicates Antjie Krog's *Country of my skull* (1998), '*n Ander tongval* (2005) and *Begging to be black* (2009), all of which deals with the reality of life in South Africa; Theo Kemp's *Skool* (2011) which combines investigative reporting and personal experience; and

narratives such as *Dis ek, Anna* (Lötter, 2004). Burger (2014) reckons that the allure of this form of writing seems to be the fact that it can claim to be based on a true story — offering a sort of authenticity that satisfies many readers because of the knowledge that the narrative is not fiction, populated with fictive characters, but is rather the real experiences of a living person. In this regard, it is possible that the "hunger for reality", as Burger formulates it, is related to the metamodernist demand for emotional honesty, meaning, and truth.

This call for reality in the context of hypermediation and simulacra leads to what Kirby (2009:139) terms the "rise of the apparently real". The "apparently real" stands in contrast to postmodernism's notion of reality, which is informed by Baudrillard's notion of simulacra, and is at best only a social construct:

a convention agreed in a certain way in a certain culture at a certain time, varying historically with no version able to claim a privileged status. Invented, the real is a fiction, inflected by preceding fictions; if the real is something we make up, it has also been made up by others before us.

As a result, in a postmodern framework, the belief in a reality "out there" is almost a form of paranoia, the "unwarranted ascription of meanings to a universe that cannot bear their load" (Kirby, 2009:140). In contrast,

[t]he apparently real, one of digimodernism's recurrent aesthetic traits, is so diametrically opposed to the "real" of postmodernism that at first glance it can be mistaken for a simple and violent reaction against it. Postmodernism's real is a subtle, sophisticated quantity; that of digimodernism is so straightforward it almost defies description. The former is found especially in a small number of advanced texts; the latter is ubiquitous, a consensus, populist, compensating for any philosophical infirmity with a cultural-historical dominance that sweeps all before it. And yet there is also signs that the apparently real is beginning to develop its own forms of complexity. (Kirby, 2009:140)

Echoing the statements of Timmer and Keulks on the matter, Kirby (2009:140) asserts that the metamodernist notion of the "apparently real" offers "what seems to be real" as if "that is all there is to it". The apparently real exhibits no self-consciousness, irony or self-interrogation, it does not signal itself to the reader or viewer, and it seems to propagate an ontology that "seems to 'go without saying'" [SINCERITY]. In this sense, the apparently real text "affords an intensity of 'reality' which is greater and more engulfing than any other, including unmediated experience" (Kirby, 2009:149).

While a postmodern approach might view these texts as crying out for demystification and a deconstruction of their assumptions, "the apparently real is impervious to such responses" (Kirby, 2009:140). Even though the apparently real is still obviously "edited, manipulated, shaped by unseen hands, somehow as an aesthetic it has already subsumed such awareness". The focus here is on the fact that the reality offered by metamodernist texts is only *apparent*, not absolute, and that is something that readers or viewers are privy to — the apparently real is "the outcome of a silent negotiation between viewer and screen: we know it's not *totally* genuine, but if it utterly seems to be, then we will take it as such" (Kirby, 2009:141). It is a revival of the notion of a "willing suspension of disbelief", and as such points to the metamodernist notion of consciously committing to an impossible possibility, of acknowledging that unproblematic truth and reality do not exist, yet acting as if though it could (cf. Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5) [CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNIST].

Metamodernist realism can be said to retain its self-awareness as a system of rhetorical strategies: instead of claiming to reflect reality as a universal experience, it simply offers one version of it. However, it is a self-consciousness that is, however paradoxically or ironically, imbued by a sense of faith — or at least, that specific form of metamodernist faith that is "[i]nspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5); a form of "faith without belief" (Toth, 2010:62).

This *return* to realism is, then, ultimately symptomatic of a broad epistemological renewal of faith — that is, faith in the promise (of mimesis, of communication, etc.) and the impossible possibility that it will be fulfilled... [R]ealism does not simply reemerge along with a renewed insistence on the possibility of the referent; it reemerges, instead and more significantly, along with a desire for narrative strategies that fulfil a latent desire for the referent as *illusion*... [N]eo-realism allows for *the possibility* that the referent can be accessed, that a representational act can be accurate. (Toth, 2010:119;120)

As an example, Toth refers to Mark Leyner's 1998 novel *The tetherballs of Bougainville* (2010:78) as a text which "reembraces the impulse towards mimesis that defined the realist mode of the nineteenth century as well as the experimental imperatives of the early-twentieth". The novel "offers us the possibility of shared recognition, even if what we recognize is the impossibility of recognition" [SUBJECTIVITY] — in contrast to the postmodernism of, for example, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's rainbow* (1973), which "carefully blur the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between history and narrative" in order to show the way in which reality is

"contingent upon narrative filtration" and "exists only as the unstable effect of an eternally shifting chain of signifiers" (Toth, 2010:79).

In this sense, Leyner

seemingly embraces the impossibility of mimesis as a portrayable reality in itself, as a way of returning to a type of realist mode of representation... [he] reembraces a certain faith in the possibility of the impossible referent, of the transcendental signified. Leyner's autobiographical account, while absolutely incongruous with anyone else's "reality", highlights the absolutely contingent nature of existence so as to reestablish the possibility of a common ground, a stable point of reference. (Toth, 2010:79)

The result is that metamodernism rejects both an empiricist, positivist notion of reality and a postmodern anti-realism in a way that Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) describe as an "oscillation", or the inhabiting of an "in-between space". This enables metamodernist realism to escape the limits of postmodernity without merely returning — or regressing — to pre-modern aesthetics. As Toth (2010:123) puts it:

neo-realism seemingly escapes the dogmatism of postmodernism by explicitly embracing *and* deferring the possibility of the referent, of mimesis. By embracing the fact that both realist and metafictional strategies are necessarily animated by a belief, even if latent, that there "can be, in principle, only one correct version of reality", neo-realism works to escape the postmodern tendency to make a grand narrative out of an "incredulity" to grand narratives.

The way in which *The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen describes the production of a movie about the Vietnam War (a reference to Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979)) stands as an example of a metatextual critique on postmodern anti-realism. The protagonist, known only as "the Captain", is a communist agent for the Viet Cong who worked undercover in the South Vietnamese Army's Special Branch before being expatriated to America, where he continues to serve as a spy. While in America, he is employed by "the Auteur" (a film director) to provide input and advice on the script for an upcoming Hollywood movie, titled *The Hamlet* but referred to simply as "the Movie".

At a first reading, the Captain's dismay, disdain and eventual disgust with the Movie can be framed as an overt Marxist criticism of a cultural product, drawing as it does on Marxist

notions²⁸ of cultural materialism and the propaganda model of cultural production. In fact, "the General" justifies the Captain's involvement in the making of the Movie explicitly in terms of Marx:

What was that line from Marx? the General said, stroking his chin thoughtfully as he prepared to quote my notes about Marx. Oh, yes. "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented".²⁹ Isn't that what's happening here? Marx refers to peasants but he may as well refer to us. We cannot represent ourselves. Hollywood represents us. So we must do what we can to ensure that we are represented well. (2015:139)

These words of Marx are repeated a number of times throughout the novel, used to raise questions about the means of representation (who has the power to represent themselves and others), and intersecting with ethical notions of the politics and violence of representation.

In a coded letter, the Captain's handler, Man, reminds him of the words of Mao Zedong at Yan'an, to the effect that "art and literature were crucial to revolution" but "could also be tools of domination" and as such "could not be separated from politics" (2015:167). In terms of the protagonist's self-defined critical goals and the way in which he confronts the power relations informing the Movie, *The Sympathizer* is to an extent reminiscent of certain poststructuralist critiques that are levelled against classical works of literature or film to expose and deconstruct the hidden power hierarchies which they embody.

However, the novel avoids merely affirming poststructuralist strategies of suspicion or extending these suspicions to notions of essence, subjectivity, meaning, and truth.³⁰ Rather,

²⁸ Jeffries (2016) argues that Marxist theories in general are experiencing a massive surge in popularity, even in popular culture – a phenomenon which can perhaps be read as a symptom of a larger cultural shift.

²⁹ This quote, from Marx's 1852 essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, appeared as epigraph to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, 1978, which itself serves as intertext to *The Sympathizer*.

³⁰ This point can be illustrated with a comparison between *The Sympathizer* and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dream jungle* (2003), which also extensively describes a fictionalised version of the filming of *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines. Although such a discussion falls outside the scope of this study, the difference between a postmodernist and metamodernist criticism of hyperreality can be noted. *Dream Jungle* makes use of a postmodern collage-like style and historiographic pastiche, which has the effect of emphasising the performative aspect of reality, rendering it into a spectacle of hypermediation and a surface play of signifiers. Although overtly a critique of the violence of representation, by employing strategies and narratives that emphasise the textual and surface interplay of signifiers, disconnected from an objective and ontologically independent reality, *Dream*

a large part of the novel can be read as grappling with the dilemma of representational accuracy in a hypermediated culture where reality is assumed to be always already textually constructed, relative and subjective, subjugated to societal forces like ideology and the market. The novel makes two assertions to the contrary, neither of which can be reduced to text: the acknowledgment that the material conditions of the production of a cultural artefact cannot be disconnected from the artwork's interpretation; and the insistence on a quantifiable, objective reality that exists outside of art.

In choosing to focus on the filming process of the Movie, *The Sympathizer* demystifies notions of art as separated from the material conditions of its production, and thereby refuses the kind of distance and detachment that may result from viewing the Movie purely as "text". The most poignant example is the desperate Vietnamese refugees living in squalor in the Philippines who are recruited to play extras in the Movie for a pitiful amount of pay (2015:146), and who continue to suffer ill-treatment and discrimination on the set (2015:157; 159). Yet, these refugees — the "real" Vietnamese — are still not "real" enough for the Movie, as it is decided that even the professional actors among them are unqualified for any of the major roles, with the result that the main roles for Vietnamese characters were played by respectively a Korean American, British Chinese, and Filipino actor. As the Captain puts it: "we could not represent ourselves; we must be represented, in this case by other Asians" (2015:152).

While the detailed descriptions of the way in which the set is constructed and the scenes filmed could be read as a metafictional deconstruction of a text — showing the fictional and textually constructed nature of the Movie — the way in which it is juxtaposed with scenes from the reality of the Captain's experience insists on an ontologically independent reality outside of the images of the Movie.

When the actor James Yoon is filming a scene where the Viet Cong tortures his character, Binh, who is sympathetic to the US forces, the Captain is reminded that "[i]t was a sight I had seen before" (2015:165) in his capacity of officer in the South Vietnamese Special Branch, who had received CIA training in interrogation methods and who had applied this on the

jungle risks participating in and perpetuating the Western production of representation that a text such as *The Sympathizer* seeks to contest through its foregrounding of objective reality.

See Gonzalez (2009) for a discussion of how *Dream jungle* indictas as well as participates in American neocolonialism by mapping the Philippines as "a site where shared hallucinations of imperial violence and dreams of tropical desire are located" (2009:144-145).

communist agents they captured. The Captain also gets into an argument with the Auteur over the planned rape scene in the Movie, where Viet Cong assaults the character Mai (who is likewise sympathetic to the US forces). The Auteur claims that he is including it in the interest of authenticity:

A little shock treatment never hurt an audience, he said, pointing at me with his fork. Sometimes they need a kick in the ass so they can feel something after sitting down for so long. A slap on both cheeks, and I don't mean the ones on their faces. This is war, and rape happens. I have an obligation to show that, although a sellout like you obviously would disagree. (2015:157)

For the Captain, however, Mai's rape was not simply figurative, but rather "a brutal act of the imagination" (2015:158). The novel parallels the film's "fictional" rape with the "real" rape of a communist agent by members of the Special Branch,³¹ under CIA supervision, in a room referred to by the policemen as "the movie theater", because it doubled as one when foreigners visited (2015:334).

By showing the fictional construction of these scenes from the Movie and placing them alongside moments from the "real" story world of the Captain, the novel raises the same questions that Susan Sontag did in *Regarding the pain of others* (2003). Discussing the ethical aspects of representation, Sontag warns against disregarding the material context and realities of reproducing an image. The rhetoric of images should never distract one from asking "what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown" (Sontag, 2003). While the Auteur includes the torture of Binh and the rape of Mai to showcase the inhuman cruelty of the Viet Cong, in keeping with the ideological and commercial aims of the Movie, in reality there had been atrocities committed on both sides, a fact that exists independently of what is being represented in dominant cultural texts.

A criticism of hyperreality and mediation also illustrates the insistence on a quantifiable reality outside of the proliferation of signifiers. When the Captain first meets the Auteur after

³¹ Regarding this scene, Nguyen in an interview with Tran (2015) says that it alludes to the tradition in Western culture to use a Vietnamese woman to serve as representation or metaphor of the country and the nation, "to be raped, or to become the lover of foreigners". In that moment in the novel, where the Vietnamese agent is raped by Vietnamese men, he "wanted to show that this was something that wasn't simply happening in terms of what the West was doing to Vietnam but what Vietnamese were doing to themselves as well... I wanted this to be very specifically a moment of Vietnamese-on-Vietnamese confrontation and responsibility because, again, this is part of how we reclaim our subjectivity: we aren't just victims but victimizers as well".

having read the screenplay, he is struck by the Auteur's personal assistant's abrupt and rude manner towards him. Initially assuming that the cause of her behaviour was his race (2015:122), he valiantly tries to rationalise her actions, until he realises:

The flawlessness of my English did not matter. Even if she could hear me, she still saw right through me, or perhaps saw someone else instead of me, her retinas burned with the images of all the castrati dreamed up by Hollywood to steal the place of real Asian men. Here I speak of those cartoons named Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, Number One Son, Hop Sing — *Hop Sing!* — and the bucktoothed, bespectacled Jap not so much played as mocked by Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. (2015:123)

Implied here is the notion that reality is always already mediated through the media, the unreal images blinding Violet to the reality of the Captain as a person — like Baudrillard's hyperreality, the real has been sublimated, it was something Violet "saw right through". While postmodernism might have focused on the "loss" of the real and the consequent impossibility of meaning, however, the Captain's very real irritation with the way he is being treated stems from the fact that he experiences a "being real" that is irreconcilable with the simulacra of images in Violet's mind.

This passage sets the tone for the meeting between the Captain and the Auteur that follows. At the heart of their conflict is the Captain's insistence on what is real (individual, unique, and accurate) versus the Auteur's interest in entertainment and commercialism — and specifically his belief that *seeming* authenticity (as opposed to representational accuracy) is only a means to achieve his commercial goals. For the Auteur, the only reality is the reality in which people want to believe and would be willing to pay money to see.

When the Captain points out that "the lack of speaking parts for Vietnamese people in a movie set in Vietnam might be interpreted as cultural insensitivity" (2015:127), his protest is quickly countered by the Auteur's personal assistant:

True, Violet interjected, but what it boils down to is who pays for the tickets and goes to the movies. Frankly, Vietnamese audiences aren't going to watch this movie, are they? I contained my outrage. Even so, I said, do you not think it would be a little more believable, a little more realistic, a little more authentic, for a movie set in a certain country for the people of that country to have something to say, instead of having your screenplay direct, as it does now, *Cut to villagers speaking in their own language?* Do you think it might not be decent to let them actually say something instead of simple acknowledging that there is some kind of sound coming from their mouths? (2015:127-128)

The Auteur responds very bluntly:

How many movies have you made. None. Isn't that right. None, zero, zilch, nada, nothing, and however you say it in your language. So thank you for telling me how to do my job. Now get the hell out of my house and come back after you've made a movie or two. (2015:128)

Despite this attitude, the Auteur seems to believe sincerely that he values authenticity. He tells the Captain why he wanted his input:

You're the first Vietnamese I've ever met. Not too many of you in Hollywood. Hell, none of you in Hollywood. And authenticity's important. Not that authenticity beats imagination. The story still comes first. The universality of the story has to be there. But it doesn't hurt to get the details right. (2015:125)

When the Captain points out that the Auteur did not, in fact, get the details right, he counters (in his characteristic style that eschews question marks):

I didn't get the details right. Violet, hear that. I researched your country, my friend. I read Joseph Buttinger and Frances FitzGerald. Have you read Joseph Buttinger and Frances FitzGerald. He's the foremost historian on your little part of the world. And she won the Pulitzer Prize. She dissected your psychology. I think I know something about your people. (2015:125-126)

This passage connects with the novel's criticism of the means, violence, and politics of representation. It can also be read as critical of postmodern claims of textuality: the Auteur claims to know (with the implication to own) "something about your people", their country and situation, but this knowledge is solely based on writing, invoking the idea of the signified as infinitely deferred. The preposterous tone of the conversation as a whole, however, makes it clear that lived reality does exist outside of the texts, and that its existence has very real, tangible and corporeal implications for those living it.

The Captain proceeds to prove this by drawing on notions of embodiment, affect and cultural embeddedness and pointing out that the script "didn't even get the screams right":

basically all the places in the script where one of my people has a speaking part, he or she screams. No words, just screams. So you should at least get the screams right. (2015:126)

When the Auteur claims that screams are universal, the Captain — who has in fact "heard many of my countrymen screaming in pain" (2015:127) — responds that, should he at that

moment attempt to kill the Auteur, the scream from the Auteur would be different from his assistant's:

Those are two very different kinds of terror coming from a man and a woman. The man knows he is dying. The woman fears she is likely to die soon. Their situations and their bodies produce a qualitatively different timbre to their voices. One must listen to them carefully to understand that while pain is universal, it is also utterly private. We cannot know whether our pain is like anybody else's pain until we talk about it. Once we do that, we speak and think in ways cultural and individual. (2015:126)

Describing the making of the Movie, the Captain emphasises the slippage between what is real and what, in trying to be "authentic", ends up being more real than real. A comical example of the way in which the notion of "authenticity" is used to simulate or enhance the appearance of reality is the method acting of the Thespian (the actor playing one of the major characters).

The Thespian, playing the role of a soldier, insists on staying in uniform the whole time, demands a pup tent instead of his air-conditioned trailer on set and gives up on showering and shaving completely (2015:151). Being "more real than real", however, he ends up being completely unrealistic, as the Captain points out:

the Thespian had still not taken a shower after seven months of shooting. This was despite the fact that no soldier ever passed up the opportunity for a shower or bath, even if it amounted to no more than lathering himself with soap and cold water from a helmet. I mentioned this to the Thespian one night early in the shooting, and he responded with one of those looks of pity and amusement I was by now so used to getting, the kind that implied not only that my fly was undone, but that there was nothing to see even if it was. It is exactly because no soldier has done this that I am, he declared. (2015:171)

The Movie's torture scene, in which the actor James Yoon is playing the character of Binh, also dramatizes the tension between reality and hyperreality. Yoon is excited at the prospect of playing a character being brutally abused, as he tells the Captain:

All I ever got was a few seconds of screen time at most and sometimes barely that. This time though — and here he trotted out the giddy smile of a freshly crowned beauty pageant queen — it's going to take forever to kill me. (2015:162)

It is described how well he acts the scene, with real tears as well as real vomit, which nonetheless has to be repeated for seven takes before the Auteur was satisfied (2015:162). During a break in shooting, Yoon refuses to be unstrapped, instead opting to suffer in the hot sun to add to the authenticity of his scene — although, as the Captain points out, knowing from his experience of the Special Branch's interrogation, Yoon's suffering would be over within the day, "whereas a real prisoner's mortification continued for days, weeks, months, years" (2015:164).

An interplay of reality and fiction ensues as the Captain narrates:

By the final take two hours later, James Yoon really was lachrymose with pain, his face bathed in sweat, mucus, vomit, and tears. It was a sight that I had seen before — the communist agent. But that was real, so real I had to stop thinking about her face. I focused on the fictional state of total degradation that the Auteur wanted for the next scene, which itself required several takes... Left alone without the towel around his head, he was free to bite off his own tongue and drown under a faucet of his fake blood, a commercial product that cost thirty-five dollars a gallon and of which approximately two gallons were used to paint James Yoon and decorate the earth. When it came to Binh's brains, though, Harry had concocted his own homemade cerebro-matter, a secret recipe of oatmeal mixed with agar, the result being a gray, clumpy, congealed mess that he lovingly daubed on the earth around James Yoon's head. The cinematographer got especially close to capture the look in Binh's eyes, which I could not see from where I was watching, but which I assumed to be some saintly mix of ecstatic pain and painful ecstasy. (2015:165)

For the Captain, the ultimate problem with the Movie is the way in which it succeeded in "strip-mining history, leaving the real history in the tunnels along with the dead, doling out tiny sparkling diamonds for audiences to gasp over" (2015:129). By detaching itself from any "real history" (the original referent), the Movie is able to produce its "tiny sparkling diamonds" — signifiers representing something which does not in fact exist, yet seem more real than the "real history".

The Auteur himself comes very close to perfectly quoting Baudrillard when he addresses his crew prior to the final scene of the movie — "the greatest blowup ever in cinematic history" (2015:172):

It is the moment, the Auteur proclaimed to the massed crew during the last week, when we show that making this movie was going to war itself. When your grandchildren ask you what you did during the war, you can say, I made this movie. I made a great work of art. How do

you know you've made a great work of art? A great work of art is something as real as reality itself, and sometimes even more real than the real. Long after this war is forgotten, when its existence is a paragraph in a schoolbook students won't even bother to read, and everyone who survived it is dead, their bodies dust, their memories atoms, their emotions no longer in motion, this work of art will still shine so brightly it will not just be about the war but it will be the war.

And there you have the absurdity. Not that there was not some truth to what the Auteur claimed, for the absurd often has its seed in a truth. Yes, art eventually survives war, its artifacts still towering long after the diurnal rhythms of nature have ground the bodies of millions of warriors to power, but I had no doubt that in the Auteur's egomaniacal imagination he meant that his work of art, now, was more important than the three or four or six million dead who composed the real meaning of the war. *The cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.* (2015:172) (original italics)

The Auteur's vision is illustrative of postmodern nihilism: claiming the impossibility of any lasting notion of memory, emotion, subjects, or historical fact, he sees the Movie "purely as Art" (2015:166). In this way, he negates any need for a grounded, situated commitment to the political (cf. Toth, 2010:3), and can present his work of art as more important, more noteworthy, more *real* than the real victims of the real war. Removed from its original referent, the Movie as cultural text is "more real than real" and will outlive the ontological reality of history: the Movie will cease to be "about the war" and will itself *become* the war (at least in the mind of the generations coming after the historical fact, whose only access to it will be through the cultural texts in which it is represented). The "real" here is the real of postmodernism: a social construct, a convention agreed on by a certain culture at a certain time and in a certain way, "a fiction, inflected by preceding fictions" (Kirby, 2009:49).

In contrast to the postmodern belief of the Auteur, not only does the Captain insist on the ethical aspect of any mode of representation, his criticism of the hyperreality of the Movie betrays a belief in the possibility of what postmodernism has claimed to be impossible: meaning, truth and representational accuracy (Toth, 2010:3-4). For him, there is no such thing as "purely Art" that could take the place of the real — although it could serve to distract from the real, the real (in all its threat and danger) is always ontologically outside of the construct of art, and art could never entirely disconnect itself from the realities underlying it. In this sense, the Movie is a "work of propaganda", "the American story [audiences] watched and loved, up until the day that they themselves might be bombed by the planes they had seen in American movies" (2015:166).

However, *The Sympathizer* does not advocate a naive return to notions of empirical reality and innocence mimesis.³² Through the amount of narrative it spends on the making of the Movie, it acknowledges the constructed nature of the cultural text and the difficulty of true representational accuracy. There is no way for art to represent material reality unproblematically, exactly "as it is", since it is always already mediated — but the accuracy and fairness of *how* reality is represented is an ethical demand to be made on the power of representation.

Even though the novel draws on notions of a materialist ontology and a "belief in the Real" (cf. Crockett, 2007:268,280) in order to assert a reality that exists independently, it never offers an unmediated version of reality that is hold up as an undeniably correct and universal truth — even the Captain admits that style as much as content directs his own version of events (2015:305). Yet the belief that the correct version of reality is *possible*, even if it is inaccessible or seemingly unattainable, animates his insistence on the "correct" style for his "confession". Thus, in the way that it acknowledges the subjectivity and mediation of reality, even while it insists on the possibility of a single, stable referent and demands that an accurate representational act should be strived for, *The Sympathizer* inhabits the in-between space of metamodernist realism.

SINCERITY, noun. (also **SINCERE**, adj.)

"Freedom of dissimulation or duplicity; honesty, straightforwardness"; also when used with regard to feelings interpreted as "genuineness" (OED, 2015) [AUTHENTICITY].

One of the characteristics of postmodernism most vehemently rejected by metamodernism is its irony, a strategy which, it is claimed, at best cultivates a sense of ironic detachment and at worst endorses a form of exhibitionist solipsism. According to a metamodernist sensibility, postmodernist irony should be shunned for the way in which it makes it impossible to engage in a meaningful, sincere way with reality or express emotion — or anything else — in a sincere, unambiguous way, devoid of duplicity.

³² As McLaughlin (2007:60) argues in terms of metamodernist sincerity, a return to a "state of innocence about the transparency of language, discourse, and narrative" which pretends to be oblivious to the "process of representation sitting there between word and object" is highly unlikely.

Postmodernism is often referred to as the "age of irony" (Kirby, 2009:150), an epoch ruled by the "tyranny' of irony" (Timmer, 2010:101). Irony was partly an attempt to temper the solemnity of modernism which, it could be said, took itself entirely too seriously. McLaughlin (2007:58) characterises postmodernism's lack of sincerity by referring to some thoughts of Stanley Fish, namely that postmodernism refused to distinguish between discourse and content — it "valorizes expression for the sake of expression and disregards the content of the expression" (cf. Toth, 2010:10). The notion of "expression for the sake of expression" is a result of the fact that, in a certain articulation of postmodernism, "reality is a linguistic construct, in which truth-value is indeterminate and all utterances are equally valid or invalid" (McLaughlin, 2007:58) — a strategy that postmodernism used to destabilise totalising grand narratives by showing that any truth claim can never be more than an illusion (Toth, 2010:119).

However, once popular culture adopted an ironical attitude as the norm [POSTMODERNISM'S ABSORPTION INTO POPULAR CULTURE], postmodern irony and cynicism — however useful it might have been for deconstruction, dismantling illusions and undoing the hegemony of master narratives — became ends in themselves. Irony "lost its critical function" and became simply a "mode of social discourse: using irony as a way to prove you are in the loop, part of a self-conscious incrowd" (Timmer, 2010:101).

The most obvious manifestation of the way in which irony lost its edge is perhaps its (perceived) role and function in the much-vilified hipster subculture, a subculture which is self-characterised by the search for the ultimate authentic experience (Mullins, 2012) even while it is defined by its use of irony and utter lack of authenticity (Horning, 2009) [AUTHENTICITY]. As one critic puts it, "under the guise of 'irony', hipsterism fetishizes the authentic and regurgitates it with a winking inauthenticity" (Lorentzen, 2007). In this sense, the hipster is perhaps the ultimate sign of the current times as they embody "postmodernism as a spent force, revealing what happens when pastiche and irony exhaust themselves as aesthetics" (Horning, 2009).

Part of the problem with irony is the feeling that, at least in the way it came to be used in postmodernism, it is ultimately self-consuming. As a strategy for dismantling grand narratives, it is hardly capable of the actual construction of anything else. Exhausted and overused as a postmodern convention, it became little more than a synonym for sarcasm, cynicism and nihilism, and is "utilized almost exclusively as a tool to deconstruct

contemporary culture until there is neither anything contemporary nor anything remotely cultural left" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:60-61).

As McLaughlin (2007:59) points out: postmodernism privileges "discourse over truth-value" by emphasising "dialogue, negotiation, and contingency over principle" in an attitude which McLaughlin describes as "its general oh-well-what-the-Hell-ness". Postmodernism might take the form of rebellion against societal restrictions, but its dismissal of content subverts "actual rebellion based in such values as justice, equality, and freedom" (McLaughlin, 2007:59) [ETHICAL CONCERNS]. In the same way, its emphasis on pop culture and intertextuality tends to obscure (if not render impossible) "political seriousness" (Keulks, 2007:153).

In contrast, one of the major aims of the metamodernist project is to restore to cultural theory many of the concepts which postmodernism had repudiated, such as the notion of "absolute truth" (Kirby, 2009:33; REALISM). If postmodernism was the age of irony, Keulks (2007:146) designates metamodernism the "post-ironic" age.

Many regard the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York as the watershed between postmodernism and metamodernism, especially since it seemed to call for a "national outpouring of emotion" in which irony had no place (Kirby, 2009:150). Kirby points out, however, that the notion of "new sincerity" as a hallmark of the 21st century is part of an "international digimodernist earnestness that wipes out postmodernism's irony and predates the attacks of the World Trade Center". While he acknowledges that "sincerity is a value, a conscious moral choice reassuringly (in troubled times) under the control and will of a speaker", metamodernist sincerity is a much wider cultural phenomenon, which, just as postmodernist irony, "has deep roots in contemporary culture" (2009:151). Earnestness has become almost compulsory, a "sociohistorical expression, not a personal preference" (2009:151). Indeed, Timmer (2010:101-102) points out that David Foster Wallace had already predicted in 1998 (*A supposedly fun thing I'll never do again*) that the next generation of literary "rebels" will exhibit "softness, a certain sentimentality, sincerity, and the backing away from ironic watching".

However, as McLaughlin (2007:60) argues, a return to a "state of innocence about the transparency of language, discourse, and narrative" which pretends to be oblivious to the "process of representation sitting there between word and object" is highly unlikely [RETURN TO MODERNISM; MODERNISM INFORMED BY POSTMODERNISM]. One solution that McLaughlin (2007:60) suggests is that of the author David Foster Wallace, who utilises the cynical and

ironic self-awareness that Wallace himself deems to be destructive to create characters who are hyperaware of language "in an attempt to break through the irony to something genuine and sincere". In a statement echoing Vermeulen and Van den Akker's notion that metamodernism attempts despite its inevitable failure, McLaughlin (2007:60) remarks that the fact that Wallace's fiction focuses on the *attempt* to be genuine and sincere is an indication that "he doesn't see himself as having succeeded yet".

The notion that a "return" to sincerity is necessarily problematised by the spirit of postmodern irony can also be seen in the statement of film critic James MacDowell who identified "quirkiness" as a recent trend in Indie cinema. Quirkiness in this sense is "characterized by the attempt to restore, to the cynical reality of adults, a childlike naivety — as opposed to the postmodern 'smart' cinema of the 1990s, which was typified by sarcasm and indifference" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:7). The designated use of the term "quirkiness" — "characterized by certain unexpected, odd, or unusual traits; idiosyncratic, eccentric; peculiar, unusual" (OED, 2015) — indicates that it is not an unproblematic return to "innocence" either, but rather a self-conscious negotiation between "naivety" and "cynical reality".

For Timmer, the impossibility of a simple return to sincerity is seen in the self-consciousness of metamodernist works of fiction — a trait that it inherited from postmodernism and is now utilising as a strategy to resist the ironic detachment of postmodernism. Referring to Dave Eggers' novel, *A heartbreaking work of staggering genius*, Timmer argues that it

draws from a postmodern tradition of self-conscious meta-fictional prose (although any such ties to this "tradition" are fiercely denied, as we will see) but introduces very directly... a sense of honesty and openness — a sense of honesty and openness that is (unfortunately or not) constantly corrupted by that same self-consciousness. (2010:186-187)

In relation to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's assertion that metamodernism purposefully attempts despite recognising the inevitability of failure (2010:5), the problematic of "returning to sincerity" should not be regarded as a failed attempt as much as a deliberate negotiation between the two poles of irony and sincerity: sincerity "unfortunately or not" corrupted by a sense of ironic self-consciousness, to borrow Timmer's terms. Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2015:62) expound on this view, suggesting that metamodernist works utilise irony to "counterbalance" and keep in check a naive "utopianism", to this end oscillating between sincerity and irony, melancholy or apathy and hope.

Gibbons (2015:32), like Vermeulen and Van den Akker, links metamodernist sincerity to notions of utopianism [OPTIMISM]:

While modernism was fuelled by an enthusiasm for utopian thinking and an enlightened idealization of reason, and while postmodernism rejects such optimism in favor of nihilistic irony and distrust, metamodernism is flavored by the simultaneous and paradoxical sense of hope and future failure. Irony in metamodernist writing is, therefore, not a derisive apolitical performance but unreservedly committed to both promises that the locutionary act sets forth, both the surface meaning and its intended opposite.

In another example, American art critic Jerry Saltz, as quoted by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:7), describes a rising sensibility in contemporary art as an attitude which is not simply a "return to innocence", but which is rather "knowingly-selfconscious" in a way that regards the distinction between "earnestness and detachment" as artificial and believes that something can be "ironic and sincere" at the same time:

It's an attitude that says, I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious. [original emphasis]

Kirby (2009:154) indeed makes a distinction between earnestness or sincerity on the one hand, and seriousness on the other, although I would argue that Saltz's notion of "seriousness" is related to Kirby's notion of "earnestness", rather than in opposition to it:

So many of the elements of the digimodernist text... — the pseudoscientific framing, the absence of historical consciousness (however problematic) — are condensed into earnestness, which is not exactly seriousness. Seriousness might be thought a rational response to the problems of our time, the faraway wars and too-near terrorism, the economic upheavals and social estrangement, but earnestness is a depoliticized, indeed desocialized quality; it's a cultural turn toward the mythic, the consumerist, the electronic-textual. In truly objective terms, earnestness is excessive; it's really a discursive effect, something that emerges from changes in cultural content inflected by personal values. But it is no use in the "real world".

Kirby (2009:155) also contrasts the metamodernist emphasis on sincerity with the postmodern "knowingness" that David Foster Wallace rejected so vehemently (see Timmer, 2010:145-149). For Kirby, then, metamodernism is an age of credulity, as manifested in "the naivety of Wikipedia, the simplicities of children's entertainment, the irrationality of

earnestness, the belief in apparent realities, the falsity of pseudoscience, the loss of control of engulfment" (2009:155). This stands in contrast to the pride postmodernism took in

the "media literacy", the smartness of its ironic, knowing textual recipient, who could identify the quotations, the sources, and allusions, who was aware of the conventions and practices of textual production, who could piece together the discontinuous fragments and appreciate depthlessness as a positive quality.

Far from mourning the passing of the postmodern reader, however, Kirby (2007:155) almost welcomes it: "just as wall-to-wall irony got tiresome and restrictive, so perma-knowingness wound up looking self-satisfied and vacuous". Instead, metamodernism's apparent credulity, naivety and childishness can be seen as part of a project of "breakup and re-formation", a process of restructuring terms that have been decentred, dismantled and deconstructed by postmodernism, a sense of "a new, though in many ways old, form of narrative percolating through our culture" (Kirby, 2009:155).

Kirby interprets metamodernist sincerity as part of a "mythico-political" turn (2009:152) — an attempt to restructure concepts of myth and archetype [MYTH] to engage with moral and ethical matters [ETHICAL CONCERNS]. Referring to the increasing fascination with and production of fantasy and pseudo-historical films such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Matrix*, the *Star Wars* prequels, *Gladiator*, *Troy* and *Alexander*, he claims that political and ethical matters are foregrounded, but portrayed as "a matter of vague but profound gravitas, of weighty consideration, of deep solemnity and eternal values" — "essentially a child's conception of politics", devoid of sex, adult psychology, the "petulance and pettiness and cruelty" of modern-day politics (2009:152).

In the end, whatever shape a metamodernist notion of sincerity takes, two things at least are clear: there is a felt and urgent need to do away with postmodernist irony; and attempts to do so are always already problematised by that very same irony, a fact that leads to a knowing self-consciousness or a deliberate earnestness. As Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:10) interpret it, metamodernism still utilises postmodern irony and deconstruction, but while postmodernism deconstructed modernist ideals by "pointing exactly to what it presents, by exposing precisely what it signifies", metamodernism rather attempts to "redirect" these ideals:

[M]etamodern irony is intrinsically bound to desire, whereas postmodern irony is inherently tied to apathy. Consequently, the metamodern art work (or rather, at least as the

metamodern art work has so far expressed itself by means of neoromanticism) redirects the modern piece by drawing attention to what it cannot present in its language, what it cannot signify in its own terms (that what is often called the sublime, the uncanny, the ethereal, the mysterious, and so forth).

SUBJECTIVITY, noun.; that which pertains to the **SUBJECT, noun**.

"Subject" in this sense is taken as a term used in preference to humanist alternatives such as "actor" or "individual" and as such rejects the notion that "individual human beings are the sole originators of social relations" (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2014). "Subjectivity" is that which pertains to the subject and "his or her particular perspective, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (Solomon, 2005). Interpretations of subjectivity ranges from the idea that it is "the ontological essence of being human" (a tradition following Descartes); that it is the phenomenological experience of "what it's like to be' a certain conscious being" (a perspective prevalent in the domain of cognitive science); to the postmodern and poststructuralist theories that regard the subject as a "construction' of politics, language, and culture" (Solomon, 2005).

A central claim of postmodern and poststructuralist theories is that subjectivity exists only in flux, a continuous flow of construction and reconstruction, subject to various forces of society, culture and history. With regard to the "linguistic turn" heralded by writings on the subject from thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Roland Barthes, Timmer (2010:35) asserts: "[d]ead and buried, supposedly, was a particular *kind* of subject: a self-determining, self-contained subject, occupying a central position — as moral authority, as meaning-maker". During postmodernism, the subject came to be no more than "a shifting signifier caught up in this endless interplay of signification", and "language became the paradigmatic structure in the humanities", a structure which is moreover completely without a centre (Timmer, 2010:36).

Critical theory of the late 20th century has thus decentred the self or individual. Two main ideas can be identified here: the absence of an "inner center" that integrates or "holds together" the various aspects of any given individual; and the focus on "impersonal systems" (such as Foucault's discourses and power networks) rather than people as the governing forces of society. This has resulted in a certain framework of interpretation that was "so

wholly bent on anti-humanism as to seem suicidal" (Quintin Kraft, quoted by Timmer (2010:36)). The poststructuralist notion of subjectivity as decentred is reflected in the fragmentation of the self in postmodernist fiction, and can be said to have had "devastating consequences for the status of characters in narrative fiction" (Timmer, 2010:52; quoting Rimmon-Kenan).

As example of these "devastating consequences", Timmer refers to Fokkema's research of postmodern characterization, concluded in 1991, when the "de-humanizing tendency" central to structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to narratives was so prevalent that "the term 'character' had been almost completely erased from the critical-theoretical vocabulary of literary studies". This had the result that "there was apparently almost a taboo on discussing character in terms of human-like qualities, so that the intuition that characters indeed can have something human-like could not be sophisticatedly accounted for" (Timmer, 2010:61, footnote). In this way, "the 'death' of character fitted a larger, ideologically motivated shift, an anti-humanistic turn that was to correct a frame of mind that put Man at the center of the universe" (Timmer, 2010:62) [cf. POSTHUMANISM].

In contrast, metamodernism is characterised by the return of the subject and the performance of meaningful intersubjectivities (Amian 2008:202). As Gąsiorek and James (2012:616-617) point out, metamodernist fiction revives "earlier anxieties and debates" on issues such as the function of the writer and his/her role in society; as well as the "centrality (or otherwise) of character to the novel as genre".

As part of this return, metamodernism problematises the postmodernist, "anti-humanist" interpretation of the subject as fragmented, decentred, and merely a social construction through language by showing that this view of the subject has severe limitations. On the one hand, Timmer (2010:90) points out that metamodernist fiction indicates a friction between the "accepted or dominant ways of constructing a sense of self and the more private sense of self — that is: certain aspects of the self do not seem to *fit* the supposedly 'proper' or socially or culturally 'appropriate' frameworks of meaning".

This friction is a result of the fact that, regardless of what theory says on the matter, most human subjects *do* in fact experience themselves to have a centred, coherent "feeling of selfhood". The discrepancy between a theorised subject and the felt reality of a lived experience leads to what Timmer (2010:90) refers to as some "serious pathological disturbances":

An extreme self-consciousness characterizes the thought process of many of the human figures in the [metamodernist] novels, paradoxically perhaps, since what is this *self* that they are conscious of? These figures may seem self-centered, continually reflecting on their own self, but there *is* no self, fixated in mind, as a stable object of reflection — and the reflection on the self therefore results in an infinite regress, causing what could be called an *existential implosion*. (Timmer, 2010:43)

Another way in which postmodern theories of self are perceived as limited hinges on the same idea that can be found in different forms throughout the postmodernism-metamodernism debate: postmodern theories were developed to critically engage with a modern(ist) cultural milieu. The contemporary cultural landscape, however, has been shaped and informed by postmodern theories, rendering postmodern theories of critical engagement obsolete [POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE]. As Timmer (2010:31) argues in relation to theories of subjectivity:

To realize that there is not one, fixed, way of experiencing reality, including the reality of the self, can be liberating if one was ever caught up in one such traditional framework of reality. But when this becomes the *modus vivendi*, when this continual reflection on the processes of meaning making itself becomes the "appropriate" way of relating to the self, others and the world, the effects are quite different.

The "effect" that Timmer has in mind here is the notion that the infinite possibilities opened up by poststructural theories of the subject can be existentially overwhelming. One way in which metamodernism responds to this is by pointing out the need for a shared, communal framework of reality: a "shared — but unproven and unprovable — framework of reality" which is "based on a certain trust and faith, sustained by social interactions and the conventions and routines that structure those interactions" (Timmer, 2010:32). This leads to one of the central arguments of Timmer's discussion of selfhood in metamodernism, namely that the restructuring of affect in a new generation of writers leads to "a structural need for a we" (Timmer, 2010:45)

This statement touches on two interrelated themes: firstly, that the metamodernist notion of subjectivity is contingent on a restructuring of AFFECT, and secondly that it identifies a need for a sense of communal or shared experiences [MYTH]. Both these themes are complicated, or problematised, by the fact that metamodernism does not merely return to a modernist sense of a stable, autonomous self; but instead struggles to reconcile its need for an authentic self and a shared framework of experience with postmodern ideals.

With regard to the restructuring of affect, Amian (2008:176) refers to Jonathan Saffran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* (2002) to point out the "ethical urgency of a meaningful intersubjective exchange", for which a stable sense of self is first needed. The self is constructed through notions of affect as it is shared intersubjectively:

The subject fashions itself as subject as it "confesses" its "true self" to an "other" and performatively enacts its own inscription in a set of discursive formations that combine such powerful tropes as "honesty", "intimacy", "truth", and the aforementioned "authenticity" with notions of an "essence", "core", or — to use the religious concept the passage itself alludes to — "soul" that the subject is implied to possess. (2008:177)

Keulks (2007:144) also refers to the reinscription of supposedly "humanist" concepts in his discussion of Salman Rushdie's later works (*Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the clown* (2005). Keulks reads both novels as attempts to revive or reinvigorate "humanist concepts such as of agency, subjectivity, and love" (2007:144) [AFFECT]. These notions of affect are part of a "more centrist construction" of an "autonomous self" or "integrated subjectivity" in response to a postmodernist discourse on subjectivity which is characterised by nihilism, cynicism and abstraction (2007:146).

From this, it is already clear that subjectivity after postmodernism is — like many other conceivably pre-postmodern themes that are currently being revived — not a simple matter of returning to modernist ideals. In his analysis of Salman Rushdie's *Fury*, Keulks (2007:151) summarises the struggle to reconcile the need for a more coherent, autonomous self with the lessons of postmodernism. For him, the novel attempts

to re-stabilize subjectivity through both narration and love. After beginning with a series of classical postmodern criteria — absent centres, proliferating surfaces, fractured selves, ontological uncertainty — the novel stages an unsuccessful attempt to assimilate realist and humanist criteria (psychological depth, love, agency, and autonomy) within a series of persistent — and persistently toxic — postmodern settings.

The emphasis here is on "an unsuccessful attempt". For Keulks (2007:150), this "failure" is a result of a "lack of synthesis, both artistic and political" between "postmodernism, realism, humanism, and historicism" that is attempted without "resorting to essentialism or relativism". The problem here, as Keulks (2007:162) sees it, is how to reconstruct self and community in a "contemporary age that thwarts integration and remains dangerously mediated, divisive,

and discursive". (See REALISM for ways in which metamodernism deals with mediated reality in other contexts.)

Another example of the attempt and struggle to negotiate a more centred, restructured sense of self after postmodernism without regressing to modernist aesthetics is the discussion of Jonathan Saffran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* (2002) by Amian (2008). Amian (2008:178) argues that both the respective characters and the acts of exchange between them acknowledge their own discursive construction. However, there is a marked shift in the novel from "uncommitted play" to a "meaningful" textual engagement", which lends an air of "truthfulness":

This new sense of an ethical urgency remains mediated, however, and never ceases to openly parade its own mediated quality. The effect, I wish to argue, is an intriguing interplay of oscillating textual in/stability through which "stability" — like "the subject" — is exposed as nothing more than a textual effect and is yet shown to perform a relevant function as a dynamic category within a dynamic process of signification.

In this way, the self in the novel emerges as "the product of a discourse of 'self-expression' that perpetuates the familiar tropes of 'authenticity' and 'essence' as it pursues the subject's construction along the lines of a performative struggle to communicate its 'innermost' feelings and convictions" (Amian, 2008:179) [AUTHENTICITY]. The tension between a nostalgia for a modernist subjectivity and the lessons of postmodernism is navigated in the following manner: a "pervasive sense of 'humanness'" is reconstructed which "effectively resists the impulse of a nostalgic retreat by never ceasing to openly display its reliance on a postmodernist textual performance" (2008:180).

Timmer, too, stresses the fact that the return of the subject in metamodernism is not merely a "nostalgic retreat" to earlier notions of the human:

The turn to the human in recent fiction and theory does not amount to a naïve return to the more traditional view of the self as centered and autonomous meaning-maker... but neither is the absence of an "inner center" any longer uncritically reiterated, and "systems" are taken to be less deterministic than in (post)structural theories. The self resurfaces in these novels as a vague "presence", undefined by itself but not absent in the way that it was perceived in postmodern texts; and systems or structures certainly still have an influence on the construction of the self but they are no longer conceived of as "impersonal" but rather as *inter-personally* constructed. (Timmer, 2010:52)

An important aspect of subjectivity in metamodernism is the way in which it is contingent on notions of intersubjective relations and shared experiences. Amian (2008:181) for example refers to the "urgency" and the "need" for "'meaningful' engagement" which hinges on concepts of agency, meaning and truth, all in the service of "intersubjective exchange and communal involvement". Jones (2012:84) discusses the fiction of A.L. Kennedy as being expressive of a humanistic agenda that is based on the notion that "an ethical discourse can only be adequately realised in more humanist modes which deal in a recognisable world of referents and values, and a shared reality". Kennedy's fiction therefore has the potential to act as "a point of communal unity, an occasion for communication, togetherness and contact between individuals"; to prompt "human communication and convergence, an awareness and experience of intersubjectivity" (Jones, 2012:85).

Metamodernist notions of intersubjectivity serve as a reaction against and rejection of what is perceived as postmodernist solipsism and disconnection. For the postmodern subject, characterised by ironic detachment which manifests most obviously in postmodern fiction's predilection for metafiction (the notion that anything can only ever be text and that a visceral engagement with reality is therefore not only unbecoming but impossible), intersubjective relations can be little more than a naive illusion and solipsism is a given. However, as Timmer (2010:107) points out with reference to the work of David Foster Wallace, within a metamodernist frame of reference, it can be precisely this solipsism that functions as an (imperfect) basis of relationality. Solipsism is after all something every postmodern subject has in common, and the only fallacy — "a solipsistic delusion" — would be for the subject to assume that he/she is "the only person in the world who feels like the only person in the world" (Timmer, 2010:107).

Timmer (2010:113) goes on to show that this is an example of "a reconceptualization of subjective experience as 'relationally grounded'". Contrary to the claims of constructionism or constructivism, subjective experience seems to "[cry] out for re-cognition [sic] by an *other*", which is the most basic form of empathy, "the ability to feel *with* someone else" (Timmer, 2010:115). For a long time, this kind of empathy was considered a special characteristic of fiction: allowing the reader to enter a fictional character's mind and to identify with his or her perspective, to be emotional moved by his or her plight. Postmodernism, however, regarded this as an outdated (modernist) narrative convention, and set as its task the subversion and undermining of such demands of character (Timmer 2010:115). Metamodernist fiction, in contrast, revives the view that literary works can "present imagined alternatives and possibilities by extending the range of feeling and

thinking of the reader" (James, 2012:849), and in fact utilises this capacity of fiction to an ethical end by representing and soliciting "responsive readings of ethically charged scenarios of perception" (James, 2012:850).

The uniquely metamodernist way in which this capacity of literary works is applied gives rise to an intersubjectivity which avoids slipping back into a modernist metanarrative of humanism. Timmer (2010:117) suggests that the "new" sense of self she detects in recent fiction

is not grounded in any preconceived idea of similarity and sameness between self and other, and so does not signal a return to some form of "universal" humanism, but is also not (any longer) grounded in the idea of non-negotiable differences either. Wallace's stories exemplify that indeed some "traces remain of the self"... They conceptualize ("through example") the self neither as a traditional autonomous self, nor as completely determined by an *other*. This "other" is as elusive as this "self". But this "I" and "you" *may* have "a certain something" in common. It is not posited that "we" do, what is bracketed, if only for a moment, is the idea that "we" *never* do. (Timmer, 2010:117)

Mirroring the way in which metamodernist intersubjectivity avoids modernist metanarratives, the fact that the metamodernist subject is contingent on intersubjective relations also seem to provide a "solution" to the postmodern dissolution of a self: it is precisely *because* the subject is fragmented that it can restructure itself in terms of an empathetic and relational understanding of others [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. As example, Timmer (2010:243) summarises Mark Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves* as follows:

House of Leaves is a book full of traces and devoid of any delimitated presences. It traces the "dissolution of the self, lost without contrast", and hints at a possible transformation or *re-presenting* of the self via an empathetic understanding of others — or more specifically, an empathetic understanding by (a) "you"... Therefore, in reading *House of Leaves*, it becomes even more acute... to not presume beforehand that there is an identifiable self present at, or as, the center of an experience world... The novel offers a proliferation of interpretative frames and subjective viewpoints, but they are continuously interwoven, resulting into ontological and epistemological "knots". These knots prevent first of all a clear hierarchical (re)organization of the narrative levels... Experience worlds cannot be separated clearly by tracing back lines of projection to one phenomenological starting point, a single self that could center and stabilize an experienced "world".

This encapsulates the "intersubjectivity" that Timmer (2010:244) reckons is envisioned by the novel:

This book, I believe, is directed at a possible "harmony" that may arise in a confrontation with others' voices. In this novel the self that is "lost" ultimately returns, but as an echo, stretched out in the space of the other. It has to re-orient itself by *sharing* experiences... the "personal" turns out to be always and necessarily inter-personal and every "space" already inhabited by traces of others.

Jones (2012:84) echoes this notion in her discussion of the work of A.L. Kennedy as an example of metamodernist fiction, arguing that it

does not promote the return to a straightforward humanist discourse but employs the techniques of postmodernism to counter its own most radical effects. Her work does not present a singular, indisputable reality or truth, but invites us to arrive at an ethical interpretation of an ambivalently depicted situation; postmodern literary writing enables this precisely because of its privileged doubleness and irony.

Jones's argument that metamodernist fiction makes use of postmodern techniques to counter both extreme postmodernist effects and a simple return to humanism echoes Keulks's suggestion that metamodernist fiction attempts to forge a synthesis between postmodernism, realism, humanism and historicism without resorting to either essentialism or relativism (2007:150). In terms of subjectivity, this can be seen in the "newly reinvigorated genre" that has gained much popularity over the past two decades, the so-called polyphonic novel (Lukas, 2013) — a style which applies aspects of postmodernism's relativism and extreme subjectivism to (re)construct a subject that is nonetheless more coherent, centred and autonomous than the postmodern subject ever was.

Lukas (2013) describes the post-millennial polyphonic novel — examples of which include David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004); Nicole Kraus's *Great House* (2010); Jennifer Egan's *A visit from the goon squad* (2010); Tom Rachman's *The Imperfectionists* (2010) and the works of Zadie Smith, especially her *NW* (2012) — as using "a chorus of voices and narrative styles to create a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts":

Just as polyphonic music combines melodies to create texture and tension, the polyphonic novel collects a multiplicity of distinct, often conflicting voices around a single place, family, object, or idea.

The notion of the polyphonic novel is borrowed from Bakhtin, who elaborates on the idea in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (published in 1963, although the original and shorter version first appeared in 1929). In contrast to a "traditional" (or "monological") novel, where the author has the ultimate control and final say over everything in the world of the novel, the characters of the polyphonic novel are "not subordinated to the definitive power of the author but appear as independent subjects of their own" (Steinby, 2011:244):

Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus) but free people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him.

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (Bakhtin, 1989:6, in Steinby, 2011:244, original emphasis)

In the polyphonic novel, then, the characters are autonomous subjects rather than objects: they "appear to the reader as subjects of cognition and ethical action *without* the mediation of an objectifying author" (Steinby, 2011:244) [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES]. Steinby (2011:245) compares the polyphonic novel with Bahktin's earlier description of the monological model: although the hero in a "traditional" novel is also regarded as an "autonomous subject acting within his life-world", it is impossible for him to define his own essence, as this is "a gift bestowed on him by the author in the consummating aesthetic form". In contrast, the author's task in the polyphonic novel is to allow the character-subjects to "appear for the reader just as they appear to themselves as cognizing and acting subjects" without restricting their autonomy or defining who they are or what they do and think "from the outside" — thus affirming their "independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy". According to Steinby (2011:245), a more accurate term for this kind of novel would therefore be "polysubjective".

From the fact that Bakhtin bases his notion of the polyphonic novel on Dostoevsky's work, it can be inferred that its style can fit comfortably within a modernist aesthetic, and it indeed draws on modernist notions of fragmentation and disruption. Lukas (2013) cites, apart from Dostoevsky, Faulkner's *The sound and the fury* (1929) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) as predecessors for the metamodernist polyphonic novel.

There is, however, a marked difference in the way that modernist and metamodernist polyphonic novels represent their subjects. Modernist classics such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The sound and the fury* make use of stream of consciousness to mirror the fragmentation of the modern self, a technique which tends to dissolve the round characters of realism, and to relativise reality to the subjective and limited conscious experiences of the characters, according to Liebenberg (2013). A metamodernist novel such as Marlon James's *A brief history of seven killings* (2014), on the other hand, gathers a collection of interior monologues³³ in different voices to allow its characters authentic expression of their inner selves, and to represent reality as a network of intersubjectivities. In contrast to the postmodernist notion of subject as merely a shifting signifier caught up in an endless interplay of signification, the subjects of *A brief history* are self-determining, self-contained, occupying central positions as the moral authorities and meaning-makers of their own (interrelated) worlds (cf. Timmer, 2010:35).

A brief history of seven killings consists of a collection of interior monologues by a wide cast of characters, loosely gathered around an attempt on the life of a reggae superstar referred to only as The Singer (although the book's blurb identifies him as Bob Marley) in 1976. The novel is divided into five parts: the first takes place in Kingston, Jamaica, on 2 December 1976; the second in Kingston on 3 December 1976; the third in Kingston and Montego Bay, on 15 February 1979; the fourth in Miami and New York during August of 1985; and the last chapter in Jamaica and America, March 1991. The novel features a "Cast of characters" — with location, time period, occupation, and gang and/or syndicate alliance helpfully indicated — that contains the names of seventy-three characters, one gang and two drug syndicates.

Twelve of these characters are the narrators of the story, their monologues alternately presented in short "chapters" that are headed by their names, with the exception of the fifth part where the chapters are simply numbered (although it can be induced from the content which narrator is speaking). Of the twelve narrators, one is already deceased before the start of the story, and speaks in his capacity as ghost observing the lives of others. (He provides the iconic opening sentence of the novel: "*Listen. Dead people never stop talking*" (2014:1).)

³³ "[S]tream of consciousness is a special style of interior monologue: while an interior monologue always presents a character's thoughts 'directly', without the apparent intervention of a summarizing and selecting narrator, it does not necessarily mingle them with impressions and perceptions, nor does it necessarily violate the norms of grammar, syntax, and logic; but the stream-of-consciousness technique also does one or both of these things". (Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms, 2015)

Five more narrators die during the course of the novel (but do not reappear as talkative ghosts). One narrator, first identified as Nina Burgess in the first and second parts, makes her appearance in three disguises: as Kim Clarke in the third part, Dorcas Palmer in the fourth, and Millicent Segree in the fifth part.

Each narrator speaks in his or her own style and patois: the floral metaphorical language of the deceased Sir Arthur Jennings; the heavy colloquial slang of gang members Demus and Bam-Bam; the self-conscious and self-policing middle-class voice of young, educated Nina Burgess; Barry Diflorio's jovial all-American "Company man" speech; Alex Pierce's journalistic style and twenty-something drifter angst; John-John K's flamboyant speech mannerisms which he tries to curb. Each narration is in the first person and bears characteristics of an interior monologue or even oral narration: the narrators express their thoughts directly, without any intervention, summarising, interpretation or selection done by an external narrator.

While stream of consciousness is interspersed with impressions and perceptions and makes use of fragmented grammar, syntax and logic (Oxford Dictionary of literary terms, 2015), the style of narration in *A brief history* exhibits a greater coherency — with more concrete opinions, values and judgments — and follows standard conversational logic. Similarly, the non-standard grammar used by characters such as Bam-Bam, Weeper, Demus, Josey Wales and Papa-Lo is attributable to the colloquial dialect of the time and place, rather than reflecting the fragmentary and associative nature of thought processes. The only exception to this is the last speaking turns of Bam-Bam and Demus during and after the attempt on the Singer's life, when they are both very much under the influence of narcotics, the effect of which is reflected in fragmented phrases, incomplete sentences, repetition, illogical jumps, onomatopoeia, etc.

Rather than the decentralised, depersonalised subject without an "inner centre" associated with postmodernism, *A brief history*'s style of narration presupposes a centralised, coherent subject. The narrations reflect what is taken to be the authentic expression of an internalised reality and inner experience of each character [cf. AUTHENTICITY]. The characters are constructed as the autonomous subjects that Bakhtin describes in his formulation of the polyphonic novel: they appear as subjects of cognition and ethical action, they occupy central positions as moral authorities and meaning-makers (cf. Timmer, 2010:35), and they are allowed to appear to the reader "just as they appear to themselves as cognizing and acting subjects", without the interference of an objectifying author (Steinby, 2011:245).

The case of Nina Burgess serves as a prime example for the kind of subject who is more coherent and centred than the postmodern subject (a shifting signifier caught up in an infinite interplay of signification). Nina Burgess is introduced when she travels by bus to stand outside the Singer's house, waiting to see or speak to him. She had a sexual relation with him in the past and is now looking to him for help to get her family out of Jamaica in the face of political unrest (2014:99). She claims to be pregnant with his child (2014:48), although, as with many things in the novel, this is never confirmed to be true. It is implied that she is there the night when the attempt on the Singer's life is made — as narrated by Bam-Bam in his drug-crazed version of the event (2014:243) — and it later becomes clear that she changed her identity and fled Jamaica because she believed that she would otherwise be hunted down for witnessing this crime (2014:649).

Nina Burgess appears again as Kim Clarke, an unemployed woman living with her American boyfriend in Montego Bay; later as Dorcas Palmer, a caregiver working in New York; and yet again as Millicent Segree, a student nurse in New York. It is not explicitly stated that each of these incarnations is, in fact, Nina Burgess (and it is also never explained how she got where she is, or why). The style and voice of the narration, however, are more than enough to allow the reader to pick up on the content clues as to the "true" identity of Kim Clarke, Dorcas Palmer, and Millicent Segree, even before the narration finally confirms it. As a subject, Nina is authentic and unique enough in her expression of her inner self to be recognizable to the reader, regardless of the specifics of her situation, her job, circumstances, or even name — in other words, her lived experience as unique subject stands independent of the outward signifiers that are markers of a constructed identity.

A brief history's style of narration also constructs a model of intersubjectivity that avoids slipping into simple humanism. In contrast to a modernist humanism which emphasises the individualistic subject as autonomous, self-determining and free from tradition, locality or ties to a bigger community (Visagie, 2016b:3-4), the subjects of *A brief history of seven killings* are (always) already embedded in an intersubjective network where they are relationally dependent and influenced by each other's actions. This structure has implications for AUTHENTICITY as well as REALISM, as Cornwell (2011:359) argues that "liveness" — which is more than verisimilitude and lifelikeness, but rather a "truthfulness to the way things are" (Wood, 2008 in Cornwell, 2011) — is to be found in intersubjective relationality and connections:

It is the mutual perception of "liveness" that enables readers to recognize the "authenticity" of [the other's] thoughts and feelings and behavior... In this sense, "realism" is inseparable

from intersubjectivity, a premise on which all successful artistic representation of human experience would seem to depend.

A brief history answers to the metamodernist demand for a constructed "shared reality" (Jones, 2012:84) or "shared recognition" (Toth, 2010:78), to this effect even including the reader as listener or participant to the events. Often, the characters seem to be simply telling their stories to the reader, as if the reader is sitting with them somewhere and listening to their tales — an effect created by conversational markers, such as Sir Arthur Jennings's repeated use of the word "Listen" (2014:1,3); or Alex Pierce's rhetorical phrases, such as: "So this source, right?" (2014:187).

In some chapters, however, it transpires after a while that whoever is being directly addressed is not the reader per se, but rather another character in the novel. This has the effect of constructing the reader as one of the story's subjects. Bam-Bam, for example, is speaking to a "you" who is only much later identified (through a chance comment of Nina Burgess) as the Singer. The effect of this address is complicated by the fact that Bam-Bam would have never have had the opportunity in life to literally speak to the Singer:

... I know we watched your big house on Hope Road for days now, and at one point you come to talk to us like you was Jesus and we was Iscariot and you nod as if to say get on with your business and do what you have to do... I see you hungry and waiting and know that it's just luck, you loafing around the studio and Desmond Dekker telling the man to give you a break... We see you hustle and trying to talk your way twelve inches taller and we want to see you fail. And we know nobody would want you to be a rudeboy anyway for you look like a schemer. (2014:7;8)

Sir Arthur Jennings's narration at the end of the second part is also written entirely in the second person format, addressing a "you" who, after a few paragraphs, can be identified as Demus:

Those who are about to die can see the dead. That is what I'm telling you now but you can't hear me. You can see me following you... *Is the white man that don't make no sense, no sense at all* you're thinking. I'm following you like the widow in a funeral procession. Your pants snag on a half-buried rock and rip your left pocket. These men pull you like a fish and with each pull the noose around your wrists gets tighter. They've been pulling you for miles... (2014:269, 270)

At the end of the third part, Sir Arthur Jennings again addresses a "you", this time — as it becomes clear after a while — the Singer. Tristan Phillips, in the fourth part, also directly addresses a "you", namely Alex Pierce, who is in fact interviewing Tristan about Jamaica. Tristan's chatty narration is thus likely to be a transcript of one side of their conversation, further compounding the effect of that the reader position is constructed to be one of the characters:

Oh. I see. I see your method. When last you go back to Jamaica? No real reason, you just look like somebody who either never been or can't go back. What that look like? Honestly I didn't know until I just said it to see what you would do. (2014:452-453)

Is lie you a tell me...You sure? How you so sure?... You know the man check out 1981, right? Or you lock up in a battyhole till now? Me must look like me born behind cow. You writing a ghost story? The Singer duppy haunting Rose Hall? Come to think of it, if you really writing about the Singer, why the fuck you talking to me? You think me is a fucking idiot, Pierce? (2014:471)

Demus, too, addresses his narration to "someone", although in his case it is never clear who this is supposed to be. His first chapter starts with the claim: "Somebody need to listen to me and it might as well be you" (2014:52). Papa-Lo occasionally seems to be addressing an audience, although who exactly is also never clear: "One more thing, ostentatious gentlemens. Never turn your back 'pon a white bwoi" (2014:127); "Josey planning something they think me don't have the gumption to do. Gentlepeople, they is right" (2014:179); "Learn this, all nice and decent people. An election year commence as soon as the first gunshot buss" (2014:182); "All nice and decent people, me tell you a lie still. You think me stop like how blood taste when me kill that high school boy, but that was just part of it" (2014:184).

These examples of the narrations being a direct address to *someone* — compounded by the fact that this *someone* does not always indicate only the reader, but rather places the reader in the position of the character who is being addressed — can be read as an extreme manifestation of the way in which metamodernist fiction reconceptualises the subjective experience as relationally grounded (cf. Timmer, 2010:113). The direct form of address makes a demand on the reader to experience, to feel *with* — or perhaps rather feel as — the story subjects in a way that goes beyond being a spectator to fictional events, or a consumer

of a cultural product.³⁴ At the same time, however, the inconsistent position of the reading subject avoids notions of essentialism, and the novel thus negotiates between a postmodern conception of the self as dissolved and a subjective relativism which holds that each subject is essential and unique to the point of being unknowable by anyone else. Rather, it is because the subject is to an extent non-essential and fragmented that it can be restructured in terms of a relational intersubjectivity.

As an example of metamodernist fiction, *A brief history of seven killings* uses a polyphonic structure to construct subjectivities that reject the linguistic, textual framework of post-structuralism in favour of autonomous, self-determining and self-contained subjects who can authentically express their inner realities. Nevertheless, by completely abandoning an objectifying or overarching frame of interpretation and focusing on character while deemphasising plot, *A brief history* also indicates the relativism of subject experiences. The fragmented nature of the narrative never allows for an encompassing, objective understanding of the novel's events [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION].

Even though the intersections between different narrators' stories contribute to a bigger picture of what "really" took place, the intensely subjective nature of the narrations leave many gaps unfilled and questions unanswered, and the loose way in which the narrations are collected sometimes seem to have very little relation to each other. Barry Diflorio, for example, is present in Jamaica during the time of the assassination attempt on the Singer, but his narration has little bearing on the main events, and he is not directly involved in any of the other characters' lives. Sir Arthur Jennings, as ghost, witnesses the death of Demus and the life of the Singer, but he too, stands on the fringes of events. John-John K is a character in his own right, with his own voice, but apart from being hired to kill Weeper, his story does not intersect with any of the others. In this way, the novel dramatizes the disconnecting, distancing effect of a subjective view, while simultaneously holding out the possibility of intersubjective relations.

³⁴ Compare the discussion of Buys (2014) in AFFECT THEORY for another example of a metamodernist text making an embodied claim on the reader as "accomplice" to the story events.

metamodernist theories

Over the past two decades, three theoretical tendencies rose to prominence within the humanities and social sciences that engage with the central theoretical impulses identified as constituting metamodernism, and utilise relational modes of being in response to what is perceived as POSTMODERNISM'S FAILURE.

AFFECT THEORY, CHAOS THEORY³⁵ and POSTHUMANISM developed in response to a contemporary global landscape that is significantly different from the one in which postmodernist theories were formulated, to this end operating on the intersection between REALISM; SUBJECTIVITY and ETHICAL CONCERNS (cf. Toth, 2010:3).

These three theories are marked by a renewed emphasis on ontology, thus addressing what is perceived as lacking in the abstract and epistemological nature of postmodernism theories regarding reality and the self. Affect theory emphasises the role of the body and materiality in the formation of subjectivity and intersubjective relations; chaos theory turns the attention to the complexity and indeterminism of reality, eschewing a general and idealised epistemological interpretation of the natural world; and posthumanism recognises the material human/non-human interactions that form the social environment.

Connected to this focus on ontology, these theories are characterised by a relational understanding of interconnectedness, which gives rise to an emphasis on the need for social responsibility and a greater ethical involvement on the part of social theories. In the case of affect theory, the ethical imperative is founded on the acknowledgment of the capacity of all bodies to affect and be affected. In terms of chaos theory, the assumption that any small change in a system can have unpredictable and unprecedented consequences for the whole of the system calls for a greater ethical responsibility towards the world as a whole. Posthumanism undoes the boundary between human and nonhuman other, giving equal ontological weight to each, and thereby demanding an ethical approach to all living creatures.

³⁵ Chaos theory is sometimes referred to more completely as "chaos and complexity theories", and sometimes viewed as a subset of complexity (Heilbron, 2003), although some scientists regard chaos theory, catastrophe theory, and complexity theory or complex systems theory as connected but mostly discrete bodies of theory (Castree et al. 2015). In the social sciences and humanities, complexity is most often taken to be a function of chaos theory. As chaos theory seems to enjoy greater popularity in the social sciences, I chose to focus on it rather than any of its related bodies of theory.

Thirdly, all three theories deliberately reject poststructuralist models of reality, even though they are informed by poststructuralist or deconstructionist notions. Affect theory shifts attention away from the disembodied textuality put forth by poststructuralism in order to embrace the corporeal and the material. While affect theory takes as its starting point the poststructural assumption of the dispersal and discontinuity of the subject, it claims that it is precisely this dispersal that makes a relational mode of being which is founded in bodily capacities possible.

Chaos theory corresponds with postmodernism as far as it rejects binaries and embraces an uncertainty found in relativity, but its focus on ontology and its "faith" in an underlying absolute order moves it beyond postmodernism into a metamodernist understanding of myth and transcendence. While affect theory holds the dispersal of the subject as that which makes a relational mode of being possible, chaos theory implicitly assumes that it is precisely *because* everything in reality is connected in a vast network of correspondences that the subject cannot be viewed as a stable, independent, autonomous entity.

Out of the three theories, posthumanism perhaps adheres closest to a poststructuralist model of subjectivity. Using deconstruction to show that the category of "human" is always already dependent on its other, and therefore already contains the other within, posthumanism undoes the human/non-human binary. Rather than limiting itself to the realm of the textual, however, posthumanism focuses on the ontological implications of this undoing, and directs its attention to the corporeal implications of a relational mode of being that is founded on the lack of a boundary between human and other.

Lastly, all three theories — affect theory, chaos theory, and posthumanism — are self-consciously interdisciplinary in nature, and claim that deliberate interdisciplinarity is the only way to function within a changed global environment and address contemporary social and ethical issues. In this sense, their interdisciplinary origins and insistence on an interdisciplinary approach exhibit relationality as a metatheoretical organising principle of metamodernism.

AFFECT THEORY

The revival of affect, emotion, and subjective experiences as important themes in metamodernist art [AFFECT] corresponds with a great surge in interest in affect across the social and natural sciences since the mid-1990s (cf. Wetherell, 2012:par. 85). The recent interest in affect is traced to the work that Silvan Tomkins, an American psychologist, did during the 1960s. Tomkins' ideas were revived in two essays that appeared in 1995: "Shame in the cybernetic fold" by Eve Kossofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, and "The autonomy of affect" by Brian Massumi (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:5).

This led to what Leys (2011:434-435) refers to as the "turn to affect" (or the "affective turn", according to Moore (2011:par. 271)), that took place in the humanities and social sciences. The turn to affect, especially with regard to the neurosciences of emotion, is visible in fields ranging from history, political theory, human geography, urban and environmental studies, architecture, literary studies, art history and criticism, media theory, and cultural studies; as well as "newly designated fields" such as "neuropolitics, neurogeography, and neuroaesthetics" that "have not only emphasized the importance of affect but have called for the renewal of their disciplines based on the findings of scientists working in the emotion field" (Leys, 2011:434-435).

Following ideas put forth by Guattari, Massumi and Spinoza, Bertelsen and Murphie (2010:140) distinguish three different aspects of affect. In the first place, affect is transitive and indicates the "movement of impersonal" or "pre-personal" forces... in which we are caught up" (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010:140). Hemmings' definition of affect (2005:551) elaborates on this notion: affect "refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions". Affect is described in terms of psychoanalysis as an expression of the energy of the drives, as that which makes it possible for drives to be satisfied, and which "ties us to the world" (Hemmings, 2005:551). Affects are, however, distinct from drives in that they can be transferred to a range of objects and be satisfied, thus rendering them adaptable, unlike drives.

Following the writings of the psychologist Silvan Tomkins, affects are understood to "have a complex, self-referential life that gives depth to human existence through our relations with others and ourselves" (Hemmings, 2005:552). Affect can be transferred — and is thought to be "contagious", as can be seen with yawns or smiles — and often "doubles back,

increasing its original intensity" (Hemmings, 2005:552). In this sense, affect serves as the expression of everything the subject shares, through its transitive effects, with that which it is not (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010:140).

The second aspect of affect pointed out by Bertelsen and Murphie (2010:140) indicates the sense in which it is often understood: "affect as emotion or feeling". Affect theory, however, claims that affect is a more primal or visceral force than emotions. It can be described as

the folding of broader affective intensities into the nervous system, eventually to become recognizable as the *register*, eventually the representation, of the ongoing folding of self and world, as the person. (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010:140)

In contrast to emotion, affect is seen as "pre-cognitive", an "automatic" bodily response that "occur[s] below the threshold of consciousness and cognition" (Leys, 2011:443). Affect theory claims that there is a "gap" between the subject's affects and "its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object". While "reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings" are usually regarded as the primary processes informing action and behaviour (Leys, 2011:443), affect theory focuses on the role of affect in determining action, since cognition comes "too late" to be the major determining factor of behaviour in any given social situation. As Blackman (2012:par. 149) puts it, affect refers to, and is related to, processes that occur at the level of "autonomic, pre-conscious bodily reactions, responses and resonances" and is therefore "separate from meaning, belief or cognition". It is a "nonsignifying, nonconscious 'intensity' disconnected from the subjective, signifying, functional-meaning axis to which the more familiar categories of emotion belong" (Leys, 2011:442).

Theories regarding this particular aspect of affect are often based on the works of Gilles Deleuze, who further distinguishes affect from emotion by describing affect as "bodily meaning that pierces social interpretation, confounding its logic, and scrambling its expectations" (Hemmings, 2005:552). The body has a capacity for response that often "betrays" itself, acting, behaving or responding in a manner illogical or inappropriate, asserting "the unpredictable autonomy of the body's encounter with the event, its shattering ability to go its own way" (Hemmings, 2005:552-553). Echoing Timmer's description of the metamodernist subject's experience of "real feelings" (in contrast to the world-weary, ironic, knowing, unsentimental, cynical postmodern subject) that "haunts and disrupts the well functioning of the 'subject' in a cultural setting which privileges ungrounded, commodified

desire" (Timmer, 2010:44), Wetherell (2012:par. 95) refers to affect as the body's ability to "interrupt" or "disturb" social interpretation.

According to Wetherell, affect pertains to

emotional states and the distinctive perturbations they cause in the body and mind. Sometimes "affect" includes every aspect of emotion and sometimes it refers just to physical disturbance and bodily activity (blushes, sobs, snarls, guffaws, levels of arousal and associated patterns of neural activity), as opposed to "feelings" or more elaborated subjective experiences... but the term "affect" could also key into much more general modes of influence, movement and change. We could talk, for instance, about "being affected" by an event, even if it is not quite clear what the impact is. Affect in this sense need not be confined to humans or even animate life — the sun affects the moon, a magnet affects iron filings, and the movement of waves affects the shape of the coastline... Affect now means something like a force or an active relation. (Wetherell, 2012:par. 95)

The third aspect of affect is to an extent already encompassed in the first two, as it refers simply to the "power to affect and be affected", as Spinoza famously phrased it (Bertelsen & Murphie, 2010:140). As Hemmings (2005:552) suggests, affect "place[s] the individual in a *circuit* of feeling and response, rather than opposition to others". In this way, "affect connects us to others, and provides the individual with a way of narrating their own inner life (likes, dislikes, desires and revulsions) to themselves and others".

From the above definitions, two central tenets of affect theory can be distinguished. In the first place, affect theory heralds a renewed focus on the body, the material and corporeal;³⁶

³⁶ The renewed focus on the body and corporeality is evident in recent discussions of South African literature. Nel (2010) draws on ideas by Edward Soja and Julia Kristeva to investigate the role of the politics of the body in Etienne van Heerden's *30 Nagte in Amsterdam* (2008). Buxbaum (2011) refers to Elizabeth Grosz's notion of the embodiment of space to discuss the role of corporeality and the relationship between corporeality and spatiality in Marlène van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1994), *Agaat* (2004) and *Memorandum* (2006). Nortjé (2012) makes use of Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology to frame embodiment, the embodied nature of everyday events and the relation between embodiment and language, knowledge and memory in the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon. Fourie and Adendorff (2015) refer to Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja's theories to investigate the bodily spatial interaction between the main characters in *Agaat* (2004) by Marlène van Niekerk. Smith (2015) looks at the materiality and specifically the materiality of the body in the poetry of Antjie Krog, focusing on the implications of a rethinking of materialism for ecocriticism and POSTHUMANISM. Similarly, Nel and Ströh (2016) discuss the poetry of Johann de Lange in terms of the connectedness between body and landscape, referring to notions of phenomenology, new materialism, ecological thought and relationality.

and by implication on ontology. In the second place, it is founded on an assumption that the subject is constantly, inevitably, in relation to everything else in the world: affect is the body's capacity to act and be acted on, to respond and be responded to. In this regard, affect theory forms part of a greater cultural and theoretical response to, and rejection of, the ideas of postmodernism, particularly those formulated by post-structuralism.

Moore (2011:par. 272) implies as much when she heralds the affective turn in theory as being about "new ontologies, new ways of conceiving of the human subject and their relation to the world". Wetherell (2012:par. 108-119) goes further and claims that the turn to affect signifies a paradigm change, an "ontological and epistemological upheaval":

a decisive shift away from the current conventions of critical theory, away from research based on discourse and disembodied talk and texts, towards more vitalist, "post human" and process-based perspectives.

Hemmings (2005:549-550) identifies three aspects to affect theory's critique of poststructuralist models of subjectivity. Firstly, affect theorists doubt the capacity of constructivist models of subjectivity to "account fully for our place in the world as individuals or groups", since constructivism fails to account for "the residue or excess that is not socially produced, and that constitutes the very fabric of our being" (2005:549).

Secondly, after deconstruction, there is an increasing suspicion that quantitative empirical approaches and textual analyses cannot reasonably "account for the fullest resonance of the social world". In contrast, advocates of affect theories suggest that an understanding of affect can broaden and deepen social theorists' vision of their terrain of study, thereby "allowing for and prioritizing its 'texture'" — "texture" in this case refers to a "qualitative experience of the social world", an "embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection" (Hemmings, 2005:549).

Lastly, affect theorists doubt that the deconstructive notions of the opposition between power/resistance and public/private can "fully account for the political process", and instead offer "affective ties" as an alternative model of subject formation (Hemmings, 2005:550).

Affect theory is thus grounded in dissatisfaction with what is perceived as the privileging of the epistemological in the cultural theories and criticism of a large part of the twentieth century, and the exclusion of subjective experience and the ontology of a lived reality. As

Hemmings (2005:553) puts it, poststructuralism's "relentless attention to the structures of truth and knowledge obscures our experience of those structures".

Specifically, affect theory addresses what theorists now deem to be poststructuralist theory's hostility to the role of the body and the biological in subjectivity.³⁷ Influenced by theories that focus on social constructionism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction, critical theory of the second half of the twentieth century disavowed "essentialism" to the point of completely ignoring the biological aspects of subjectivity (Leys, 2011:440-441). The poststructuralist preoccupation with language, text and discursive approaches, notions of cultural inscription and discourse determinism — what Wetherell (2012:par. 108-119) refers to as "disembodied talk and texts" — has largely disregarded the importance of the body, bodily sensation, affect and emotion to communication processes (Blackman, 2012:par. 229). In the place of a poststructuralist subject, "constituted in language and founded on an ontological lack" (Moore, 2011:par. 272), affect theory seeks to reinstate the "body in its lived materiality" (Leys, 2011:441).³⁸

In its renewed emphasis on the body and materiality, affect theory is part of a larger tendency within critical theory. Hardt (2007:par. 122) locates the theoretical precursors of the affective turn in the focus on the body that was primarily advanced in feminist theory since the 1970s, and later continued in queer theory, the latter specifically exploring emotions. Cultural and social theory during the 1980s and 1990s was characterised by what Blackman (2012:par. 126) refers to as the "sociology of the body", which called for bodily matters to enjoy more attention within social theories. Since the turn of the twenty first century, the interest in materiality has surged even further, with a continued emphasis on the "physical actuality of culture" rather than the abstractions of textualism, manifesting in "a series of awkward materialities" (Highmore, 2010:119).

³⁷ Although theories of affect signal, to a certain extent, the return of the body and materiality in critical theory, it is in a sense also a continuation of poststructural theories. Clough (2010:206) argues that affect and emotion "point just as well as poststructuralism and deconstruction do to the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect".

³⁸ However, as Hemmings' central argument shows, affective theories are often reductive in their portrayal of poststructuralism. Affect theorists tend to ignore the "counter-hegemonic contributions" of critical work done in the areas of feminist and postcolonial theories, as well as oversimplify matters when they claim that affect is the "privileged 'way out' of the perceived impasse in cultural studies" created by deconstruction (2005:548;549).

The central place given to the materiality of the body in affect theory is more than simply a rejection of poststructuralist notions of the social construction of subjectivity. Corresponding with metamodernism's complex relation to postmodernism and modernism, the current return of the body in theory mirrors the return to realism within metamodernism: it claims a corporeality informed by the lessons of poststructuralist textual practices. In an effort to liberate the subject from the limits of textual construction, a certain materialist ontology is indeed revived — but not unproblematically. Instead of a simple return to modernist notions of physicality and materiality, or a dualism between mind and body, emotion and reason, the notion of the body (as it figures in the kind of metamodernist ontology espoused by affect theory) is still influenced by the ideas of poststructuralism.

Highmore (2010:119) claims:

In the demand for the concrete (a concreteness sophisticated and complex enough to be desirable to minds drilled in the rigors of poststructuralism and the like) cultural inquiry turned toward a materialism where a body would be understood as a nexus of finely interlaced force fields.

Affect theory thus works from the assumption, informed by poststructuralism, that "the solidity of the subject has dissolved into a concern with those processes, practices, sensations and affects that move through bodies in ways that are difficult to see, understand and investigate" (Blackman, 2012:par. 117) [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. Issues of affect, the non-representational and the immaterial

have been offered as terms which refer to registers of experience which are primarily trans-subjective (that is, they are not contained by bounded singularly human subjects), which introduce the noncognitive into our theorizing of perception, knowing and sense-making, and which demand collaborations across disciplinary boundaries in order to reinvent new ways of being human, and develop new concepts for exploring embodiment and experience (Blackman, 2012:par. 229-441).

To this end, Leys (2011:441) reckons that affect theorists deliberately distance themselves from the assumptions of geneticism and determinism that were attacked by poststructuralist cultural theory. Instead, they place the focus on biology and "seek to recast biology in dynamic, energetic, nondeterministic terms that emphasize its unpredictable and potentially emancipatory qualities" [compare CHAOS THEORY].

In other words, materiality and its attendant notions of emotion and affect cannot be understood as dualistically opposed to the abstract, to thought or language. In the perspective of affect theory, reason and passion are posed on a continuum (Hardt, 2007:par. 146-159). They are also not limited to the body, but instead are in a continuous, open and renewable process of "sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect" that encompass the whole of the subjectively experienced world (Highmore, 2010:120). In fact, Leys (2011:450-451) describes the "ontological turn" of affect theory as a shift away from the consideration of meaning, however not towards simple representation, but to "the subject's subpersonal material-affective responses".

Instead of a mere return to the notion of the body as "a 'thing' to retreat to, a material basis to explain how social processes take hold", the body as understood in affect theories has been "radically reconfigured" to the extent that the notion of the body as "singular, natural or even distinctly human" has been brought into question in various ways (Blackman, 2012:par. 126). Because of the emphasis on the subject's material-affective responses, bodies are seen to

always extend and connect to other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies and objects which produce different kinds of bodies and different ways, arguably, of enacting what it means to be human. (Blackman, 2012:par. 134)

[POSTHUMANISM]

This conception of the body does not conform to traditional views of clearly defined boundaries between the psychological, social, biological, ideological and economic, and technical. The only "guiding principle" is "the assumption that what defines bodies is their capacity to affect and be affected" (Blackman, 2012:par. 138).³⁹

In a formulation that connects the body's innate capacity to affect and be affected with Bersani and Dutoit's notion of a relational mode of being — one that cannot be fully realised or accomplished, but which moves between different and parallel registers of being

³⁹ The notion that the subject is constituted through its (bodily) capacity to be affected is linked to its "self-feeling of being alive — that is, aliveness or vitality" (Clough, 2007:par. 232). This theme points to one of the central issues of metamodernism: the discrepancy between a (post-structurally) theorised subject and the felt reality of a lived experience (Timmer, 2010:90), which can be seen in the subject's difficulty to appropriate feelings while feeling them nonetheless (2010:43). The metamodernist subject and its sense of self is restructured through relational affect, what Timmer (2010:324) refers to as "a feedback loop that runs via a 'you'", that is founded in recognition by the other (in contrast to a "closed-off, unitary" account of feeling and affect).

constituted through relationality (2004:5) — Seigworth and Gregg (2010:1) give the following definition of affect in their introduction to *The affect theory reader*:

Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.

The fact that affective processes take place between all and any kinds of bodies, as well as between bodies and the world, means that the capacity to affect and be affected lends the same ontological weight to everything in existence. It also implies a reciprocal relation between the subject and everything else. As Hardt (2007:par. 122-132) points out, affect "require[s] us... to enter the realm of causality". This realm does not however indicate causality as it is normally understood — linear, with a clear, irreversible and unidirectional flow from cause to effect — but offers instead "a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship" [CHAOS THEORY].

Although Hardt here primarily refers to the causal relationship between mind and body — a notion of correspondence that, according to affect theory, is "importantly open and indefinite" (2007:par. 132-146) — the disregard for linearity and causality has definite implications for all forms of relationality [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION]. In the sense that it places the subject simultaneously on both sides of any causal relationship, the capacity to affect and be affected is a function of connectedness: "[a]ffect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed, 2010:29).

On the one hand, it can be said that affect exists only in contingency, or in relational spaces (cf. Ahmed, 2010:30); at the same time it is through affect that relational spaces come into being and that the body, or self, is immersed in the web of relations that constitute subjectivity. Affect is regarded as the "persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing

immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:1). It is something that "accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters" which passes between bodies; something that "marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:2).

The embeddedness of the body in a web of encounters means that affect marks a body which is "as much outside itself as in itself — webbed in its relations — until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:3). This undoing of traditionally perceived distinctions is another hallmark of affect theory. Not only the distinction between body and mind, feeling and thinking, but also the distinction between subject and object, self and other — as is implied by the notion that, through affect, a body is "as much outside as in itself". Affect as a powerful, pre-subjective force undermines the boundary between thinking subject and knowable object (cf. Leys, 2011); as a trans-subjective occurrence, it cannot be said to be possessed by or contained in an individual subject.

Probyn (2010:76) elaborates on this notion and, drawing on the ideas of Deleuze (as influenced by Spinoza), shows that the subject, or more specifically the body of the subject, is not a "unified entity" but rather "composed of many moving elements". In this manner, affect exposes the disruptions in the boundaries between self and other, as evidenced by the "contagiousness" of affect. Echoing the notion put forth by Seigworth and Gregg (2010:3) that through affect a body is "as much outside as in itself", Probyn (2010:7) claims that affect does not "impinge on the body from the outside, nor does it erupt from the inside" — it is rather something that affects the body through being in proximity to other bodies.

Through affect, the body in proximity to other bodies is imbued with receptivity and responsiveness — what Clough (2010:210) refers to as the "openness of a body", its "quantum indeterminacy" [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. This openness is a function of relationality: the relational mode of being that is constituted through what Bersani and Dutoit (2004:161;159;165) describe as the "ontological passivity" of a non-projective subject who registers the world receptively, who witnesses, responds to and participate in the world without imposing an appropriative epistemological framework of knowing on it [EPISTEMOLOGY].

This relational openness, constituted through affect, is not limited to human bodies, but encompasses all manners of matter (cf. Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:1; Blackman, 2012:par. 126; Highmore 2010:10; Moore, 2011:par. 272). As a result of this openness and

indeterminacy through and by means of affect [OPENNESS], the "centrality of the human subject" as it was long held in cultural theory⁴⁰ is displaced and reconnected to "the vitality of the world" (Moore, 2011:par. 272).

Clough (2010:210) confirms the notion that affect displaces the human subject and reconnects it to the world as whole. For her, the relational openness of the subject puts affect "at every level of matter⁴¹ such that the distinctions of living and non-living, the biological and the physical, the natural and the cultural begin to fade" [SIMILITUDE].

The implications of this undoing of distinctions are far-reaching. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010:4) argue:

[In or through theories of affect] [a]lmost all of the tried-and-true handholds and footholds for so much critical-cultural-philosophical inquiry and for theory — subject/object, representation and meaning, rationality, consciousness, time and space, inside/outside, human/nonhuman, identity, structure, background/foreground, and so forth — become decidedly less sure and more nonsequential (any notion of strict "determination" or directly linear cause and effect goes out the window too). Because affect emerges out of muddy, unmediated relatedness and not in some dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements or primary units, it makes easy compartmentalisms give way to thresholds and tensions, blends and blurs.

Affect theory's assumptions of connectedness, openness and the capacity to affect and be affected have profound ethical implications. Its renewed focus on ontology makes it possible to engage with the lived, material realities of the surrounding world; its focus on the interrelated nature of ontology — the affective capacity to affect and be affected — makes it imperative to do so. As a result, many scholars emphasise the "political" or "ethical" imperative of focusing on affect (cf. Leys, 2011:435; Hardt, 2007:par. 122).

⁴⁰ However, Leys (2011:458) argues that, even though the subject-object split or dichotomy is generally condemned by affect theorists, they nonetheless seem to overemphasise a "false opposition between the mind and the body", which "operates at once with a highly intellectualist or rationalist concept of meaning and an unexamined assumption that everything that is not 'meaning' in this limited sense belongs to the body".

⁴¹ For Clough (2007:par. 232-248), "affect is not only theorized in terms of the human body" [POSTHUMANISM], but is also felt "in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to 'see' affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints". Affect thus "traverses the opposition of the organic and the nonorganic" and "expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter".

With regard to their potential for engaging with the surrounding material world, theories of affect make a critical understanding of the social context possible. Instead of traditionally positioning the human subject as being able to study and understand reality from a detached, epistemological viewpoint, affect theory acknowledges the irrefutable embeddedness of "us" in the world, and focuses on "our place in it" (Hemmings, 2005:548). By focusing on the affectively interrelated nature of reality, affect theory serves as "means of inquiry... to account for the relational capacities that belong to the doings of bodies or are conjured by the world-belongingness that gives rise to a body's doing" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:9). Rejecting poststructuralist approaches to power which are "framed as hegemonic in their negativity" (Hemmings, 2005:554), affect theory assumes that the affective subject is formed through interpersonal relationships rather than apathetic social structures.

In contrast to poststructuralist theories of power-networks that are perceived to be pessimistic and disabling, over-emphasising power-relations and "their framing of both what we do and who we are, to the extent that there appears to be no hope of liberation" (Hemmings, 2005:554), affect theory thus holds out a possibility of concrete, ethical change. While poststructuralist epistemology is considered as politically and socially debilitating, affect theories herald a return to ontology which is founded in a "capacity for change over time" (Hemmings, 2005:554); a "post-deconstructivist ontology" that posits affect as "both post biological essentialism and post-epistemology" (Hemmings, 2005:557;559).

Affect theory's claim that the subject is relationally embedded in the social world is thus more than just a descriptive strategy — it serves as an ethical imperative not only to recognise connectedness, but to foster it. An example of this is Eve Sedgwick's claim that an affective return to ontology advocates a "reparative return to the... intersubjective, to the surprising and enlivening texture of individuality and community", where affect serves as "the key to that texture, because of its capacity to link us creatively to others" (Hemmings, 2005:553). As Moore (2011:par. 272) puts it: affect theories "offer a way of reconnecting human subjects to the material world, and to its potential for change and transformation".

Seigworth and Gregg (2010:9) see affect as a means to achieve greater sensitivity and empathy towards the world, and expect affect theory to embody this. Although they recognise affect as in itself "neutral" (2010:9), they suggest that theories of affect should, ideally, serve as "a generative, pedagogic nudge aimed toward a body's becoming an ever more worldly sensitive interface, toward a style of being present to the struggles of our time" (2010:12). They describe this as the "political dimensions of affect", something which

"proceed[s] through or persist[s] immediately alongside its aesthetics, an ethico-aesthetics of a body's capacity for becoming sensitive to the 'manner' of a world" (2010:15).

By advocating a sensitivity to the world, affect theory promises much to cultural theory: it offers ways of understanding the origin and maintenance of the various interconnected relations that make up the cultural context, as well as brings to light the "conditions under which novelty is produced", while also "anticipating the goals and techniques that could compose new forms of cultural politics based on inducing, amplifying, and transmitting capacities to affect and be affected" (Anderson, 2010:161). This mode of understanding is especially critical in an increasingly globalised world with ever-expanding cultural connections and interrelations (cf. Clough, 2007:par. 248-260).

Anderson (2010:165) claims that

attention to affect in cultural theory is not only necessary but contemporaneous. It occurs in parallel to a set of economic and cultural developments that aim to invest and harness the productive powers of life. The turn to affect is therefore legitimized as timely because it provides a way of understanding and engaging with a set of broader changes in societal (re)production in the context of mutations in capitalism. These changes include the advent of new forms of value and labor centered around information and images; the emergence and consolidation of biopolitical networks of discipline, surveillance, and control; and the development of the molecular and digital sciences... [T]he turn to affect is not only timely but imperative if the present conjuncture is to be adequately grasped, witnessed, and intervened on.

Wetherell (2012:par. 284-295) refers to further examples: an understanding of affect can help to explain the "panicky rhythms of current politics and recurring waves of appeal to terror and security"; affect plays a central role in "new forms of emotional labour and to responses to the precariousness of neo-liberal workplaces"; affect as it is understood in terms of identity studies is a useful tool for understanding "people's allegiances and investments, and the activities of categorising, narrating, othering, differentiating and positioning"; and affect can provide an understanding of "the unpredictable psychosocial actor, the ways in which she or he is suffused with feeling".

In connection to this, Clough (2007:par. 324) points to the potential of affect theory to restructure non-Western subjectivities and histories. According to her, it was affect theory's work on trauma which made it possible for critical theory to shift from simply deconstructing the "Subject of Western modernity" towards the "production of multiple subjectivities and

multiple modernities expressed in new forms of history, often presented at first in autobiographical experimental writings by diasporic subjects" (2007:par. 324). Blackman (2012:par. 117) also suggests that the renewed emphasis on affect — rather than on the discursive processes and ideology that prevailed in poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories — can be seen as a call for "an emancipatory politics of change".⁴²

In addition to enabling more ethically-informed choices that can have an environmental, socio-political, economical and global impact, affect theory also provides a critical tool for understanding how affect itself can be manipulated for political gain or effect (cf. Massumi, 2010; Bertelsen & Murphy, 2010). The role of reason and rationality in the domains of politics, ethics and aesthetics have been traditionally "overvalued", giving a "too flat or 'unlayered' or disembodied account of the ways in which people actually form their political opinions and judgments" (Leys, 2011:436).

In contrast, affect theories claim that

we human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances that so decisively influence or condition our political and other beliefs that we ignore these affective intensities and resonances at our peril — not only because doing so leads us to underestimate the political harm that the deliberate manipulation of our affective lives can do but also because we will otherwise miss the potential for ethical creativity and transformation. (Leys, 2011:436)

As part of the ethical drive underlying the application of affect theory, theorists often cite its interdisciplinary nature⁴³ as enabling it to engage with the challenges of the contemporary, globalised world. With its roots in psychology (via the writings of Silvan Tomkins) and closely linked to the neurosciences of emotion, affect theory's focus on affect as a process and mechanism of subject formation provides "the kind of common ontology" that links human and natural sciences (Blackman, 2012:par. 298-309).

⁴² She does, however, point out the problematic of this approach: it undermines "the capacity for ideological critique important for challenging inequities and oppressions" (the same criticism levelled against queer theory) (Blackman, 2012:par. 117).

⁴³ Partly because of its interdisciplinary origins, Seigworth and Gregg (2010:3-4) state that "[t]here is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds".

Because of its hybrid origin, affect theory "necessarily invites experimentation in capturing the changing cofunctioning of the political, the economic, and the cultural, rendering it affectively as change in the deployment of affective capacity" (Clough, 2007:par. 260). Seigworth and Gregg (2010:5) echo this notion when they claim that affect theory's interdisciplinarity is its greatest strength in terms of political and ethical imperative. It has accumulated a "sweeping assortment of philosophical/psychological/physiological underpinnings, critical vocabularies, and ontological pathways, and, thus, can be (and has been) turned toward all manner of political/pragmatic/performative ends".

For Clough (2007:par. 221) the interdisciplinarity inherent to affect theories is a result of the demand on current critical theory to face

the analytic challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism. If these world events can be said to be symptomatic of ongoing political, economic, and cultural transformations, the turn to affect may be registering a change in the cofunctioning of the political, economic, and cultural.

Buys (2014) by Willem Anker

In keeping with the metamodernist demand for SUBJECTIVITY that is more coherent and tangible than the textual, deconstructed subject proposed by postmodernism, as well as the ethical imperative to elicit a moral and ethical response from the reader [ETHICAL CONCERNS], *Buys (2014)* by Willem Anker inscribes an "intersubjective reading position", as Amian (2008:188) calls it. Through textual engagement with the reader — a claim on the reader's emotional responses and a call to connect with the events of the novel — a "reading subject" is constituted and intersubjectivities established as sites for meaning making.

Affect theory posits that a "gap" exists between the subject's affective responses and its cognitive functions (cf. Leys, 2011:443). This gives rise to the notion that affect — as an autonomic, pre-conscious bodily reaction — determines action because cognition always comes "too late". The affective response is thus disconnected from cognition, belief, and meaning, as it operates before and outside of any conscious, signifying frame of interpretation. It is in this "gap" between affect and cognition that Alom-Buys interpellates the reader by firstly making a demand on the reader's bodily, visceral response, and secondly precluding a rational interpretation of the novel's events.

Buys opens with the command to the reader: "Kom en zie!" ("Come and see!") (2014:9). More than a simple invitation, it is a compelling command, repeated in "Kyk, agter die klipsalmander verryf ek uit die rots", and more emphatically in the order "Aanskou my" — ("Regard me", as opposed to merely "look"):

Aanskou my: Ek is die legende Coenraad de Buys. Kom, laat ek jou besmet, my erflik belaste leser. As jy hier lees, sien jy wat ek sien. En ek sien alles. Ek is van alle dae, ek is onsterflik. Moet my nie siel noem nie. Ek het hoeveel name. Noem my eerder Coenraad, of Coen as jy my moeder of suster is. Pen my neer as De Buijs, De Buys, Buys of Buis, nes jy goeddink. Noem my Koning van die Basters, Khula, Kadisha, Moro, Diphafa of Kgowe. Ek is hulle almal. Ek is alomteenwoordig. Ek is Alom-Buys. Jy sal my aantref in vele gestalte... Ek gaan jou verblind en verbyster met my gestalte, met my alvermoënde blik. Ek is 'n trekvogel, ek neem jou op vlerke. Streel oor my kruis en jy sal weet ek is geen engel nie. Ek ken jou goed. Ek weet jy kan nie wegkyk nie.

[Regard me: I am the legend Coenraad de Buys. Come, let me infect you, my hereditarily burdened reader. If you are reading here, you see what I see. And I see everything. I am of all days, I am immortal. Do not call me soul. I have many names. Rather call me Coenraad, or Coen if you are my mother or sister. Write me down as De Buijs, De Buys, Buys or Buis, whatever you think best. Call me King of the Bastards, Khula, Kadisha, Moro, Diphafa or Kgowe. I am all of them. I am omnipresent. I am Omni-Buys. You will encounter me in many guises... I will blind and bewilder you with my shapes, with my omnipotent gaze. I am a migrant, I take you on wings. Stroke my back and you will know I am no angel. I know you well. I know you cannot look away.]⁴⁴

Through this passage, it is apparent that the "you", the reader, is not placed simply in the position of consuming a text. In contrast to postmodernist metafiction, where the emphasis is on the narrative as text, as a book that can be picked up and put down — compare, for example, Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979) — the reader here is commanded to look, to regard, to see what Buys is seeing. (And as will become apparent, the act of seeing is not without guilt, as the reader will be held accountable for playing spectator to some of the events of the narrative, for being unable to look away.) Through this direct address and command, an intersubjective reading position is established, confirmed when Buys tells the reader: "I know you well. I know you cannot look away".

⁴⁴ All translations are my own.

Despite Alom-Buys's claims to being an omniscient legendary figure, a myth of many names, the corporeality of the relation between the narrator and reader is implied in the phrase "Streel oor my kruis" (2014:10) (Stroke my back). The intimacy of knowing and being known is further emphasised in the suggestive words: "Mag ek jou verder influister? Jou oorhaartjes tril wanneer my asem naby kom" (May I whisper to you some more? The hair in your ear vibrate when my breath comes close) (2014:10). With this, the embodied nature of the simple act of listening is established, as the presence and words of Alom-Buys affect the "you" not only emotionally — as implied by the questions "Hoe ver is jy bereid om in my spoor te trap? Is jy reeds te bang?" (How far are you willing to walk in my tracks? Are you already too afraid?) (2014:10) — but also bodily, since the conveyance of meaning takes place through the embodied process of soundwaves, caused by breath and received through ears.

Alom-Buys invites — or compels — the reader to follow him through a history that is marked by violence, death and blood:

Kyk, die bloukopkoggelmader sluk die rysmier in, versit versigtig sy poot, tas skaars die grond. Luister, die geskiedenis begin beef, die stof van vergete veldslae en onopgetekende sterftes kom los, ritselfend onder die siedende bodem. (2014:10)

[Look, the blue-headed agama swallows the flying ant, shifts its paw carefully, barely touches the ground. Listen, history begins to tremble, the dust of forgotten battles and unrecorded deaths are coming loose, rustling under the seething soil. (2014:10)]

What follows is a bird's eye view of the history of South Africa, narrated compellingly in the form of commands that implicate not a disembodied spectatorship, but movement that incorporates the whole body: "Storm met my voort" (Storm ahead with me); "Snel verby" (Speed past); "Skeer verby" (Streak past); "Kom waad saam met my deur die strome van bloed" (Come wade with me through the streams of blood); "Skier oor die berge en dale" (Streak over the mountains and valleys); "Skeer heen" (Streak away); "Vlieg oor" (Fly over); "Flits oor" (Flash over) — the movement in one telling phrase likened to the flight of a bullet from the barrel of a gun: "Soos deur die spiraal in die loop van 'n roer, met elke draai al hoe blitziger" (Like through the spiral in the barrel of a gun, with every turn even swifter) (2014:10-11).

After taking the reader on this journey through history, Buys confronts the reader:

Wat soek jy hier? Weet jy hoekom jy my soek? Wat gaan jy doen as jy my vind? Toe, gaan kniel by enige karkas en kyk hoe die vlieë saamkoek soos 'n kosmos wat oopblom: sien! Dese grond wis uit en verteer. Dit slurp die geskiedenis op en kook dit weg tot niks. (2014:11)

[What are you looking for here? Do you know why you are looking for me? What are you going to do if you find me? Go ahead, go kneel at any carcass and look how the flies are caking together like a cosmos in bloom: see! This soil obliterates and consumes. It slurps up history and boils it away to nothing. (2014:11)]

These questions — "What are you looking for here? Do you know why you are looking for me? What are you going to do if you find me?" — confirm the reader's position as an involved participant rather than an impartial and unaffected spectator. They imply that the reader must be looking for something in particular, that his/her decision to join Alom-Buys on this journey is born out of a deliberate search for something. There is also an ontological imperative: "What are you going to do if you find me?" Rather than an epistemological quest of knowing as an end in itself, the implication is that knowledge will compel action on the part of the reader. Even if the phrase is taken more metaphorically, or in the Afrikaans vernacular of a rhetorical question, it presupposes affect: "you are looking for me, but will not be unaffected when you find me".

The contrast between history as material reality — alluded to by the image of a carcass caked with flies — and history as text is highlighted a paragraph later when Alom-Buys taunts the reader: "Dalk voel jy veiliger in die agterkamers van museums?" (Perhaps you feel safer in the back rooms of museums?) (2014:11) — a safe place where history is reduced to words and records. But even here, Alom-Buys's corporeality is asserted: "Ek is die vismot se voeler in elke argief. Ek het toegang tot elke bladsy. Ek vreet soos ek lees" (I am the silver moth's feeler in every archive. I have access to every page. I devour as I read).

He invites the reader to skim through the names on maps and the records of deaths — reality reduced to the epistemological product of humankind's representation of it — but the reader cannot approach history simply epistemologically or textually, and cannot ignore the sensory affect and lived reality of history — "en lyke, al die lyke" (and corpses, all the corpses) (2014:11). Alom-Buys points out: "Voorwaar, selfs op hierdie afstand die weergalmende slae en skote, ja, selfs uit die blaarie van blosende geskiedskrywers" (2014:11-12) (Indeed, even at this distance the echoing beats and shots, yes, even from the pages of blushing historians).

Throughout the whole novel the reader is constantly commanded to look, e.g. "Kyk, ek staan in die deur" (2014:12); "Kyk hoe gryns die berge met goue tandé" (2014:20); "Kyk, dit lyk of die perd nie bewus is van die ruiter nie" (2014:33); "Kyk net hoe kordaat staan hy daar, die jong Buys" (2014:34); "Aanskou: landdrost Mortiz Hermann Otto Woeke" (2014:64); "Kyk, by een van hierdie driwwe is daar spore in die modder" (2014:137); "Kyk net, die eens slanke vingers nou kloue met 'n matrys van letsels" (2014:170); "Kyk hoe fraai" (2014:256); "Aanskou: Ek tolk die onderhandelinge oor my eie toekoms" (2014:259); "Kyk, daar is sy" (2014:294); "Kyk, hier kom die Buyse aangeloop oor die werf" (2014:309); "Kyk! Kyk hoe brand my huise!" (2014:311); "Kyk, ons verrys oor die einder" (2014:343); "Kyk, die rivier strek voor ons verby vir ewig en altyd. Kyk, ons wag op 'n boer uit die Kolonie" (2014:359); "Kyk: Dit is Oktober 1820 en ek ry op my laaste perd" (2014:403); "Kyk, ons is 'n stuk of twintig mans en vroue wat gewapen staan en staar na die grond" (2014:407).

[Look, I am standing in the door (2014:12); Look how the mountains grin with golden teeth (2014:20); Look, it seems as if the horse is not aware of the rider (2014:33); Look how dapper he stands there, the young Buys (2014:34); Regard: magistrate Mortiz Hermann Otto Woeke (2014:64); Look, at one of these fords there are tracks in the mud (2014:137); Just look, the once slender fingers now claws with a matrix of scars (2014:170); Look how pretty (2014:256); Look: I translate the negotiations about my own future (2014:259); Look, there she is (2014:294); Look here, the Buyses approachhing over the yard (2014:309); Look! Look how my houses burn! (2014:311); Look, we rise over the horizon (2014:343); Look, the river stretches ahead of us vir ever and always. Look, we are waiting for a farmer from the Colony (2014:359); Look: It is October 1820 and I am riding my last horse (2014:403); Look, we are about twenty men and women who are armed and staring at the ground (2014:407)]

Rather than a distanced gaze upon events, the act of looking here is embodied, as is shown for example when Buys challenges the reader: "Kyk my in die oë en vra my reguit en ek sal nikks hiervan ontken nie" (Look me in the eyes and ask me straight and I will deny nothing of this) (2014:78). This challenge is repeated later, when Buys boasts: "Kom kyk maar, in my oë lees jy verniet. Hulle is nie vensters op enigiets nie" (You can come and look, in my eyes you read in vain. They are not windows on anything) (2014:139). While the challenge to "look me in the eyes" can be read as a turn of phrase characteristic of an oral narration — as if the reader is listening to a tale being told by Alom-Buys — the corporeality of the events and the presence of the material reader is clearly suggested at times when Buys commands the reader to "stand aside": "Jy moet goed wegstaan om my te sien versnel" (2014:141) and

Nou moet jy padgee voor. Ek en my perd is skaars 'n spikkeld op die horison. Soms moet jy darem die kleur van my oë — liggrys — kan uitmaak, maar dit is nie nou geleë nie. Ek is haastig. (2014:142)

[Now you have to make way ahead. My horse and I are scarcely a dot on the horizon. Sometimes you must be able to discern the colour of my eyes — light grey — but it is not convenient now. I am in a hurry. (2014:142)]

In some instances, the demand on the reader is further compounded with the direct question: "Do you see?" For example:

Kyk hoe stamp ek myself by die tweede een in, al is alles wat ek had om te bied reeds gestort op Hobe se magie waar die spiertjies dein en bult. Het jy gesien hoe sy geskater het toe my saad oor haar naeltjie spuit? (2014:167)

[Look how I pound into the second one, even though everything that I had to offer was already spilled on Hobe's stomach where the muscles flex. Did you see how she laughed when my seed spurted over her belly button? (2014:167)]

Sien jy die sterkte Ngqika klouter in die boom? ...Kyk, die blinkoog-Ngqika... Kyk daar vir die ou man Kemp... En sien jy hoe ek my op 'n klip gaan neerplak, tussen die twee? (2014:182)

[Do you see the strong Ngqika clamber in the tree?... Look, the bright-eyed Ngqika... Look there at the old man Kemp... And do you see how I seat myself on a rock, between the two? (2014:182)]

Sien jy hoe die stukkie snot uit haar neus val en op haar bors land? Wyl sy praat, vryf sy die drelletjie van haar rok af. Sien jy hoe die linkertepel teen wil en dank regop spring? (2014:198)

[Do you see how the little piece of snot falls from her nose and land on her breast? While she talks, she rubs it from her dress. Do you see how the left nipple jumps up despite itself? (2014:198)]

Het jy al gesien hoe vogels neste bou? (2014:256)

[Have you ever seen how birds build nests? (2014:256)]

These questions construct an interaction between Alom-Buys and the reader that goes beyond simply that of narrator and passive audience. The question "do you see?" is misleading in that it seems to allow for a yes or no answer, when in fact "no" is always already precluded by the question itself: through asking it, Alom-Buys has already imprinted on the reader that which s/he was meant to "see". It is made clear, however, that this does not make the reader a captive or unwilling audience: when Alom-Buys recounts how he had made a hole in the clay of a riverbank in order to perform a carnal act, he tells the reader: "Toe, jy wou mos alles hoor" (There, you wanted to hear everything) (2014:28).

The involved nature of the act of looking blurs the boundary between passive bystander and accomplice, thereby emphasising the ethical aspect of looking and knowing. At times this is no more than an overt acknowledgment of the familiar accusation levelled against fiction, namely that it places the reader in the position of voyeur, e.g. "Ek sien jy jou aan loer" (I see you keep on peeping) (2014:146); "Liewe loervink" (Dear peeping Tom) (2014:230); or more explicitly, when Buys visits Yese in her hut: "jy kyk hoe ek my heupe lig om teen haar hand te stamp" (you watch how I raise my hips to bump against her hand) (2014:172).

When it comes to scenes of violence, however, the allegation against the reader is more serious than voyeurism: s/he becomes an accomplice — by inhabiting a subject position that is constructed through the working of affect and the narrative's claim on the reader's affective presence.

Alom-Buys, who has already warned the reader from the very beginning that he knows "you" and "knows that you cannot look away" (2014:10), confronts the reader not only with images of violence and suffering, but with the reader's own complicity in them: by looking, by being affected, and by being affected and not looking away.

The first instance is when it is recounted how Buys attacked a man during his raid on Langa's kraal, while Nombini watched:

Ek los die Kaffer en slaan na die Hottentotte wat my wil bedwing. Al drie van die goed. Het sy saamgelag? Ek het hulle hoor lag, die Kaffers wat skater vir die mal wit man wat sy eie Hottentotte te lyf gaan. Het sy toe weggekyk? Jy gaan ook wil wegkyk. Probeer gerus. Probeer jou kop draai wanneer ek orent kom met bloed om my mond. Probeer wegkyk wanneer die Hottentot regop struikel, sy hande voor sy gevreet wegtrek asof hulle vasgeplak is. Sy hét gesien. Kyk net hoe betrag sy my. Die stomme meid het alles gadegeslaan en niks verstaan nie. Ek is nie skaam nie. Vir wat? Sy weet nijs. Die Hottentot wat opkyk met die wit been waar sy wang was. (2014:96)

[I leave the Kaffer and lash at the Hottentotte who are trying to restrain me. All three of the creatures. Did she laugh along? I heard them laugh, the Kaffers who guffaw at the crazy white man who assaults his own Hottentots. Did she look away then? You are also going to want to look away. You can try. Try to turn your head when I rise with blood around my mouth. Try to look away when the Hottentot staggers to his feet, pulls his hands from his face as if they are stuck. She *did* see. Just look how she watches me. The poor girl watched everything and understood nothing. I am not ashamed. What for? She knows nothing. The Hottentot who looks up with the white bone where his cheek was. (2014:96)]

In this instance, it could be argued that the act of "looking away" (or at least, *wanting* to look away) indicates censure or disavowal on the reader's part, and that the attempt fails simply because of shock and horror (after all an automatic affective response). However, the reader's complicity is stated unequivocally in the next example, when Buys and his men, together with some of Ngqika's warriors, massacre a Bushmen settlement.

Structurally, the scene in its entirety reflects the way in which affect as a bodily response interrupts and pierces social interpretation. Before the massacre, the scene is inscribed in a political and religious frame of interpretation. During the massacre, this framework dissolves, interrupted by the primal, visceral forces of violence and suffering. Afterwards, the events are again reinscribed in religious terms (although terms that undermine the more familiar Christian missionary narrative).

Ostensibly, the men go hunting for reasons of political gain: Buys and some of his comrades have been staying with Ngqika, king of the Rharhabe Xhosas, with whom they had formed a loose alliance. Ngqika wants Buys to show his warriors how white men hunt. They agree because they are his guests and indebted to his goodwill, and because it is only their horses and guns that ensure their value to Ngqika (2014:172). The hunt is also a social event with the aim to strengthen ties between the white men and the Xhosa warriors. Alom-Buys frames this in religious terms when he uses a Biblical allusion to attach meaning to their hunt:

Sien jy die kameraadskap tussen die jagters? 'n Band ander kant mooipraat wat net gevind word tussen mans in die oop veld wat deel in die slagting van diere. Ons is seuns wat speel in die veld en ons is mans wat sorg vir ons vroue en ons is gode wat beskik oor die lewe en dood van alle gedierte in die hemel daar bo en op die aarde hier onder en in die water onder die aarde. (2014:173)

[Do you see the companionship between the hunters? A bond beyond fancy talk that can only be found between men in the open field who share in the slaughter of animals. We are boys who play in the field and we are men who provide for our women and we are gods who decide the life and death of all creatures in the heavens above and the earth below and in the water beneath the earth. (2014:173)]

Near sundown, they come across a Bushmen settlement. The Xhosa captain in charge of the hunt does not want to let the opportunity pass (2014:173), and they attack the settlement driven by nothing more than bloodlust:

Die drosters en krygers wat die skepsels nou stadig omsingel op hierdie groen vlakte word gedryf deur oerse en verwikkeld ritSELINGS in hul agterkoppe, en hulle is lus, so lus, vir bloed. (2014:174)

[The deserters and warriors who are slowly surrounding the creatures on this green plain are driven by primal and intricate rustlings in the back of their heads, and they are lusting, lusting, for blood. (2014:174).]

The events that follow are recounted without the provision of any other interpretative framework — apart from "opportunity" and "bloodlust" — that would explain the men's actions. More than a simple "hunt" with the aim to kill, the men here are intent on sadistically inflicting brutal violence, which is described in a way that resists interpretation (e.g. an ideological explanation, for example that the slaughter is driven by racial hate; or justification in terms of vengeance or political gain). They commit the slaughter "onbeteueld en swymeldronk" ("unchecked and giddy-drunk") (2014:175) at first. It is only after most of it is over that they look around them, panting with their hands on their knees, and something more calculated is said to replace the bloodlust (2014:175).

After Buys and his men have returned to Ngqika's kraal, the narrative reinscribes the massacre in symbolic terms that carry nuances of religion, even though it provides an imperfect interpretation and undermines the narrative of civilisation propagated by Kemp, the missionary from the Netherlands:

[K]emp bid dat daar een dag 'n kerk hier sal staan wat die evangelie tot aan die einde van Afrika sal uitbasuin. Hy bid vir altaars en offers en die lig van beskawing en vlamme wat reik na die hemel. Hy bid dat God sal heers oor Afrika. Ek wil vir hom sê Gaan kyk net hier ander kant, daar staan reeds 'n groot genoeg altaar van smeulende babas wat stink ten

hemele. Ek wil vir hom sê Ek en my honde, óns is koning hier. Maar ek hou my bek en trek voort.⁴⁵ (2014:176)

[Kemp prays that one day a church will stand here that will trumpet the gospel to the ends of Africa. Hy prays for altars and sacrifices and the light of civilisation and flames that reach towards heaven. He prays that God will rule over Africa. I want to tell him Go look just over there, there is already a big enough altar of smouldering babies whose stench reaches heaven. I want to tell him My dogs and I, we are king here. But I keep my mouth and travel on. (2014:176)]

During the massacre scene, the reader's position as voyeur is irreparably shattered, as the narrative undeniably constructs his/her affective presence at the scene. The reader becomes an "accomplice" by looking, by being affected, and by being affected and not looking away. Before it starts, Buys warns:

As jy wil nader kom om te kyk in die brandende oë van Bossiesman-jagters, sal jy vertrap word... Glo my, medepligtige: Ingewikkeldheid en verdelging word albei meer verteerbaar op 'n afstand. (2014:173-174)

[If you want to come closer to look into the burning eyes of Bushmen hunters, you will be trampled... Believe me, accomplice: Complexity and destruction are both easier to stomach at a distance. (2014:172-174)]

The mention of destruction being easier to stomach or digest from a distance implies the possibility of a visceral, stomach-turning gut-reaction to the scene that is about to take place. By referring to the reader's material-affective response, the reader is embedded in a network of extension and connection to other bodies and placed in relation to everything else in the event. The reader is thus constructed as a presence at the scene through his/her affective response to it. The ethical aspect of looking and being present is also activated, as it is

⁴⁵ The theme that is emphasised in this passage — the inability of any narrative of civilisation to fully make sense of the primal violence and blood that mark the progress of humans through history — can itself be read in terms of affect. Just as affect is the bodily response that confounds the logic of societal expectations and disrupts the subject's ability to function in a cultural setting (cf. Hemmings, 2005:552), Buys claims that humankind's insatiable lust for blood, violence and strife is inherent and visceral. It defies attempts to contain it within a civilian or judicial system (compare for example the case of Martha Ferreira, the perfect epitome of a civilised woman, who is accused of killing seven of her workers and severely maiming four others (Anker, 2014:302-308)).

implied that the reader might actually *want* to come closer to look into the eyes of the victims.

After the scene of the massacre, Alom-Buys confronts the reader:

Ek moes jou seker gewaarsku het: As jy my wil sien, moet jy bereid wees om te veel te sien. Ek weet wat jy wil lees. Ek weet wat om jou in te fluister, wat jou opgewonde maak, want dit is wat my broek laat span. Ons is nie so anders nie. Metterdaad word ons al meer eenders. Maar pasop, daar gaan 'n punt kom, op hierdie paadjie wat ons so gesellig saam bewandel, wanneer dit te laat is vir omdraai.

Nie dat ek jou wil afskrik nie. Kom, kyk, glo my, die ergste is verby. (2014:175)

[I probably should have warned you earlier: If you want to see me, you must be willing to see too much. I know what you want to read. I know what to whisper to you, what excites you, because it is what makes *my* trousers bulge. We are not so different. In time we become even more similar. But beware, there will come a point, on this path where we are strolling so companionably, when it will be too late to turn back.

Not that I want to put you off. Come, look, believe me, the worst is over. (2014:175)]

Even though the novel here seems to acknowledge its own textuality (through the mention of reading), its textuality is complicated by the assertion of the embodied act of reading/seeing which is interrupted by the body's affective responses — the "skrik", shock and horror, after which the reader can "come closer" again, because the worst is over.

The other affective response referred to here is that of excitement, even sexual arousal. The transitive working of affect allows Alom-Buys to claim: "I know what excites you, because it is what excites me". Given that affect places the individual in a framework of "feeling and response", of connectedness to others (cf. Hemmings, 2005:552), it is through the reader's affective response to the scene that s/he is connected to others; inscribed relationally into the network of victims and perpetrators.

In *Regarding the pain of others* (2003), Susan Sontag argues that — even without the kind of response that Alom-Buys demands of his reader, that excitement that many readers would perhaps hesitate to identify with — looking at images of suffering always engages with affect and always contains an ethical dimension. Discussing the difference between looking at the depiction of pain in art and regarding the documentation of suffering in reality, Sontag

points out that both kinds of images elicit an affective response: satisfaction, pleasure, shame, guilt, or disgust.

In terms of the representation of "cruelties from classical antiquity" or Christian art, Sontag claims:

No moral charge attaches to the representation of these cruelties. Just the provocation: can you look at this? There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching. (2003)

It is different when the image is, for example, "a photograph of a First World War veteran whose face has been shot away":

One horror has its place in a complex subject — figures in a landscape — that displays the artist's skill of eye and hand. The other is a camera's record, from very near, of a real person's unspeakably awful mutilation; that and nothing else. An invented horror can be quite overwhelming... But there is shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror. Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it — say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken — or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be.

In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering. (Sontag, 2003)

The style of description of the massacre scene in *Buy's* reflects the way in which it progresses from a political and religious framework (epistemological and interpretative) to a visceral and primal representation that defies interpretation (ontological and affective), simply to be reinscribed in a symbolic interpretation. While the narration *before* the massacre contains instances of metaphorical and poetical language and makes use of allusions, the massacre itself is rendered in stark, unembellished words and short, descriptive sentences. Notably, the worst part of the slaughter is relayed entirely through rhetorical questions addressed to the reader:

Nou begin die slagting: Sien jy hoe die vroue en bejaardes gemartel en vermink en vermoor word? Ek het jou gesê om weg te staan. Sien jy nou? Hoe borste afgesny word? Hoe geslagsdelle verbrysel word? Hoe suigelinge van hul moeders weggeskeur word en op 'n

hoop tussen die hutte gegooi word? Hoe strooi van die hutte op die wriemelende en skreeuende hoop gegooi word en hoe dit aan die brand gesteek word en hoe die kleur en die reuk van die rook is soos niks wat ek of jy al gesien en geruik het nie en hoe die slagting aanhou en hoe my makkers onbeteueld deelneem? Hoe Steenberg 'n kind se arm afruk, hoe 'n Kaffer aanhou slaan met 'n kierie aan 'n hoop vlees wat lankal nie meer mens is nie; hoe die slagters hygend rondkyk met hande op die knieë en hoe die doodslag dan vervang word met iets veel meer berekend? Sien jy? (2014:175)

[Now the slaughter starts: Do you see how the women and elderly are tortured and mutilated and murdered? I told you to stand aside. Do you see now? How breasts are cut off? How genitals are crushed? How infants are torn from their mothers and thrown on a heap between the huts? How straw from the huts are thrown onto the wriggling and screaming heap and how it is lit and how the colour and the smell of the smoke are like nothing that you or I have seen or smelled and how the massacre continues and how my comrades are taking part uncontrollably? How Steenberg pulls a child's arm off, how a Kaffer keeps hitting a heap of flesh that is already not human any more with his cane; how the butchers look around panting with hands on the knees and how the slaughter is then replaced with something much more calculated? Do you see? (2014:175)]

The use of these questions is twofold. On the one hand they function in the same way as the other direct questions in the novel, addressed to the reader: it constructs the reader as a watching presence; it precludes a negative answer to the question "do you see?"; it ensures that the reader cannot "look away" by directly addressing him/her. At the same time, the style resists a reading of the passage as an overly artful construction of words that displays the author's skill of description. Instead, the way in which the reader is directly addressed gives the scene something of a documentary quality by making it more immediate, less mediated — thereby compounding the reader's shame and guilt as accomplice to it.

As a historical novel, *Buy's* insists on the materiality of history and the physical actuality of culture (cf. Highmore, 2010:119) by repeatedly emphasising the smells, the sounds, the sights, the feelings associated with historical events. By making a direct claim on the reader, the novel asserts that history — and possibly no aspect of human culture — can be approached merely epistemologically as a textual construct, since any frame of interpretation can be interrupted by affect. Just as affect is taken as proof that the body is always in a process of immersion in the world (cf. Seigworth & Gregg, 2010:2), so the reader is immersed in Buy's world. Instead of placing the human subject in its traditional position as

being able to study and understand reality from a detached, epistemological viewpoint, the reader is embedded in the corporeal reality of the past, affected and complicit.

CHAOS THEORY

Chaos theory emerged as a new field in the 1960s to 1970s as a continuation of the basic tenets of Einstein's relativity theory and the consequent formulation of quantum theory (Dion, 2007:225). Although attention to complexity precedes the formulation and development of the mathematical formalisms that constitute chaos theory, the publication of various popular science books detailing the developments in chaos theory contributed to the wide-spread proliferation of the field (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 125). In addition to this, the development of digital science and computers able to process and depict the mathematical formulations of chaos theory played a central role in the emergence and definition of the theory (Heilbron, 2003).

Broadly speaking, chaos theory poses the notion that most systems are sensitive to small changes, so that small variations in initial conditions can lead to big changes in the whole of the system (cf. Castree *et al.* 2015; Heilbron 2003). The consequence of this is the acknowledgment of non-linear dynamics, namely that any dynamical system (a system which changes over time) is subject to non-linear change. Whereas linear change refers to simple deterministic cause and effect relationships where a change in one element causes a proportional and thus predictable change in another (Warren *et al.*, 1998:358), non-linear dynamics assume that a small change in any one element of a system can cause disproportional and indeterminate changes in other elements and in fact in the whole system, leading to apparent chaos.

Romesburg (2004:205) explains the distinction between orderly and chaotic events as follows:

Science has long held that everything is deterministic: one cause leads to one effect, so everything can be determined if we just know all the information. For instance, a ball tossed with a particular force will rise to a predictable height before falling back to earth. Such simple deterministic systems, with their clean relation between cause and effect, are easily and accurately described using linear equations. Importantly, order becomes equated with clear cause and effect. If we can explain events, we presume them orderly and deterministic. If not, we designate them disorderly or chaotic.

In reality, few systems in nature comply with these simple rules. In most situations, determining cause and effect is difficult if not impossible, since the slightest variation can

have significant consequences. The most familiar analogy for this phenomenon is the so-called butterfly effect, in which a butterfly flapping its wings in Nebraska causes a puff of air that becomes a breeze that blows itself into a storm that pummels New York (Romesburg, 2004:205). These problems, in which inestimable, unmeasurable variables influence one another, can only be approximated — but not solved — using *nonlinear* equations (Romesburg, 2004:205).

Events that cannot be clearly explained using linear and causal relations are deemed "chaotic". The term "chaotic", however, does not function here as a "synonym for simple disorder" (Livingston, 2011:44), but rather refers to the "more complex and fruitful kind of disorder — the kind of disorder out of which order can emerge" (sometimes termed the "edge of chaos"). More often, the word "chaos", as it is used in terms of chaos theory, indicates the "complex disorder" itself as well as the "kind of order that emerges from such disorder". In this sense, Livingston notes, the ambiguity is "not so much an obstacle to be cleared away, as it is *what chaos really is*" (2011:44).

While chaos theory eschews simple linear and causal relations, it still maintains that "rules and regularity" can be found "buried deeper in disorder" (Heilbron, 2003). Romesburg (2004:206) therefore suggests that the term "chaos" itself might be a misnomer, because the underlying principles of chaos theory are deterministic, "possessing no randomness, no chance". The only reason why a system might *appear* chaotic, consisting of "unforeseen elements we would label as chance", is due to the "impossible task of compiling all possible information" — in other words, due to the impossibility for any given observer to observe, calculate and account for every single element and/or event (cf. Livingston, 2011:43).

This leads to the formulation of "deterministic chaos", which Romesburg (2004:200-201) describes as follows:

In traditional deterministic order, everything is predictable; cause runs smoothly to effect, and future effects are easily computed. Deterministic chaos just as clearly attaches every effect to a preceding cause. However, because we can never divine infinitely detailed information about all causal forces, many systems ultimately appear disorderly. The system is still deterministic in theory, but in practice unpredictable. In this manner, a chaotic system bears qualities of both order and chaos. It is orderly in that definite rules govern how the system functions; but if we equate unpredictability with disorder, the system is ultimately chaotic. Positing chaos within order and vice versa, traditional connotations of order and chaos are challenged. Finding value in both, chaos theory clarifies a paradoxical model of nature, even while reinforcing essential and unresolvable tensions.

One of the main impetuses behind the emergence of chaos theory is the belief that classical Newtonian physics, based on linear mathematics, is oversimplified. Historically, since the Enlightenment, scientists have approached nature's complexity by simplification, generalisation and approximation of phenomena in order to discern regularities that could be described mathematically (Heilbron, 2003). Romesburg (2004:202) describes this model, as it was quantified by Newton, as a "mechanist view of the universe" that equates "order, predictability, and certainty with value". Other theorists go as far as to assert that not only was order, predictability and certainty valued, it was forcibly imposed. This gave rise to the "belief in a clockwork world" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:97-98), founded in a Cartesian and Newtonian worldview, according to which "all chaotic features, dysfunctions, disharmonies, and internal inconsistencies were eliminated from theoretical studies and experimental techniques" in favour of linear phenomena.

The natural sciences during the twentieth century became increasingly suspicious of this Newtonian model of science, which is perceived to be limited in its ability to engage with the complexity of reality. As Byrne (2001:par. 113) says of classical physics, "[I]nlinearity and order seemed to be being forced on a world which isn't really like that". Chaos theory does not propose that Newtonian science is false, but merely that it is severely limited in its ability to engage with reality:

The implication of non-linearity is not that law-focused Newtonian science is wrong but rather that it is limited in its rightness. For some things it works and works very well but it cannot stand as an approach to the whole of reality... Nonlinearity challenges the universalism of the Newtonian conception at the level of the real world which we inhabit and experience. (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 518)

In terms of the biological and environmental sciences, for example, Kwiatkowska (2001:99) points out that habitats and ecological systems are not in reality stable, non-dynamic entities, easily understood and described with abstract formulations. Rather, they are systems which emerge and overlap "without clear boundaries", their extent "defined by the scale of observation".

In response to the abstraction of the Newtonian model of nature, recent work in fields such as the sociology of science, history of technology, anthropology of medicine, cultural studies, feminism, and political philosophy has, to a great extent, been "a revolt against simplification" (Law & Mol, 2002:par. 101). The argument that Law and Mol (2002:par. 101) identify as underlying this rejection of simplification is "that the world is complex and that it

shouldn't be tamed too much — and certainly not to the point where simplification becomes an impediment to understanding". In this regard, Dion (2007:240) reckons chaos theory rejects traditional Western binary logic in order to provide a vision of reality that is more adequate to our "complex and chaotic world".

Chaos theory's "holistic embrace of complexity and flux" — in contrast to the reductionism and determinism of Newtonian physics — resonated with the "general cultural ferment" of the 1960s and 1970s which often manifested in anti-scientism (Heilbron, 2003). From the 1970s onwards, physical, social and biological scientists have increasingly focused on chaos theory and complexity, seeing the potential of wide-spread application across scientific and social scientific disciplines in its approach (Warren *et al.*, 1998:358). Romesburg (2004:205) describes how the scientific shift towards uncertainty was paralleled in culture:

The century-long reevaluation of order and chaos, predictability and uncertainty, also occurred in Western culture. Deconstruction, postmodernism, and feminism overturned old paradigms of authorial control, aesthetic value, and patriarchy. American political systems underwent their own revolutions in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, as activists strove to decentralize institutional government, at least on the surface. The environmental movement, feeding off developments in ecology and increasing concerns about loss of native species, challenged assumptions about human control of nature. Culture and science evolved together in what Katherine Hayles terms a "feedback loop", as society encourages science in certain directions and science pushes the culture.

With regard to this parallel cultural development, Romesburg (2004:201) poses deterministic chaos as a metaphor, "a paradox that complicates our image of nature, and our ability to interact with and discuss nature", marked in its most obvious form as the shift in science and culture during the last half of the twentieth century towards "celebrating, instead of condemning, nature's unpredictability".

Underlying this move towards "celebrating" the complex unpredictability of nature is a bigger paradigm shift from an epistemological model of scientific theories to an ontological one. Rather than formal abstract mathematics which provided causal connections, chaos theory focuses the attention on "reality itself" (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 125) and should therefore be understood not as a generalising theory, but as an "ontology" (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 267):

When we say complexity "theory" we mean by theory a framework for understanding which asserts the ontological position that much of the world and most of the social world consists

of complex systems and if we want to understand it we have to understand it in those terms... For us complexity theory is an ontologically founded framework of understanding and not a theory of causation. (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 281)

By focusing on ontology, chaos theory problematizes the traditional assumption of the world as an object that can be known, understood, explained and interpreted by a human subject [EPISTEMOLOGY; SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES]. Classical Newtonian physics sought to impose linear and abstract formalisms to render the natural world "understandable" to a human observer, thereby simplifying the behaviour of "nonhuman environments" in order to "comprehend it within human scale effects in both space and time" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:103).

This reduction of the nonhuman to human terms — a kind of epistemological violence of anthropomorphification — reinforced the epistemological and teleological Enlightenment fantasy that the natural world can be fully understood and comprehended by the intellect of mankind. As Romesburg (2004:202) puts it, the mechanistic worldview put forth by Newton was based on the long-held view that nature and the universe is a "perfectly ordered natural world destined to reveal its secrets to the men of science".

In contrast to the Newtonian epistemological model, and in correspondence to a relational view that the world is comprised of subjects "too inconclusive, too multiple, too unfinished" to be completely submitted to interpretation (cf. Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:68), chaos theory holds the position that it is impossible for any observer to fully determine all the elements or variables of a complex system. This is because any act of observation is always already embedded in the system it claims to be observing, thus affecting the observing subject as much as the observed object (cf. Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:145) [OPENNESS].

Livingston (2011:43) quotes Rasch (2007:47) in referring to sociologist Niklas Luhmann's description of a social system. Complexity is described as the quality that is derived from the inability of an observer

to define completely all [the] elements' connections and interactions... [T]here is no totalizing perspective or omniscient selector. Each act of observation is embedded in what it observes. Such a definition should also be historicized: only *against* the fantasy of a disinterested, totalizing and transcendently objective perspective — a fantasy most specific to imperialist modernity — can complexity come to be defined as embeddedness, or rather, as the contradiction between transcendence and embeddedness.

The notion that the act of observation is embedded in what is being observed (a notion which is founded on Einstein's theories of relativity) is not new to cultural theory. In postmodern terms, it was interpreted as implying that "reality is structured around the observation recorded", whereby the power for generating truth is "placed in the hands of humankind" (Dion, 2007:230).

Following chaos theory, however, the idea of embedded observation is taken as a further confirmation of the interrelatedness of everything: because any small variant in the initial conditions of a system can lead non-linearly to indeterminable changes across the whole system, the mere act of observation can potentially impact the whole system. As Romesburg (2004:206) puts it, "*each individual is the whole because it potentially changes everything*" (Romesburg, 2004:206).

For Kwiatkowska (2001:101), this marks a "new relationship between man and the universe" as "[s]uddenly, the human being has become an active party in the drama of existence". In this regard, humankind is no longer independent from their environment. Instead,

[r]eleased from our restrictive role as spectators in the universe, we are allowed freedom and perspective to see ourselves as part of a much greater living system and learn to act accordingly. (Kwiatkowska, 2001:101)

Livingston (2011:43) points to the embeddedness of observation as the "coordination" of observer and observed, and deduces from it the philosophical implication of anti-reductionism, "the rejection of the principle that the whole can be known simply by knowing its component parts". Byrne (2001:par. 151) refers to this as chaos theory's ability to account for "holism", or more scientifically put, "emergent properties", which is defined as the view that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Byrne, 2001:par. 126).

Another way of putting this would be to say that, instead of imposing linear, causal relations, chaos theory acknowledges "complexity": a non-linear property according to which a complex system is "a set of interrelated elements" (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 191). The notion of interrelatedness as a function of the irreducible whole corresponds with the view of the relational "whole" of reality, comprised of a vast network of correspondences (Silverman, 2009:152) that cannot be reduced to a simple hierarchy or causal relation [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION; SIMILITUDE].

The idea that everything is part of a greater, interconnected system is inherent to chaos theory. Dion (2007:238) refers to the popular metaphor of the butterfly effect to state that the belief in "a structure that is behind nature" is founded on

the inherent suggestion that all life is interconnected. If a butterfly flapping its wings can affect the weather on the other side of the globe, then we must accept that we are not completely autonomous, we are part of a global whole... [I]f the same structure governing the wind in the trees governs the flow of stock values... then all life, all "authentic" and "inauthentic" components of the natural world must function within the same structure. In fact these opposing labels are revealed to be a fiction.

With regard to the way in which chaos theory resists any concept of boundaries, or the very notion of a binary logic (Dion 2007:240), it is sometimes linked with poststructuralism. Livingston (2011:42) claims that chaos theory heralds a shift from seeing structures as structures, towards viewing them as "systems, events in process". Although she claims that this "makes chaos and complexity theory full partners with poststructuralist theory generally" (2011:42), her explanation of this view aligns itself with metamodernist notions of POSTHUMANISM and AFFECT THEORY by emphasising the body and its insistence on materiality and emotion:

Sociologist Niklas Luhmann describes society as a complex system whose basic elements are events of communication; that is, 'not stable units (like cells or atoms or individuals) but events that vanish as soon as they appear' (Luhmann 1990:83). Likewise (for example), when you deconstruct the image of a human body as a structure with a simple boundary between inside (self) and outside (nonself), you get something much more dynamic and fractal. Negotiations between self and nonself (and the continuous transformations of one into the other) happen not just at the skin but fractally and at multiple scales down to the cellular level: every cell in the body is engaged in this negotiation; in fact, every cell *is* this negotiation. If the body is a structure, it is a fractal one, with all edges and no interior — a whirlpool, a burning bush.

(And by the way, as you were reading those words, did you feel your body subtly opening up, exquisitely flayed and aflame, and in the process, a new sense of being-in-the-moment?...)

Livingston (2011:42) then links the notion of a deconstructed body — a dynamic, fractal process of constant negotiation between self and nonself — to "poststructuralist accounts of texts not as hermetic interiors but as intertextual negotiations", as well as to the "paradigm

shift in cybernetics from closed to open systems". The correspondence between chaos theory and notions of poststructuralism and deconstruction should not be disregarded. However — as is implied in the above quotation of Livingston — chaos theory, with its focus on materiality and ontology, carries a different emphasis than the disembodied, textual practices of poststructuralism. While poststructuralism is often taken to manifest in a splintered, incoherent sense of subjectivity [SUBJECTIVITY], the dissolution of the self that chaos theory suggests points instead to the possibility of the subject being taken up into a greater, relational whole [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD].

In fact, Dion (2007:241) acknowledges the importance of deconstruction (and the work of Derrida in particular) in rejecting dualisms, but claims that, in chaos theory, it moves beyond deconstruction and asserts a new unity:

[T]he intermingling of Derrida and Chaos theory suggests the need for a language that can transcend the boundaries of our limited perspective by rejecting dualisms in favour of a multidimensional language with gradations rather than polarities. This latent idea which has its grounding in a Postmodern aesthetic just as Chaos theory has its roots in Quantum theory, is further advanced here. Not only is the distinction between opposites broken down to be replaced by shades in between (not either/or but a full spectrum) but these seeming opposites are forcefully yoked into a new unity ("space-time"). Chaos is order and order is chaos, paradoxically comprising a more mathematical-spiritual view of the world.

In accounts of chaos theory, this "new unity" is most often imagined as a web of interrelated kinships between everything in reality. For Livingston (2011:43) questions of "both kinships and differences" are made possible by chaos and complexity, a conclusion she came to after she contemplated a sagebrush bush and felt that the desert ecology is

deeply strange and deeply familiar to me. What I recognized in the sagebrush was a fellow creature engaged, like me, in the question of how to find what nourishes you in the middle of a desert. (Livingston, 2011:42)

The question of this kinship is ultimately a moral one, drawing on instances of compassion and empathy:

Recognizing a single common level of complexity (or *virtual kinship*, as I have called it) radically undercuts the master narrative of growth and development as increasing complexity. Instead of deploying increased complexity as a way of characterising more

"advanced" societies against more "primitive" ones (or sonnets from pop lyrics, or Guinness from Miller Lite), can we imagine more *empathetic* complexities? (Livingston, 2011:44)

For Kwiatkowska (2001:97), the ontological framework of kinship emphasises the importance of human decisions. In a complex system, according to chaos theory, any decision can have "unforeseen consequences" that will impact the whole of nature and the environment. This leads to what are, for her, "moral questions":

Would the ontological interpretation of chaotic systems (ontological indeterminacy rather than epistemological ignorance) be helpful not only to describe the world we are living in, but also to influence the way we are acting in this world? Seeing the world of complex and flexible characters whose processes are open to the future, would it affect our motives, our behavior, and our value system? (Kwiatkowska, 2001:97)

In answer to these questions, Kwiatkowska (2001:97) proposes that chaos theory allows an ecological perspective of life which characterises systems as "marked by change, heterogeneity, and multiplicity", and emphasises the "interactive openness to the environment or 'otherness' through which the unknown, novel, and creative forms or functions can arise unexpectedly". This perspective indeed necessitates a new logic and a new ethics — renouncing the idea of defeating nature, or controlling or even understanding it fully. Because everything is taken to be a part of an "interwoven totality" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:101-102), chaos theory allows for a "dialogue with nature": an ethical imperative to relate to nature actively in a framework that is based on a partnership where both human and nonhuman entities are "active agents" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:111).

Claiming that the current environmental crisis refutes any notion of "a dream of an all comprehensive theory grown out of impartial observation which embraces Humans and Nature", Kwiatkowska (2001:105) makes the following statement:

Out of the multiplicity of relations emerges a new set of metaphors to describe our minds, our universe, and ourselves. The view of nature, where the aspects of indeterminacy make evident the role the observer plays in the construction of an account of reality, calls for a new ethics to respond to the nature of complex systems and to constitute us purposefully in response to the natural environment. The chaos theory, which defies permanence, durability, and equilibrium, generally means renouncing the idea of defeating nature or controlling it completely. Instead, it confronts us as partners in the human-nature dialogue with the need to change the style and the type of discourse, the questions we want to ask,

and the answers. The nebulousness of our future makes dialogue the fundamental element connected with the ethos of responsibility for humankind today and tomorrow.

In response to the call for a new ethics, chaos theory provides, metatheoretically, the interdisciplinary approach necessary to respond to global environmental problems, since "simplistic models constructed within the isolated disciplines" are inadequate to explain or manage the complexities of physical and biological realities — or indeed to "address the problems of the modern world" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:97;102).

Byrne and Callaghan (2014:par. 152) echo this notion when they assert that, in order to engage with issues ranging from governance and public administration, health care and service delivery, education and the environment, "the future of useful social science is at the very least inter-disciplinary and probably post-disciplinary". For them, complexity as formulated by chaos theory "represents an important challenge to the disciplinary silos of the twentieth-first-century academy" and "provides a central element in the foundation of such a post-disciplinary programme" (cf. Heilbron, 2003).

Metatheoretically, chaos theory also resonates with other underlying tendencies within metamodernism. In the same way that metamodernism revives modernist values while remaining informed by postmodernism [CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM], chaos theory is sometimes linked with a postmodernist account, even while it rejects certain core postmodern claims.

While Livingston (2011:41-42) links chaos theory's preference for indeterminism to postmodern poetics, Byrne (2001:par. 151) points out that an interpretation of chaos theory as "postmodern" is based on an understanding of chaos as synonym to "randomness", in which sense it is taken to point to a rejection of modernist truth values and a belief in teleological progress. In fact, the term "chaos" as it is used in the scientific sense (and as it is currently being applied across various fields of social science) defines chaos instead as the precursor of order, something out of which order emerges (Byrne, 2001:par. 164). In this regard, Byrne (2001:par. 189) suggests that chaos and complexity theory in fact has ontological and epistemological implications that challenge "in the most fundamental way the postmodernist view of the nature of social science and the potentials of its applications".

For Dion (2007:236), chaos theory's insistence on order within disorder and chaos as the precursor to order undermines the implications of postmodern poetics, since it implies a belief in "the possibility of higher, absolute truth". Elaborating on this claim, Dion discusses

Einstein's relativity theory, quantum theory and chaos theory as corresponding to respectively modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism:

Relativity theory, with its suggestion that there may be a plurality of apparent truths despite a constant truth lurking behind them, might be seen as the mathematics of Modernism. Quantum theory, then, with its rejection of an absolute truth in favour of a system of essentially infinite possibilities, can be understood as the mathematics of Postmodernism. Finally, Chaos theory which looks at the randomness, the seeming chaos of a world comprised only of possibilities and once again tries to find an organization, a structuring principle that beckons to a higher Truth, seems ready to be the mathematics of post-Postmodernism. (2007:225)

Einstein's theory of relativity acknowledges the "scientific possibility that a single event may be recorded in completely different ways", depending on the observer and the conditions of the record, "with neither report asserting dominance as the One True Answer" (Dion, 2007:226). Although it is impossible to determine a single report as "correct", since either is equally valid even though they might disagree, Dion (2007:226) points out that the "moral relativism" that is often blamed on the theory of relativity is not, in fact, part of the theory itself. Even though the theory of relativity embraces a potential for differing but equally valid or "correct" viewpoints, "the truth of the event is never questioned" and "an absolute remains behind the difference" and "certain facts remain in place".

Einstein's theory of relativity nonetheless heralded a shift in ways of looking at reality, which lead to paradox being embraced, "not as a problem that needs resolution, but as a component of the way the world really works" (Dion, 2007:227). In this sense, theories of relativity — especially in the sense that they were deemed understandable by only a very few people in the world, a kind of "inner sanctum" — paralleled developments in modernist art. The "very opacity" of these theories aligned them with the modernist aesthetic "which praises difficulty as evidence of a greater truth and as a sign of development from earlier 'simpler' understandings of the world" (Dion, 2007:227).

Quantum theory followed on Einstein's theory of relativity, and is linked by Dion (2007:228) to the postmodern epoch. According to quantum theory, "truth is reduced to a series of possibilities" or potentialities: "we cannot say with certainty what occurs, all we can determine is a series of probabilities; certain events, then, are simply more or less likely to happen". In this sense, quantum theory replaces events with possibilities and furthers the "potential for paradox and uncertainty". Uncertainty is further emphasised by Heisenberg's

uncertainty principle, and is raised to the level of "scientifically accepted fact" (2007:229). It also shifts the suggestion from there being a "single sentient being, a god, controlling the outcome of events", and shifts control towards the human observer: "reality is structured around the observation recorded", shifting the "power for generating truth... from some external, omnipotent god" and placing it "squarely in the hands of humankind" (2007:229-230).

In response, chaos theory restores some sense of order to the indeterminacy of quantum theory, as well as some sense of a bigger, transcendental truth, the search for which Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) highlight as one of the core characteristics of a metamodernist aesthetics [MYTH].

In Chaos theory scientists search for a pattern, an organizing principle behind even the most seemingly random series of events. The assumption underlying this theory is that there is something, some structure, organizing everything and this structure can be ascertained, with enough effort. This organizing principle opens the door wide once again for the presence of a (type of) god. (Dion, 2007:231-232)

By examining the way in which even the smallest of changes in initial circumstances can vastly affect the outcome of a system, chaos theory "searches for the order that underlies apparently random situations" (Dion, 2007:232). In a description that echoes elements of the neo-romanticism that Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:12) identify as characteristic of metamodernist art, Dion (2007:232) describes

a return to a sense of fate, a sense that we are travellers on a train waiting for the next moment to occur; absent is any suggestion that we simply select from a series of possibilities at any given moment and that we decide our own reality. In addition... there is the underlying assumption that all life is connected in some capacity. If a butterfly flapping its wings can affect whether people live or die in Indonesia, then all life is interconnected, a notion that has strong ties to Eastern mysticism as well.

Dion (2007:238) identifies the distinguishing characteristic of chaos theory which most corresponds with metamodernism as "belief" or "faith" in a "hidden truth lurking behind our chaotic existence", a "faith that somehow, the paradoxes have their place and that the whole will bind together in a manner that transcends logic". He illustrates this by contrasting the worldview of the characters of Sol and Max in Darren Aronofsky's 1998 film *π* (pi) as,

respectively, one founded in postmodernist ideas and one founded in metamodernist beliefs (Dion, 2007:236-237).

Sol is only searching for a pattern behind the digits of pi and ultimately abandons it as a "futile project" — a rejection that Dion characterises as representing ideas linked with quantum theory and postmodernism (Dion, 2007:237):

For Sol, these ideas [chaos and order] are mutually exclusive: the world will either appear as chaos or, if Max is lucky, as ordered. Yet, under Chaos theory, the chaos *is* a kind of order. Having abandoned the hope, we might even say the faith, that an order will ever be revealed from his analysis of pi, Sol has accepted the quantum mechanical approach to the world where an absolute truth is impossible to determine. For Sol, life is chaotic; there is no hope of finding The Answer.

In contrast, Max searches for "a meaning, an order, behind the physical world, hoping to find something that will unite all the components of that world". He believes and has faith "that an Absolute will appear from the mists of chaos", that "an order will appear to explain the interconnectedness of life", an order which, the film suggests, is God. Echoing the notion that metamodernism is engaged in a search for "a truth that it never expects to find" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:5), that it embraces the need to believe in a spectral promise of certainty while simultaneously maintaining its infinite deferral (Toth, 2010:122), Dion (2007:238-239) points out that Max's search for the absolute order (or God) is ultimately doomed to fail. Rather than absolute answers that would strip life of its mystery, a certain amount of

uncertainty becomes crucial to a complete understanding of the world... Life, and our understanding of it, or so π and Einstein suggests, needs to maintain a link to the mysterious, to the unknowable. As Chaos theory (and thus, perhaps, the aesthetics of a post-Postmodern epoch) suggest, we can never fully understand the individual components of the world, although we can know the larger structure. There are limits then to our knowledge; uncertainty must be a component of life. We can take comfort in the knowledge that there is a structure, a design behind random events without having to know precisely how or why that structure functions the way it does.

Livingston (2011), too, emphasises the "link to the mysterious" signified by chaos theory when she claims that "[l]earning to see chaos represented, for me, a kind of re-enchantment of the world" (2011:41), a kind of "conversion process" (cf. 2011:42, 43). Heilbron (2003) states that several of the "chaos pioneers themselves drew inspiration from the romanticism

of Goethe", a notion that was reinforced by the fact that the first centres for the field of chaos theory in the US were in Santa Cruz and Santa Fe, "towns with New Age reputations".

Aside from "re-signifying" the "commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:12) [MYTH], chaos theory also embodies the notion of "impossible possibility" that is embraced by metamodernism (Toth, 2010:77-78) [CONTINUATION OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM]. Corresponding to chaos theory, metamodernism does not disregard postmodern doubt, but nonetheless chooses to "believe anyway" (Amian, 2008:192).

By uniting "the unknowable with the knowable, the chaotic with the absolute and the scientific with the mystical" (Dion, 2007:233), chaos theory advances beyond the postmodern view in which "in the absence of an order, a structure, we are left in a nihilistic world". Instead, in metamodernism as in chaos theory,

the freeplay itself, the chaos, includes a structure, an organization. Ultimately, unlike Postmodernism, in this new era the possibility of an answer is not denied; it is promised, it is just not provided for us... [N]o answer can be given to the many questions [the film] poses because the answer is simply yes and no at the same time. (Dion, 2007:242)

Die boek van toeval en toeoverlaat (2006) by Ingrid Winterbach

In post-millennial Afrikaans fiction, the multi-awarded⁴⁶ novel *Die boek van toeval en toeoverlaat* (2006) by Ingrid Winterbach introduced a renewed interest in themes regarding mysticism in the discussion of literary works (see for example Viljoen (2007); Johl (2008); Van Vuuren (2008); Human (2009b); Van den Heever (2012); and Spruyt (2014)). The novel is an example of the metamodernist revival of MYTH and notions related to myth, such as a move to looking beyond the surface of the everyday to a deeper, universal, connective truth.

More specifically, the novel's central theme of the search — the main character Helena Verbloem's search for her stolen shells on a literal level, and the search for the origin of life and the comfort of transcendental meaning on a symbolic level — activates metamodernist metaxis through paralleling the mystical and spiritual on the one hand and the scientific and

⁴⁶ *Die boek van toeval en toeoverlaat* received the WA Hofmeyr Prize (2007), the M-Net Prize (2007), the University of Johannesburg Prize for Creative Writing (2007), as well as the C.L. Engelbrecht Prize for Literature (2012).

evolutionary on the other. The novel's juxtaposition of contingency ("toeval") and an evolutionary view of the origin of life also resonates with some of the fundamental tenets of chaos theory, by indicating the way in which the order of evolutionary progress can be discerned within the chaos of contingency. In this way, *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* presents a metamodernist vision of the fusion between science and spirituality, characterised by the search for a higher, absolute truth or organising principle — or at least, the implied belief in the *possibility* of such.

Viljoen (2007) describes *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* as a story in which contingency is the main ingredient, a notion that the extensive conversations between some of the major characters about the origin of life and the course of evolution supports. The view is taken that an infinite number of contingent events — rather than a coherent plan — have led to the existence of humankind. This is in accordance to chaos theory's rejection of a Newtonian, mechanist view of the universe that supposed order, predictability and certainty (Romesburg, 2004:202). At the same time, the novel emphasises the principle of chaos theory that a living, dynamic system is subject to non-linear, non-causal, non-deterministic and entirely unpredictable change.

Yet despite the apparent chaos of contingency in *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat*, the narrative suggests that meaning and order can be found in the disorder — or perhaps in the paradox between order and disorder. For Van Vuuren (2008:164) the novel revolves around the tension between evolutionary contingency and the title's "toeverlaat" (mainstay, support, sanctuary or comfort) which suggests a religious frame of reference and implies a divine consciousness that planned and created the universe. The novel thus juxtaposes the apparently irreconcilable ideas of evolution and religion, and thereby embodies the search for meaning, for a framework or paradigm that can explain and give meaning to life (Van Vuuren, 2008:165).

In terms reminiscent of chaos theory, Viljoen (2007) suggests that the "mainstay" ("toeverlaat") that the title indicates is perhaps to be found precisely in the acknowledgment of the role that contingency plays in every aspect of existence, and a consequent consciousness of the rich and complex textures that come into being through the coincidental course of the universe — the re-enchantment of the world through an understanding of its chaos, as Livingston (2011:41) puts it. In her discussion of *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat*, Spruyt (2014:45) links the "mainstay" even more explicitly to a notion of chaos theory: the comfort of existence is to be found in the acceptance of contingency and

the orderly structures that come into being as a result of this, in other words the order which arises from apparent disorder.

The evolutionary theme in *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* also aligns itself with the implications chaos theory hold for the place of humankind in the cosmos. Chaos theory rejects the belief of classical Newtonian physics that the natural world can be understood in a linear, abstract way by any human observer, that it can reduced to predictable formalisms in order to be comprehended "within human scale effects in both space and time" (Kwiatkowska, 2001:103). Similarly, in *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* it is emphasised that humankind itself is the result of an infinite amount of entirely random, contingent happenings, and that the span of time of which Helena and Hugo talk when they discuss evolution measures in billions of years — hardly intelligible within a human scale.

This leads Van den Heever (2012:53) to argue that

the theme of evolution takes the idea of man's insignificance to its extreme. Man's intellectual struggle with his evolutionary origins has rarely been an embracement of chance, it rather seems to be characterised by an inability to let go of the idea of progress and man as the climax of the evolutionary process. In Winterbach's novel this tendency is both illuminated and undermined. Man is relegated to his proper place. He is a marginal being with no claim to essence, necessity or an ultimate goal.

This relegation of man to "his proper place" does not point to a cynical or nihilistic view of humanity, however. Van den Heever (2012:53) contends it is not a cause for hopelessness, because it is precisely "the colour and texture that contingency lends to life" that provide hope and comfort to the individual.

The decentralisation of humankind — and by implication human reason, which designates the ability to interpret the mysteries of nature — through an acknowledgment of contingency and chance also allows for a relational understanding of everything in the world. Because any small variation in the system can lead in a non-linear way to indeterminable changes across the whole system, it follows that "each individual *is* the whole because it potentially changes everything" (Romesburg, 2004:206). Rather than playing the role of an impartial spectator, independent from his/her environment, the embedded human observer is affected by his/her act of observation in the same way that the observation can potentially affect the whole system.

Johl (2008:142) touches on this idea when she describes *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* as

the weaving of a small-scale "personal history" out of all the seemingly haphazard intimate experiences, perceptions and memories of the main character, Helena Verbloem, is reflectively linked to a "cosmic scale history", to a time-space universe "born" from chance events and which is ever growing, changing, and dying/ending, and beginning again through a series of "cosmic blunders" ("toevalle").

***A tale for the time being* (2013) by Ruth Ozeki**

In a similar way, a reviewer describes Ruth Ozeki's *A tale for the time being* (2013) as a novel that takes on big themes: "not just the death of individuals but also the death of the planet" (Downer, 2013). If the novel is read in terms of Livingston's formulation of chaos theory as describing an endless, dynamic, fractal process of negotiation between self and nonself (2011:42), its structure can indeed be likened to that of a fractal pattern. The novel contains the stories of four individuals, Nao, her father Haruki #2, her great-uncle Haruki #1, and her great-grandmother Jiko. These stories can be read as fractal replications of each other and they become entangled, in a quantum sense, with the life of their "observer", Ruth. Ruth is the semi-fictional figure of the novelist, who is reading the diaries, letters and other material by and about the others. Her act of observation is embedded within the system she is observing: through observing, she not only changes the system (the life events of Nao and Haruki #2), but is changed by it as well.

These individuals are presented as a fractal representation of the global whole on a micro level, as their tales are embedded within a vast network of global events and occurrences, some spanning millions of years — all of which are interrelated in such a way that no causal, linear narrative can be discerned. Some examples of these events and phenomena are: feminism in the Taisho era of Japan (2013b:19); Marcel Proust; ancient Zen master Dōgen Zenji; World War II; the oceanic currents and the Great Garbage Patches in the world's oceans (2013b:36); the Dot-Com Bubble and economic collapse (2013b:43); wide-spread pollution that made it possible for a Japanese Jungle Crow to come to Canada as part of the drift of garbage and debris in the ocean (2013b:55); ecological upheaval because of human interference, leading to the proliferation of invasive species and the loss of indigenous fauna (2013b:120); the impact of human migration two hundred years ago on the current population of whales (2013b:57-58); a project that anticipates the effects of global warming

by planting trees that had been indigenous during the Eocene Thermal Maximum 55 million years ago (2013b:60); the Y2K scare, the collapse of the power grid and the world banking system (2013b:83); the earthquake and tsunami in Japan (2013b:111-113); the uprising in Libya (2013b:113); the tornado in Joplin (2013b:113); the "bully culture" of "[p]oliticians, corporations, the banks, the military" and state-sanctioned torture (2013b:121); terrorism, war, global warming and species extinctions (2013b:169); the terror attacks of September 11 (2013b:265-267) and the US war with Afghanistan (2013b:273).

A tale for the time being revolves around the chance discovery of a Japanese schoolgirl's diary by a writer, Ruth (semi-autobiographically the author Ruth Ozeki herself), who lives with her husband Oliver on an island off the coast of British Columbia. Through reading the diary of the girl Nao — as well as the letters and diary of Nao's great-uncle, Haruki #1, and e-mails by Nao's father, Haruki #2 — Ruth and Nao's stories and lives become entangled in a complex dynamic web of effects.

The chance way in which Ruth found the diary relates to the strong notion of fate that emerges in the narrative. During a walk along the beach, Ruth sees a "tiny sparkle, a small glint of refracted sunlight angling out from beneath a massive tangle of drying kelp" (2013b:8). At first she mistakes it for a jellyfish that had been washed up and almost walks on, but "something made her stop" (2013b:8). Discovering that it was a barnacle-encrusted plastic freezer bag, she is unsurprised — the "ocean was full of plastic" — and assumes that the bag contained someone's garbage, perhaps the remainder of a lunch that had been tossed overboard or left behind after a picnic (2013b:8).

She picks it up to throw it away at home, but her husband discovers and unpacks it. Inside, wrapped in multiple freezer bags, is a Hello Kitty lunch box which contains Nao's diary — a book that had been sewn inside the binding of an old copy of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* — along with a small stack of handwritten letters from Haruki #1 to his mother, a booklet in which Haruki #1 kept a journal during his time as an enlisted soldier in WWII, and an old military-issued wristwatch which had belonged to him (2013b:10).

What at first seemed like pure chance — indeed, "[t]he sea was always heaving things up and hurling them back: fishing lines, floats, beer cans, plastic toys, tampons, Nike sneakers" (2013b:8) — attains a suggestion of fate when Ruth's husband, Oliver, points out that the diary might have been either flotsam or jetsam: "Flotsam is accidental, stuff found floating at sea. Jetsam's been jettisoned. It's a matter of intent" (2013bb:13).

He goes on to explain the eleven great planetary gyres — each a "string of currents" — which were responsible for bringing the diary from Japan to the beach of an island off British Columbia. The gyre patterns represent the kind of order that emerges from apparent disorder and during the course of the novel they come to stand for the interrelated nature of all things in existence:

"Each gyre orbits at its own speed," he continued. "And the length of an orbit is called a tone. Isn't that beautiful? Like the music of the spheres. The longest orbital period is thirteen years, which establishes the fundamental tone. The Turtle Gyre has a half tone of six and a half years. The Aleut Gyre, a quarter tone of three. The flotsam that rides the gyre is called drift. Drift that stays in the orbit of the gyre is considered to be part of the gyre memory. The rate of escape from the gyre determines the half-life of drift..." (2013b:13-14)

Later, Oliver mentions the Great Garbage Patches, "[e]normous masses of garbage and debris floating in the oceans" (2013b:36), where everything that "doesn't sink or escape from the gyre gets sucked up into":

"That's what would have happened to your freezer bag if it hadn't escaped. Sucked up and becalmed, slowly eddying around. The plastic ground into particles for the fish and zooplankton to eat. The diary and letters disintegrating, unread. But instead it got washed up on the beach below Jap Ranch, where you could find it..."

"What are you saying?" Ruth asked.

"Nothing. Just that it's amazing, is all."

"As in the-universe-provides kind of amazing?"

"Maybe." (2013b:36)

While Ruth herself is initially sceptical, Nao makes it clear that she believes in fate, and that whoever is reading the diary was the one it was meant for. She tells her reader:

[I]f you decide not to read any more, hey, no problem, because you're not the one I was waiting for anyway. But if you do decide to read on, then guess what? You're my kind of time being and together we'll make magic! (2013b:3-4)

A "time being" includes everything in the world, as Nao explains, since it is "someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be" (2013b:3). Being a time being is therefore something everyone has in common, not only Nao and her reader. However, by saying "together we'll make magic!", it is already implied that there is something fateful — or indeed, magical — in the mutual relationship between Nao and whoever is reading her diary.

In fact, her diary is intended for "only one special person", and her plan had been to simply leave it somewhere and "you will find it!"

How cool is that? It feels like I'm reaching forward through time to touch you, and now that you've found it, you're reaching back to touch me!

If you ask me, it's fantastically cool and beautiful. It's like a message in a bottle, cast out onto the ocean of time and space. Totally personal, and real, too... It's the opposite of a blog. It's an antiblog because it's meant for only one special person, and that person is *you*. And if you've read this far, you probably understand what I mean. Do you understand? Do you feel special yet? (2013b:26)

Eventually, Ruth herself comes to believe in the fatefulness that she was meant to find the diary. She tells her husband:

"You're the one who said the universe provides. Well, the universe provided Nao, and she says this is the way to wake up. Maybe she's right. Anyway, I want to try. I need something. I need a supapawa." (2013b:185)

This "supapawa" overtly refers to Nao's instructions on how to do zazen (meditate), but it comes to stand for the indirect way in which Ruth is changed by the narrative she reads. Having suffered from writer's block through a long time of working unsuccessfully on a memoir, her feeling of failure as a novelist is compounded by feelings of isolation, living on the island. Through engaging with Nao's story, specifically in an affective and ethical way, Ruth is truly "awakened".

However, in *A tale for the time being*, the impact of reading goes beyond the notion of fiction as consolation or redemption *for the reader*. In terms of chaos theory, the act of observation (reading) changes the observer (reader) as well as the system being observed (the story). The embeddedness of the act of observation — regardless of the time that lapsed between Nao writing the diary and Ruth reading it — is already apparent from the opening of the

novel. The novel begins with a section from Nao's diary where she directly addresses her reader:

As for me, right now I am sitting in a French maid café in Akiba Electricity Town, listening to a sad chanson that is playing sometime in your past, which is also my present, writing this and wondering about you, somewhere in my future. And if you're reading this, then maybe by now you're wondering about me, too.

You wonder about me.

I wonder about you.

Who are you and what are you doing? (2013b:3)

The novel's epilogue, a letter from Ruth to Nao, mirrors the opening sentences:

You wonder about me.

I wonder about you.

Who are you and what are you doing?

I picture you now, a young woman of... wait, let me do the math... twenty-six? Twenty-seven? Something like that. (2013b:402)

The last sentence of the epilogue — "P.S. I do have a cat, and he's sitting on my lap, and his forehead smells like cedar trees and fresh sweet air. How did you know?" (2013b:403) — is a response to a question from Nao when *she* is first wondering about *her* reader (2013b:3). This suggests a dialogue between writer and reader, rather than a passive, closed, one-sided act of consuming a written text in which only the reader has the capacity to be affected by the writer's (finished, unchangeable) text. In the context of the novel as a whole, Ruth's question "How did you know?" strengthens the quantum notion that not only does the observer affect the system she observes, but she is affected through the act of observation herself, as the question further opens up the suggestion that, just as Ruth could affect Nao's story, Nao had affected Ruth's.

The "quantum connection" between Nao and Ruth is made explicit when Ruth is seized by "an odd and lingering sense of urgency to... what? To help the girl? To save her?"

(2013b:29). Driven by "a strong sense of almost karmic connection with the girl and her father" (2013b:311), Ruth tries to track down Nao or her father out of concern for Nao's expressed intention to commit suicide. She finally makes contact with an American professor who had met Nao's father when she and her parents were living in America. Ruth tells professor Leistikko that it was a matter of urgency that she reaches Nao, since the "whole diary is a cry for help" (2013b:312).

Her husband, however, points out how nonsensical this is: the diary had clearly been written more than a decade ago.

Ruth felt the floor tip. She put her hand on the doorjamb to steady herself.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, swallowing hard. "I... of course, you're right. Stupid. I just... forgot." (2013b:313)

She explains later:

It wasn't that she'd forgotten, exactly. The problem was more a kind of slippage. When she was writing a novel, living deep inside a fictional world, the days got jumbled together, and entire weeks or months or even years would yield to the ebb and flow of the dream... Fiction had its own time and logic. That was its power. But the email she'd just written to the professor was not fiction. It was real, as real as the diary. (2013b:314)

In Ruth's mind, Nao was sixteen years old and would always be sixteen (2013b:314). Her sense of urgency was driven partly by the fact that Professor Leistikko has told her of the real reasons that Nao's father got fired from his job in Silicon Valley and the underlying cause of his depression. Haruki #2 had been headhunted to work on a human-computer interface design, but had discovered that the U.S. military was interested in applying his research to semi-autonomous weapons technology (2013b:306-307). Once he expressed his moral misgivings over the project, he lost his job.

Once Ruth realises that it was "too late" to "help" Nao, she is tempted to stop reading the diary, arguing that it would not make any difference whether she reads it or not (2013b:314-315). However, as soon as she reaches that conclusion, the diary itself changes: while previously Nao's handwriting persisted to the end of the book, the last pages are now blank (2013b:343). It appears that Ruth's decision to stop reading — or perhaps her belief that her

act of reading could not affect any change — altered the diary in a way that is reminiscent of Schrödinger's theory of the observer paradox in quantum mechanics: because she is not "observing" the events Nao described, it did not happen.

In the last entry of the diary, it is implied that Nao's father is about to kill himself (2013b:339). Nao receives news that her great-grandmother is on her deathbed (2013b:336), but she is unable to make it all the way to the temple to see her great-grandmother one last time (2013b:339). She states: "I don't believe I exist, and soon I won't. I am a time being about to expire" (2013b:340); and the last words are: "I guess this is it. This is what now feels like" (2013b:341).

Reading this, Ruth and Oliver surmise that Nao has "caught up with herself" (2013b:342). And indeed, when Ruth turns the page, the last twenty pages of the diary are all blank. The closest explanation for this that she could come up with is that Nao had "changed her mind", and in effect had reached in and took her words back: "It's like her life just got shorter. Time is slipping away from here, page by page..." (2013b:343).

The entangled nature of the interrelational bond between Nao and Ruth becomes explicit here. According to the quantum principle of entanglement, two particles that share certain characteristics or behaviours can coordinate their properties across space and time and behave like a single system (Appendix B, 2013b:409). In other words, just as Ruth's act of observation affects Nao, so Nao's implicit observation of Ruth affects *her*.

As Oliver argues, if Nao has changed her mind about writing the end, "then it's not just *her* life that's at risk", but also "our existence" that is called into question, because "if she stops writing to us, then maybe we stop being, too" (2013b:344). Later, Nao herself suggest this, too, when she tells her reader: "you don't even exist yet. And unless you find this book and start to read, maybe you never will" (2013b:385).⁴⁷

Following Oliver's suggestion that she should go and find the words, Ruth has a dream where the whole world and all the events of the novel come together, inextricably intertwined:

⁴⁷ While this is reminiscent of certain poststructuralist and deconstructionist notions of textuality — the idea that everything is text — *A tale for the time being* draws on notions of affective networks and the ethical responsibility that is demanded by the textual connection between Nao and Ruth to create an ultimately redemptive end. In this way the novel can perhaps be said to redeem postmodern textual strategies that were originally used to disavow exactly these notions of affect, sentimentality, connectedness, and the sense of a deeper universal connecting truth.

spectral images, smells and sounds; the gasp of a woman hanged for treason as the noose snaps her neck; the cry of a young girl in mourning; the taste of a son's blood and broken teeth; the stench of a city drowned in flames; a mushroom cloud; a parade of puppets in the rain. For a moment she vacillates. The words are there at her fingertips. (2013b:348)

Through this world that cracks "into a kaleidoscope of fractal patterns — recursive limbs and glinting wavelets — that spin and then reorganize themselves" (2013b:348), Ruth searches for Nao. She is finally guided by a crow to where Nao's father is waiting for the fellow members of his "suicide club" (2013b:350). She tells him that she was there to meet him, to give him a message from his daughter (2013b:351): that he should not kill himself, that his grandmother Jiko was dying and that he needed to meet Nao at the bus stop near Jiko's temple (2013b:353). After this, Ruth finds herself at the temple, where she places the composition book containing Haruki #1's diary in the box that was supposed to contain his remains (2013b:354). This secret diary was in the Hello Kitty lunchbox that Ruth discovered on the beach, even though this should not have been possible — Haruki #1 stated his intention to destroy the diary himself, and even if he had not, he would have carried it with him when his plane exploded (2013b:328).

These actions of Ruth change Nao's story: her father abandons his plan to kill himself and meets her at the bus stop instead, from where they go together to say goodbye to Jiko before she dies (2013b:360), finally discovering Haruki #1's lost diary together (2013b:367). Nao's father discovers that his own story is a replication of Haruki #1's moral anxiety about his task as kamikaze pilot in the Japanese army. This gives Haruki #2 some moral reassurance, as well as the conviction to go on living and a way to repair his relationship with Nao (2013b:388-389).

After Ruth "changed" Nao's diary through her dream, the end of the diary keeps "receding" (2013b:375). She explains that every time she opens the diary, there are more pages: "the end keeps receding, like an outgoing wave. Just out of reach. I can't quite catch up" (2013b:376). One of Ruth's friends theorises about it as follows:

[M]y theory is that this crow from Nao's world came here to lead you into the dream so you could change the end of her story. Her story was about to end one way, and you intervened, which set up the conditions for a different outcome. A new 'now', as it were, which Nao hasn't quite caught up with. (2013b:376)

Her second theory is

"That it's your doing. It's not about Nao's now. It's about yours. You haven't caught up with yourself yet, the now of *your* story, and you can't reach her ending until you do." (2013b:377)

Ruth acknowledges the observer's capacity for influencing the system she is observing, along with the paradox that perhaps she only exists *because she observes*:

She hadn't been writing, she'd been *reading*. Surely a reader wasn't capable of this bizarre kind of conjuration, pulling words from the void? But apparently she had done just that, or else she was crazy. Or else...

Together we'll make magic...

Who had conjured whom? (2013b:392)

The way in which the smallest of changes — such as Ruth's act of observing — causes unpredictable changes to the whole system is only one instance of the interrelated nature of everything in the world. In his diary, Haruki #1 draws on the words of Buddhist master Dōgen to explain that this phenomenon occurs at "every moment of existence":

Both life and death manifest in every moment of existence. Our human body appears and disappears moment by moment, without cease, and this ceaseless arising and passing away is what we experience as time and being. They are not separate. They are one thing, and in even a fraction of a second, we have the opportunity to choose, and to turn the course of our action either toward the attainment of truth or away from it. *Each instant is utterly critical to the whole world.* [my emphasis] (2013b:324)

He applies this to his ultimate choice as kamikaze pilot — whether to fly his plane into an American battleship or crash it harmlessly into the sea:

in that same fraction of time, that minuscule movement of my hand through space will determine the fates of all the Japanese soldiers and citizens that these same Americans (enemies, whose lives I save) may live to kill. And so on and so on, until you could even say that the very outcome of this war will be decided by a moment and a millimeter, representing the outward manifestation of my will. But how am I to know? (2013b:325)

By juxtaposing the ripple effect of "big" choices (whether or not to destroy a ship full of soldiers) and "small ones" (whether or not to read a certain diary), and by embedding these

instances within global patterns of ocean currents, climate change and natural disaster, *A tale for the time being* acknowledges the complexity of reality that cannot be subjected to an idealised epistemological interpretation, but which should rather be accepted, ontologically, as it is. At the same time, the ethical implications of the fact that everything in nature is interrelated are brought to the fore: Ruth is compelled to act on Nao's cry for help, and her actions are ultimately shown to have changed the course of Nao and her father's life. Haruki #1 grapples with the moral choices facing him as a kamikaze pilot, and Haruki #2 has to deal with the ethical implications of designing a computer interface that could be used in weapons technology (2013b:307).

The theme of moral choice — linked with notions of honour and shame, as they manifest in the narratives of Haruki #1 and Haruki #2 — emphasises the spiritual aspect of the novel that is expressed through various references to Buddhist teaching. The novel's epigraph is from the work of Japanese Zen master Eihei Dōgen Zenji, titled "For the Time Being", and Nao herself makes multiple references to Dōgen's teachings, as she was taught them by her great-grandmother Jiko. This leads reviewer Schwarzbau (2013) to claim that *A tale for the time being* "can be read as a kind of Buddhist meditation of its own, a koan". Throughout, the Buddhist concept of time is linked to a quantum understanding of reality (indeed, out of the six appendices to the novel, three deal with Buddhism and three with quantum physics).

While the resonances between the advances made in twentieth-century science — relativity theory, quantum theory, and chaos theory — and Eastern mysticism in general and Buddhism in particular, have been much discussed (see for example, Verhoeven (2001)), the way in which science and spirituality are presented in *A tale for the time being* is a prime example of a metamodernist sensibility.

Even though Ruth in the end reluctantly accepts the "many worlds" theory of quantum mechanics (2013b:397-399) — the idea that every choice causes the world to split to account for all possible outcomes — she does not take this as a reason for moral complacency or for embracing relativism. As she tells Oliver, "I don't care about other worlds. I care about this one. I care whether [Nao]'s dead or alive in this world" (2013b:400). In contrast to a postmodernist approach to quantum theory which would reject the notion of an absolute truth in favour of infinite possibilities all carrying equal weight and importance, the various characters' search for and insistence on the possibility of a single "right" moral choice and course of action points to a metamodernist search for and belief in "a structuring principle that beckons to a higher Truth", as Dion (2007:225) puts it. Within the apparent

chaos of interrelated beings and the infinite possibilities opened up by every instance of choice, the belief in fate, destiny or meaning belies a belief in the possibility of a higher, absolute truth (cf. Dion, 2007:236) — a belief which drives a certain ethical imperative while simultaneously making that imperative possible.

The concept of time put forth in *A tale for the time being* also corresponds to a metamodernist worldview. According to Dion (2007:235), the twentieth century has seen a radical shift in the understanding of time. Rather than a "constant progress", Einstein posited that time is a dimension just like length, width and height, and is "relative to the reference frame selected". This gives rise to the notion that "all times become eternally present", and that the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion (Dion, 2007:235) — an idea that, again, parallels understandings from Buddhism and other mystic traditions.

This concept of time stands in contrast to the modernist, teleological notion of an uninterrupted trajectory or historical progress that will somehow culminate in an ultimate utopia. Postmodernism, for all its scepticism and cynicism, was not free from this, as Toth (2010:4) argues that it was itself haunted by "a certain teleological aporia, a promise of the end" — the end of history that was supposedly brought on by the collapse of socialism and the perceived triumph of Western capitalism and its liberal-democratic order.

By paralleling the narrative of World War II — which marked the end of the modernist utopian ideal — and the destruction of the planet as a result of global neoliberal capitalist consumerism, *A tale for the time being* delivers a strong criticism of teleological delusions. Everything in nature is interrelated, as are past and future, emphasising the ethical imperative of choice: the smallest change can affect the whole system — present, future, and past.

POSTHUMANISM

The body of theories designated "posthumanist" is characterised by the unsettling of traditional humanist or anthropocentric categories of "human" and "other" — whether this "other" refers to nature, animals, machines, or any entities labelled as "inhuman" or "non-human".⁴⁸

Traditionally, the category "human" was understood to indicate a Descartean conception of the human as being absolutely and unquestionably distinguishable from all other inhuman entities. The human, according to this view, occupies "a natural and eternal place at the very center of things", shares a unique and incontestable "essence" with all other human beings, and is the "origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history" — in short, human beings are "exceptional, autonomous, and set above the world that lies at their feet" (Badmington, 2011:374).

Posthumanism, in contrast

[e]merges from the recognition that "Man" is not the privileged and protected center, because human beings are no longer — and perhaps never were — utterly distinct from animals, machines, and other forms of the "inhuman"; are the products of historical and cultural differences that invalidate any appeal to a universal, transhistorical human essence; are constituted as subjects by a linguistic system that pre-exists and transcends them; and are unable to direct the course of world history towards a uniquely human goal. (Badmington, 2011:374)

Nayar (2014:157) distinguishes between two conceptualisations of posthumanism. In the first sense — the sense that is often referred to as the "popular cultural" notion of posthumanism (cf. Seaman, 2007:258) — posthumanism simply indicates an ontological condition

⁴⁸ I use the term "non-human" (rather than "nonhuman", except where indicated in a direct quotation) to emphasise the constructed nature of the category.

in which many humans now, and increasingly will, live with chemically, surgically, technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms (such as body parts from other life forms through xenotransplantation.⁴⁹

Sometimes referred to as transhumanism, this is considered by many critics to be merely an extreme form of humanism (cf. Nayar 2014:par. 211), in the sense that this "post-human" is considered to be an "enhanced" version of a human, improved by means of technology to become "faster, more intelligent, less disease-prone" and longer-living (Nayar, 2014:par. 225).

In terms of critical theory, posthumanism more often refers to "a new *conceptualization* of the human" (Nayar, 2014:par. 167, emphasis in original), which is more closely aligned to the posthumanist agenda outlined by Badmington (2011:374).⁵⁰ Studies of posthumanism investigate and destabilise "cultural representations, power relations and discourses that have historically situated the human above other life forms, and in control of them" (Nayar, 2014:par. 167).

Critical posthumanism is thus a "radical reworking of humanism" that aims to move "beyond" the traditional humanist ways of conceptualising the human as an "autonomous, self-willed individual agent" — instead viewing the human "as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology" (Nayar, 2014:par. 168). The underlying basis for these aims is the rejection of the human as exceptional, as separate from other life forms, and as dominant over other forms of life or matter.

The idea of posthumanism is not entirely new. In fact, in as far as it is a response to and critique of humanism the idea itself might very well be as old as humanism itself.⁵¹ As Herbrechter (2013:par. 89) points out, the current context of posthumanism might be "new and singular", but as a critical and philosophical notion, it "relies on questions and problems that have a long history and are therefore closely connected to other past and present

⁴⁹ See Botha (2013) in this regard for a discussion of the posthuman subject in a digital world, as portrayed in recent Afrikaans poetry; and Viljoen (2005) for a discussion of technology and cyborg identity with reference to poems of Nijhoff, Van Wyk Louw, and Evelyn Castelyn.

⁵⁰ See Seaman (2007) for a more in-depth discussion about the differences between popular posthumanism, or transhumanism, and critical or theoretical posthumanism.

⁵¹ See Badmington (2011) for a discussion of "antihumanism" and the similarities it shares with posthumanism.

contexts". As a critical concept, then, posthumanism is always already embedded in a network of ideas that spans all of human history, as well as the future of humanity. As the designator "post" already suggests, posthumanism is closely related to, inseparable from, and contained within humanism. Indeed, posthumanism is "merely the latest symptom of a cultural malaise that inhabits humanism itself — humanism in the sense of an ideology and a specific discourse" (Herbrechter, 2013:par. 127-139).

The relation between humanism and posthumanism can thus be said to mirror the relation between postmodernism and metamodernism (or, indeed, modernism and postmodernism) — that of a remnant spectre haunting the current discourse, uneasy and unable to be put to rest finally:

The "post-" of posthumanism does not (and, moreover, cannot) mark or make an absolute break from the legacy of humanism. "Post"-s speak (to) ghosts, and cultural criticism must not forget that it cannot simply forget the past. The writing of the posthumanist condition should not seek to fashion "scriptural tombs" for humanism, but must, rather, take the form of a critical practice that occurs *inside* humanism, consisting not of the wake but the working-through of humanist discourse. Humanism has happened and continues to happen to "us" (it is the very "Thing" that makes "us" "us", in fact), and the experience — however traumatic, however unpleasant — cannot be erased without trace in an instant. (Badmington, 2003:21-22)

Posthumanism, then, is not as much a rejection of humanism, but a radical rethinking of its terms. As O'Rourke (2008:xviii) argues: posthumanism questions not whether critical theory and thought "can go on" without the human, but without "the mythic understanding of the human as foundational, natural, of the bio-anthropological as the degree zero of the human".

Since the turn of the millennium, posthumanism has been established as "an autonomous field of study with its own theoretical approach (especially within the so-called 'theoretical humanities')", as is indicated by works of posthumanist theorists N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, Neil Badmington and Elain L. Graham from the late 1990s to the 2000s (Herbrechter, 2013:par. 76). To a certain extent, the rise of posthumanism as a critical field is due to the fact that it developed in response to the rapid technological advances of the past decades. While the role of technology is most obvious in the popular concept of posthumanism (or transhumanism), it also has implications for theoretical posthumanism. The boundaries between human, machine and animal are blurred by "[t]echnologies of cloning, stem-cell engineering, cryogenics, Artificial Intelligence and xenotransplantation" (Nayar, 2014:par.

143), while the separation between the categories of the natural and the cultural has been undermined if not eradicated by the technological advances and scientific discoveries of the past century (Braidotti, 2013:par. 95; Kirby, 2008:37).

The problematisation of what it means to be human is also a consequence of the changing global context:

the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns. After the postmodern, the post-colonial, the post-industrial, the post-communist and even the much contested post-feminist conditions, we seem to have entered the post-human predicament. Far from being the n^{th} variation in a sequence of prefixes that may appear both endless and somehow arbitrary, the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our policy and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises questions as to the very structures of our shared identity — as humans — amidst the complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations. (Braidotti, 2013:par. 70-82)

For Braidotti (2013:par. 95), posthumanism is an attempt to engage with the way in which the social and cultural landscape has changed. In this regard, a shift is taking place within contemporary theory, away from the opposing forces of nature and culture and towards an emphasis on the "self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter" (Braidotti, 2013:par. 105).

Similar to the way that a major part of the impetus behind AFFECT THEORY and CHAOS THEORY is the need for theories that can engage with the changes in the contemporary globalised world and can provide an ethical response to the problems and challenges of the 21st century world [ETHICAL CONCERNS], posthumanism is also very much a product of its time. In the same way that metamodernism considers postmodern strategies to be obsolete, posthumanism is founded on

the conviction that a traditional humanist view and understanding of the human have become untenable if not irrelevant, either because of external, mostly technological, economic and ecological influences, or because of internal metaphysical and ethical reasons. (Herbrechter, 2013:par. 259)

Just as AFFECT THEORY and CHAOS THEORY are hailed for their interdisciplinary origins and/or application, Herbrechter (2013:par. 89) claims that the "truly innovative potential" of critical

posthumanism is found in its contemporary relations with other current theoretical developments. For Wolfe (2009:565), posthumanism is a result of a "daunting interdisciplinarity that is inseparable from its very genesis" — something which he argues is not unique to posthumanism, but rather a manifestation of the fact that, for many currently emerging theoretical fields, specialisation is no longer justifiable. The changing global world necessitates a level of cooperation between different fields of study.

Citing the "new and extensive possibilities" of cooperation between the biosciences on the one hand and the humanities and social sciences on the other, Herbrechter (2013:par. 89) reckons that

the current developments and thus also the discussion about posthumanism are taking place within the context of radical changes affecting the material economic base. This change constitutes a radical transformation within increasingly globalized late capitalism from an "analog" (humanist, literate, book or text-based) to a "digital" (posthumanist, code, data or information-based) social, cultural and economic system.

Apart from being a way to describe a new empirical phenomenon (the connections and interrelations that make up the globalised world), posthumanist theories also have a deliberate aspect, in that they serve as a response to a felt need for greater ethical responsibility. Braidotti (2013:par. 244) argues for the need

to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing. That means that we need to learn to think differently about ourselves.

Most discussions of posthumanism take the ethical aspect of posthumanism for granted. In an article arguing for "emotive ethics" [AFFECT THEORY], Bump (2014:57) opens his discussion with the following question: "In view of recent research can we continue to argue for a superiority over other animals that justifies dominating and exploiting them?" This question, for Bump (2014:57), demands a radical reconsideration of the terms of the ethical inquiry regarding global and environmental changes.⁵² For Nayar (2014:par. 268-283), a

⁵² With regard to metamodernist notions of collectivity and relationality, it is important to note the distinction that Landry (in Cole *et al.*, 2011:89) makes between animal rights activism and posthumanism. Landry points out that most notions of animal rights are still "based on liberal notions of the individual subject". According to conventional animal rights' studies, it is the suffering and the "right-to-life or death" of the *individual* animal that forms the basis for ethical action.

posthumanist critique of the "centrality of reason and rationality... offers a more inclusive and therefore ethical understanding of life" — an understanding which calls for a more inclusive definition of life, as well as a greater moral-ethical response and responsibility to non-human life forms (Nayar, 2014:par. 268-283).

In terms of its ethical agenda, Wolfe (2009:568) links posthumanism to the developments in gender, race and sexuality studies during the second half of the 20th century. He states that, currently

we are forced to make the same kind of shift in the ethics of reading and interpretation that attended taking sexual difference seriously in the 1990s (in the form of queer theory) or race and gender seriously in the 1970s and 1980s. In such a genealogy, animal studies is only the latest permutation of a socially and ethically responsive cultural studies working to stay abreast of new social movements... which is itself an academic expression of a larger democratic impulse toward greater inclusiveness of every gender, or race, or sexual orientation, or — now — species.

By linking posthumanism to postmodern investigations of sexuality, race and gender, Wolfe (2009:567) argues that the deconstruction of humanism and anthropocentrism includes not only a focus on the "non-human" other (animals, plants, other organisms) but also the "human other" — categories of gender, race, sexuality and ability that have, for a long time in Western history, been treated as "lesser human" or "animalistic".

[V]iolence against human others (and particularly racially marked others) has often operated by means of a double movement that animalizes them for the purposes of domination, oppression, or even genocide — a maneuver that is effective because we take for granted the prior assumption that violence against the animal is ethically permissible.

As part of acknowledging the human others — "those ghosts, all those human others that have been repressed during the process of humanization: animals, gods, demons, monsters

In contrast, posthumanism — which Landry links to ecocriticism — is focused on "the welfare of the species as a whole" as well as the "welfare of the entire habitat" or ecosystem: in other words, the species in relation to all other species. From a posthumanist point of view, "[s]pecies-being, and flourishing" is the criterion on which ethical responsibility is based (Cole *et al.*, 2011:89). This is where animal rights and posthumanism have the potential to be at odds. From a posthumanist ecocritical standpoint, something like recreational hunting, for example, might be endorsed in the service of maintaining not the *individual* animals of the species, but to ensure the welfare and flourishing of the *whole* of the species, as well as the other species with which they share their habitat and ecosystem (Cole *et al.*, 2011:89).

of all kinds" (Herbrechter, 2013:par. 259) — posthumanism calls for a "more inclusive definition of the human and life" (Nayar, 2014:par. 172). This forms part of a shift away from what was traditionally considered "normal" in terms of "ability and agency" towards "emphasizing shared vulnerability" (Nayar, 2014:par. 172).

Wolfe (2009:570) also locates a posthumanist understanding of the connection between the human and the non-human other in a shared capacity for suffering, a shared finitude — the basis of relationality [FINTITUDE]. Wolfe (2009:570) refers to Derrida's essay "The animal that therefore I am (more to follow)" (2008), in which Derrida engages with a question by Jeremy Bentham regarding animals: "the question is not, can they talk? or can they reason? but can they suffer?" The vulnerability shared by humans and non-humans alike concern humans very directly, for

mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion. (Derrida, in Wolfe, 2009:570)

In this way, the autonomy and authority of humanist subjectivity are fundamentally questioned and undermined "by riveting our attention on the embodied finitude that we share with nonhuman animals, a finitude that it has been the business of humanism largely to disavow" (Wolfe, 2009:570).

Based on this shared vulnerability or finitude, posthumanism maintains firstly that the category "human" is not an autonomous, essential absolute, but rather contingent on the exclusion of the non-human other — which is therefore always already included in the notion of what defines a human.

To illustrate how the category "human" is dependent on the category "non-human", Nayar (2014:par. 127) refers to the way in which cultural representations — in art, entertainment and the media — have constructed "the 'normal' human with specific biological features and abilities, sex, form and functions", defining a "particular physiology, anatomy, intellectual ability and consciousness" as "the marker of normalcy". Posthumanism investigates these representations to draw attention to "the constructed nature of the human 'person'" (2014:par. 135). By emphasizing the "blurring of bodily borders, identities (gender, species, race) and even consciousness", critical posthumanism

is the radical decentring of the traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human in order to demonstrate how the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and

constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines. Literary texts that have since the Renaissance always shown us how humans behave, react and interact — indeed it has been said that literature 'invented' the human — have now begun to show that the human is what it is because it includes the non-human. (Nayar, 2014:par. 138) [original emphasis]

In order to decentre the human as autonomous and establish its contingency on the category of the non-human, many posthumanist theorists draw on poststructuralism and deconstruction (cf. Herbrechter, 2013:par. 127) to engage with matters regarding the coherence and agency of the subject. Seaman (2007:246-247) argues that, according to posthumanism, "there has never been one unified, cohesive 'human'" — instead, "human" was only "a title that was granted by and to those with the material and cultural luxury to bestow upon themselves the faculties of 'reason', autonomous agency, and the privileges of 'being human'".

In this regard, Smart (2011:332) refers to the poststructuralist theories of Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, Latour, Deleuze and Guattari, as they have been interpreted by posthumanist theorists to undermine "the coherence of the individual", allowing subjects to be viewed as "intersections of relations, contexts or actor-networks". In contrast to other postmodernist practices that "acknowledge polyvocality" and assume "the separateness of the speakers of the voices", Smart (2011:332) emphasises the value of the post-structuralist notion⁵³ that

we perform our parts through chains of relations about which we have only dim awareness.
Or perhaps more precisely, we are enacting performances only contingently animating this particular body and situation.

Because the posthumanist subject is constituted through the "intersection of relations", the body is released from "the constraints placed on it not only by nature but also by humanist ideology" (Seaman, 2007:248). This allows it to "roam free and 'join' with other beings, animate and inanimate" — thereby rendering it not as a stable, coherent, autonomous individual, but instead as "*many subjects*" (Seaman, 2007:248). Echoing this notion of the

⁵³ It is important to note that, despite the influence of poststructuralism as claimed by Smart (2011:332), there is an implicit focus on the body in both Smart and Seaman's formulations of posthumanism. For Smart (2011:332), the performances that constitute the subject are still ultimately *bodily* performances, and are affected by other bodies in relation to the subject. Seaman (2007:248) also emphasises the body's role by claiming that posthumanism transforms the humanist subject by "releasing the body" from its humanist restraints, and goes on to discuss posthumanism's "challenges to the human" as "largely corporeal".

human subject being freed from humanism's "constraints" Landry (in Cole *et al.*, 2011:88) claims that posthumanism goes "beyond liberal humanism in the direction of a greater emancipation of subjects that has ever been achieved under the banner of liberalism".

Once the human subject has been liberated, a more relational understanding of life is possible. As Wolfe (in Cole *et al.*, 2011:99-100) argues: "it is not just nonhuman animals but rather *life itself*, globally, that becomes the direct object of political power in its modern form", because an "affirmative... biopolitics requires the rearticulation of the ethical and political relation beyond the boundaries of what we used to call 'the subject'" — in other words, a move away from "subject-centered" ethics" and towards a "'biocentric' perspective". This "biocentric" perspective points to the relational understanding of all lives and all systems that Smart (2011:332) identifies as the result of a poststructuralist understanding of the subject.

With regard to the relational rethinking of subjectivity through posthumanism, Nash (Cole *et al.*, 2011:92-93) refers to Karen Barad's idea of "agential realism", which reconceptualises traditional humanist subject-object dualisms, in order to focus instead on "'intra-actions' between assemblages of subjects, objects, and measuring apparatuses" or "collaborative affiliations" between everything in existence [SUBJECT-OBJECT CATEGORIES]. This indicates a "re-thinking of the ontology of the world" that moves human thinking beyond the "paradigm of dominion" into a more relational understanding of the interactions (or "intra-actions") between humans and all the other species that inhabit the world alongside them — leading to a "governing logic of interdependence" (Nash, in Cole *et al.*, 2011:93).

The idea that everything in the world is interdependent, or "mutually dependent and co-evolving" (Nayar, 2014:par. 268), is simultaneously the basis for posthumanist critique as well as the logical consequence of decentring the human subject. By posing a "non-unitary subject" in the place of humanism's sovereign and autonomous subject (Nayar, 2014:par. 268), a certain mutual influence between a human subject and his or her surroundings is acknowledged. Drawing on ideas that correspond with AFFECT THEORY by emphasising the body as enabling a relational understanding of reality, and incorporating notions of CHAOS THEORY by acknowledging the embeddedness of the observer and the act of observation, Nayar (2014:par. 283) describes the role of embodiment in posthumanist theories:

Critical posthumanism sees embodiment as essential to the construction of the environment (the world is what we perceive it through our senses) in which any organic system (the human body is such a system) exists. But this embodiment is *embedded* embodiment, in which the human body is located in an environment that consists of plants, animals and

machines. Critical posthumanism, adapting work from cognitive sciences, biology and philosophy, sees the complexity of the human system, with its "unique" consciousness or cognitive/perceptual processes, as emerging from this embeddedness, where human complexity, with all its internal organizations and operations, is a *consequence of its openness to the environment...* Systems, including human ones, are in a state of emergence rather than in a state of being when the system is constantly traversed by information flows from the environment... [C]ritical posthumanism recontextualizes the human system as having "become-with" other life forms.

The notion of "openness to the environment" [EPISTEMOLOGY; OPENNESS] is emphasised in Michael O'Rourke's preface to *Queering the non/human* (2008). O'Rourke (2008:xvii) writes that the volume — which he characterises as a "polylogue" — is

marked simultaneously by an exuberant sense of wonder, of fullness, and by a sense that the conversation is only ever, and can only ever be, provisional, marked by temporariness, interminability, unfinishedness. In a word: open... infinitely open to and responsible for others, to other spaces, other times, other worlds, to the other (than human), to new forms of being-in-the-world.

O'Rourke (2008:xvii-xviii) refers to Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's ideas in *Forms of being* (2004), namely that the "distance between subject and world is narrowed by our receptivity to, our opening-up to, if you will, the world". Following Bersani and Dutoit, O'Rourke (2008:xvii) argues that, to be "shattered by (our being in) the world" recreates the world and our understanding of it, in order to make space for "new relations, affective ones, between the subject and the world, and among the world's objects" (cf. Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:176-177).

Once we "open ourselves to the sense of the world" and are "vulnerably exposed to the future", we cease to be stable, autonomous and unchangeable, settled subjects. Instead, the human subjects in this scenario become "singular plural" — the "*many subjects*" of Seaman (2007:248) — "singular beings in a relational regime independent of identitarianism or anthropomorphism" (O'Rourke, 2008:xviii).

Being "open to the world", a consequence of as well as condition for a relational understanding of everything in existence, leads to a moral and ethical imperative to *respond* — rather than interpret or force a human framework of understanding unto the world (cf. the rejection of an epistemological framework as formulated in CHAOS THEORY]. Haraway (2008:par. 216) claims that a posthumanist perspective causes the "Great Divides" between

nature and society, non-human and human to "flatten into mundane differences — the kinds that have consequences and demand respect and response — rather than rising to sublime and final ends" (Haraway, 2008:par. 305).

The notion of acknowledging alterity even within similarity [ALTERITY; SIMILITUDE] is a crucial part of Haraway's argument against an over-interpretation of similarities that "issue in the collapse of all of man's others into one another" (2008:par. 366). Acknowledging alterity, on the other hand, opens up a space for response, the act of "witnessing" that Bersani and Dutoit (2004:16) identify as a mode of receptively registering the world without imposing individuality or interpretation on it [EPISTEMOLOGY; REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION].

Pointing out that the etymological root for "species" connect to "respecere" — the act of respect as well as the act of "looking back" — Haraway (2008:par. 379) states:

To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet. To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where *who and what are* is precisely what is at stake... Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect.

Openness to and respect for others, however, are impossible without decentring the human subject and undoing the power relation of knowledge formation constituted by the knowing subject. As Wolfe (2009:568-569) puts it, if posthumanism is to be "something other than a mere thematics", it should "fundamentally" challenge "the schema of the knowing subject and its anthropocentric underpinnings sustained and reproduced in the current disciplinary protocols of cultural studies". As a result, the radical potential of a posthumanist approach to theory

resides in its power to remind us that it is not enough to re-read and reinterpret — from a safe ontological distance, as it were — the relation of metaphor and species difference, the cross-pollination of speciest, sexist, and racist discursive structures in literature, and so on. That undertaking is no doubt praiseworthy and long overdue, but as long as it leaves unquestioned the humanist schema of the knowing subject who undertakes such a reading, then it sustains the very humanism and anthropocentrism that animal studies sets out to question. (Wolfe, 2009:569)

A posthumanist, relational understanding of the human as embedded in and constituted through a relational network of correspondences not only undermines the traditional relation of knowing human subject vs. known non-human object (cf. CHAOS THEORY), but replaces it with a more affective model. While Enlightenment humanism claim that reason and a capacity for rationality set humans apart from non-human nature, the contemporary human (as formulated by posthumanist views) is defined by the "capacity for emotion" (Seaman, 2007:262).

In contrast to a traditional epistemological model, which is founded on the notion that reason not only distinguishes humans from nature but also lends them "superiority" (thereby justifying the domination and exploitation of nature by humans), Bump (2014:57) calls for a posthumanist "emotive" ethics that should "include the feelings *biophilia*⁵⁴ and *biophobia* as well as *compassion*, *sympathy*, and *empathy*" (italics in original). This emphasis on emotion is part of a bigger turn towards affect in the majority of contemporary disciplines, especially philosophy, sociology, psychology, history and anthropology [AFFECT THEORY] — which is partly a consequence of "new research in biology on mirror neurons and cognitive ethology proves that our actions, our perceptions of others, and our emotions are intimately linked with those of other animals" (Bump, 2014:60).

Buys (2014) by Willem Anker

The role of landscape in Afrikaans literature as a theme of study is quite prevalent in Afrikaans literary criticism, and Visagie (2016b) indicates that Afrikaans literature has a long tradition of engaging not only with the natural environment, but also with animal themes and motifs. The traditional "plaasroman", or farm narrative — of which the earliest and perhaps best-known examples are C.M. van den Heever's *Somer* (1935) and *Laat vrugte* (1939) — established the landscape as a central aspect of Afrikaner culture and identity.⁵⁵ Van Coller (2003:51) refers to J.M. Coetzee's characterisation of the plaasroman (1988) to indicate that, more than just a space in which characters incidentally found themselves, the farm in the plaasroman serves as a mythical space. The connection between farmer and cosmos is not

⁵⁴ "Biophilia" is described by Bump (2014:58) as "an emotion, the feeling that we are deeply, instinctively connected to all living beings" and is the "ideal for environmental and animal ethics, if not all ethics".

⁵⁵ For further discussion of the role of landscape in Afrikaans literature in general and the Afrikaans plaasroman in particular, see Van Coller (1995), Ampie Coetzee (2000) and Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004).

merely one of romantic identification, but veers towards construing the farm as the source of meaning. Through the farm, the Afrikaner is shown to be connected to the earth and to his history — allowing him to confirm his claim to the land (Van Coller, 2003:51).

Although critical posthumanism itself does not seem to have gained much popularity in Afrikaans literary criticism yet, some of the studies on the relationship between human and nature or human and animal put forth views that are compatible with the basic tenets of posthumanism.

For example, Meyer (2010) discusses the relationship between human and nature in Petra Müller's collection of narrative works, *Desembers* (2007), showing that these narratives "reflect upon a human being's place in the wide community of earth's beings and forces, and elucidate the multiple levels of communication between man and other living creatures" (2010:41). Continuing her study of Müller's work, Meyer (2014) aims to outline the "nature-centred disposition of Müller's narrative art", with reference to the theme of "human-earth connection". The idea of a "human-nature 'conversation'" (Meyer, 2012) is also central in her analysis of Alexander Strachan's *Dwaalpoort* (2010). Meyer refers to aspects of "ecological discourse" in *Dwaalpoort*, which she defines as an effort "to achieve a deeper form of respect and communion with other species in the greater context of the cosmos" (2012:291). The result is a "more encompassing form of contact with and understanding of animals", as well as "a more profound reflection about the place of and the link between man and animal within the great biotic sphere" (2012:291).

Drawing on notions of ecocriticism and ecopoetry, Smith (2012) discusses Martjie Bosman's collection of poetry *Toevallige tekens* (2010). In her study of selected poems of Johann Lodewyk Marais's collection *In die bloute* (2012), Smith (2014) makes use of theories of new materialism and object-oriented ontology, two interrelated theoretical bodies of work that Kerr (2016) describes as part of a contemporary "posthumanist egalitarianism".

New materialism is the common name given to a "series of movements in several fields" that set out to criticise anthropocentrism, reframe notions of subjectivity by foregrounding the role of "inhuman forces" within the human, and emphasise "the self-organizing powers of several nonhuman processes", particularly within the context of the need for a global ethical framework (Connolly, 2013:399). Object-oriented ontology, too, embodies a form of anti-anthropocentrism by rejecting the idea that "things are real only insofar as they are sensible to a human subject", and that any material thing — whether it be animal, mineral or man-made object — "experience their existence in a way that lies outside our species-centric

definition of consciousness" (Kerr, 2016). Object-oriented ontology thus focuses its attention on exploring "the reality, agency, and 'private lives' of nonhuman (and nonliving) entities" (Kerr, 2016).

In her discussion of Marais's poetry, Smith (2014:750) foregrounds the "interaction between human and nonhuman" and the appearance of "human qualities in the non-human and vice versa" — strategies which emphasise the lack of a division between human and other, subject and object, inside and outside. Continuing her investigation into new materialism and object-oriented ontology, Smith (2015) analyses Antjie Krog's *Verweerskrif* (2006) to frame ways in which dualisms such as alive/non-alive, human/non-human, subject/object and active/passive are rethought, which in turn leads to a re-evaluation of nature and matter and our relationship with it.

According to her, Krog

takes a posthumanist stance, a stance which is put into motion by an encompassing concept of the *outside-of* or the *more-than-human world* which transcends our regular categories of knowledge and which also questions the previously centralised position of man (and men). (Smith, 2015:2)

Another example of an investigation into the interaction between human and non-human is Nel and Ströh's discussion (2016) of the interconnected, interrelational relationship between body and landscape, human and non-human in the poetry of Johann de Lange. With specific reference to the animal, Crous (2015) examines Elisabeth Eybers' poem "Huiskat" within the context of animal studies.

Willem Anker's *Buy's* (2014) relates to the established tradition of engaging with the landscape and the animal in Afrikaans literature. Reviewers noted the centrality accorded to the landscape in *Buy's*. As Van Schalkwyk (2014) puts it, the mythical numinosity of nature plays an important role in *Buy's*, as animal and landscape seem to become one. Similarly, Snyman (2014) notes in his review of the novel that the landscape of the Eastern Cape comes alive in the novel, its mysterious and intimidating beauty becoming part of *Buy's* and his story.

The interconnectedness of *Buy's*/Alom-Buys and his natural environment is already apparent from the opening pages of the novel. The "koggelman" (blue headed agama lizard) of the first paragraph (2014:9) is posed as an analogy for *Buy's* himself by foregrounding its readiness to mate and indicating the casual violence of its place in the natural order (as

predator to the flying ant it is eating and as prey to the falcon that soon catches it (2014:12)). This analogy sets the tone for the rest of the narrative, where the intractability of the laws of nature and their persistence — despite attempts of civilisation, culture, and religion — are consistently brought to the fore. As Buys explains to Kemp — the missionary with his dreams of raising the dark savagery of the African plains into civilisation — "Hier is bloot vleis en bloed en kut" (Here are only meat and blood and cunt) (2014:213) and "daar is geen lewe sonder bloedvergieting nie... Hier vreet ons mekaar... Dit is een groot jagveld" (there is no life without bloodshed... Here we devour each other... It is one big hunting ground⁵⁶) (2014:219).

Nature as a metaphor for the human is a familiar concept, and was especially prominent during the Romantic era. Using nature as vehicle for human characteristics, however, implies an unequal power relation, a hierarchy that places humankind — as interpreter, as knowing subject and meaning maker — in a superior position to nature. In this power relation, nature is viewed as merely an empty signifier waiting to be filled with human meaning, something which therefore exists only in relation to human reason.

The following passage in *Buys* undermines this notion and establishes a posthumanist relational mode of being that provides a framework in which the novel as a whole can be read.

Aanskou die letsels van my beweging, die merke van my vel op die moederaarde. Opgelet: My huid is hierdie stof en sand. Hoor my in elke voet en hoof wat val. Sien my weerkaats in iedere oog wat 'n vuur betrag; ek is beide spoor en spiegel. Ek is van hierdie land, getoë in klip. (Anker, 2014:10)

[Regard the scars of my movement, the marks of my skin on the mother earth. Noticed: My skin is this dust and sand. Hear me in the fall of every foot and hoof. See me reflect in every eye watching a fire; I am both track and mirror. I am of this land, bred in stone. (Anker, 2014:10)]

At first glance this passage might seem to conform to the humanist tradition of placing the human (the omniscient, omnipresent, transcendental Alom-Buys) at the centre of the universe, presenting him as the origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history (cf. Badmington, 2011:374). However, even though it is acknowledged that the human has the

⁵⁶ All translations are my own.

power to leave his mark on the earth — "the scars of my movement, the marks of my skin on the mother earth" — the images of scars and skin evoke notions of corporeality and surfaceness. The human here is not characterised by reason and rationality that he imposes in order to understand, order and own the landscape. The human in this context, though timeless and omnipresent, is marked by corporeality: a body that is affected as it affects, that is wounded by the same process through which it scars the landscape.

This reciprocity is confirmed with the simple analogy "My hide is this dust and sand". Silverman, in her work on relationality *Flesh of my flesh* (2009), regards an analogy as a function that can connect even categorically disparate things. It is non-hierarchical and reciprocal, a structure in which "every phenomenal form rhymes with many others" and thus carries the same ontological weight (2009:1-3). Alom-Buys is not an imposing presence that bends the landscape according to his will — a humanist interpretation — but is present only in the echoes of every foot and hoof on the earth, in the reflection in eyes regarding a fire. He is a (posthumanist) assemblage, indistinguishable from and enmeshed with the environment (cf. Nayar, 2014:par. 168).

If a track or trace is read as a physical remainder that serves as evidence of a corporeal presence, it underlines the fact that the presence itself is no longer there. The presence that made the track is not realised, fixed in time and space, rendered immobile — but is instead already dispersed, leaving behind only traces of itself which, like tracks in the sand, will eventually disappear [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. While the track is an indication of the subject's ability to imprint itself on the landscape, likening the subject to a mirror implies the opposite: the subject is now "imprinted" by the image of the landscape, it has no uniqueness of its own and can never be accomplished within fixed boundaries, but rather is always and constantly open to the other.

Alom-Buys, despite the legendary and larger-than-life status of Coenraad de Buys, is not the human subject as understood by humanism: the centre of the universe, the origin of meaning and sovereign subject of history, exceptional, autonomous and set above the world. Instead, as subject, he reflects the world and is simultaneously reflected in the eyes of the other. This act of reflecting and being reflected precludes the ability to submit the other to the subject's own interpretation, and does not allow for the world to be reduced to an object which is constructed by the human subject's gaze [EPISTEMOLOGY]. As posthuman subject, Alom-Buys is always already embedded in a network of relations with all living beings.

Even before his transformation into Alom-Buys, Buys is shown to be one with the landscape. For him, the only reason why humans consider themselves to be unique and exceptional to the rest of creation is their ignorance and lack of understanding:

Mense dink hulle is anders as plante, want hulle kyk nie lank genoeg nie. Die lewe is 'n reeks uitbarstings. Soos hierdie blomme wat die varke vreet, kom en gaan ek ook, lê en wag ek ook, bars ek ook uit. (2014:171)

[Humans think they are different from plants, because they do not look for long enough. Life is a series of eruptions. Like these flowers that the pigs eat, I come and go too, I lie and wait too, I erupt as well. (2014:171)]

Buys quite literally "becomes one" with the soil, as he recounts a habit from his youth, when he used to perform a carnal act with the clay of a riverbed:

Soggens voor dagbreek stap ek soms stroom toe en boor 'n gat in die riverklei en trek my klere uit en druk my pik in die gat en strek my plat uit teen die grond met arms en bene gesprei en wanneer ek klaarkom, druk ek my gesig in die grond. (2014:28)

[In the morning before daybreak I sometimes walk to the stream and bore a hole in the river clay and take off my clothes and push my cock into the hole and stretch myself out flat against the ground with arms and legs spread and when I finish, I press my face in the soil. (2014:28)]

While this scene too can be read in Romantic (or (post)colonial) terms where this act would indicate the ultimate manifestation of man's subjugation of nature, the effect here implies a different kind of power relation. Buys's description of his action carries a nuance almost of submission on his part, and the mutual affect of the act is foregrounded when he afterwards contracts a strange rash and fever (2014:28). He spends the night praying for forgiveness and healing, but is only released from the fever and diarrhoea once he returns to the river and couples fervently with his "bride" until he saw visions and fell asleep on the riverbed's "clay body" (2014:28). Rather than conquering nature, he is shown to be in nature's power.

The foregrounding of the animal in the novel further decentres the human subject. Van Schalkwyk (2014) shows that *Buys* is related to a long tradition of the animal or animalistic as theme in South African literature: from the works of N.P. van Wyk Louw, D.J. Opperman, Etienne Leroux, J.M. Coetzee's *The lives of animals* (1999a) and dogs in *Disgrace* (1999b), Marlene van Niekerk's *Die sneeuvelaper* (2009) and *Wolf, wolf* (2013) by Eben Venter, as

well as the novels of Alexander Strachan, in particular *Dwaalpoort* (2010); and of course, Peter Blum's poem "Drosterhonde bo Oranje" (1955), which provides the epigraph of the novel.

Buy's himself is frequently likened to an animal and described in terms of animal characteristics, like having a snout (2014:25;135;425), paws (2014:380;425) and animal skin (2014:409). The various dwellings in which Buy's lives throughout his life is frequently said to resemble the holes of animals (2014:14); a burrow or fox hole (2014:27); a nest (2014:44, 2014:86-87); a cocoon (2014:100); or the shell of a hermit crab (2014:236).

In fact, Buy's has never learned the skill of building or constructing a proper house. If one of the characteristics of humans and the hallmarks of civilisation is the ability and inclination to erect architectural structures that can withstand time and impose meaning on the landscape, Buy's is closer in nature to an animal.

He builds his first hut on his brother-in-law's farm: "*n Huis is dit nie*" (A house it is not) (2014:26). Not only does he have trouble structuring it properly, but he is constantly breaking down parts of it and burrowing deeper, until the hut resembles a fox hole more than a human dwelling (2014:27). Later, with his second house, he is again said to be "nesting" rather than "building a house" (2014:44). Even when he does find himself living in a well-built construction, it is framed as an organic extension of the landscape rather than an attempt at order and structure imposed on it. Buy's describes one of his homes through the years as placed on top of the soil like a nest, at the mercy of the dark and heavy primal forces of the earth (2014:86). At night, Buy's dreams of

donker waters onder die huis, staande swart water sonder rimpelings, die gladde oppervlak wat nie deurbreek word nie, die onbepaalde dieptes sonder einde.

Huise op die grensvlake is nie gewortel met kelders of fondasies nie, hierdie hutte van Kristen en Heiden raak skaars aan die stof, dring nie die aarde binne nie. Die hut word neergesit op die grond soos 'n nes in die veld. (2014:86-87)

[dark waters under the house, stagnant black water without wrinkles, the smooth surface that is not pierced, the unfathomable depths without end.

Houses on the border planes are not rooted with cellars or foundations, these huts of Christian and Heathen barely touch the dust, do not penetrate the earth. The hut is placed on the ground like a nest in the field. (2014:86-87)]

When the Buys family moves into a house that has been built by someone else and abandoned, it is seen as an inseparable extension of nature, despite its human-made geometry:

Jy sal dit nie sê as jy die plek so staan en bekyk nie, maar die huis het uit die grond gegroei.
Die sandsteen uit die heuwels en die klei uit die grond. (2014:236)

[You wouldn't say it if you're looking at it like this, but the house grew out of the ground. The sandstone from the hills and the clay from the ground. (2014:236)]

Even the chalk used to whitewash the walls is made of dead animals, a fact that Buys describes with nuances of the violence of nature as well as humans' aptitude for "sacrilege" by using the homes of other animals to construct their own:

Kalksteen is dooie diere. Verbryselde, gedroogde diere; ontwyde skulpe. Skulpe wat vergruis, gemaal, gebrai is deur die ondergrondse geweld; deur die skrikwekkende hitte van die aarde se binnegoed. Dooie, saamgeklonte diere, lees ek, Alom-Buys, nou die aand in 'n Franse verseboek. (2014:236-237)

[Limestone is dead animals. Crushed, dried animals; desecrated shells. Shells that were pulverised, milled, pressed by the underground violence; by the terrifying heat of the earth's bowels. Dead animals caked together, I, Alom-Buys, read the other night in a French book of rhymes. (2014:236-237)]

The anthropocentric categories of human and non-human other are even more explicitly unsettled by the pack of wild dogs that follows Buys everywhere. Buys "acquires" this dog pack when he is twelve years old and hunts down the animals that have killed three of his family's sheep — because as a farmer, he knows that the lives of cattle is also his life (2014:23). He tracks the animals to the abandoned ruins of a Hottentot village that had been ransacked years ago, and a fight ensues between him and the dogs. It comes to a climax when Buys is cornered alone in a hut with the leader of the pack:

Ek kruip vorentoe. Die hond retireer tot hy teen die graswand vasgekeer staan. Ek kyk vir hom, die donker oë waarin ek weerkaats. Vir 'n oomblik is ons doodstil. Dan blaf ek. Ek blaf so hard ek kan, tot my keel rou is. Hoor net die krete en blawwe en alles wat in my is wat ontploff uit my pens en longe, tussen my tandé deur. Èrens in die geraas is die hond op my en ek byt en skeur en blaf tot my stem en tandé en kake ingee. Ek maak my oë oop. Die hond lê teen my, op sy rug, stert opgevou oor sy peester in 'n poel skuimende pis wat in die

grond wegsyg. Aanskou: Coenraad de Buys staan op en spoeg die hond se oor uit. (2014:24-25)

[I creep forward. The dog retreats until he is cornered against the grass wall. I look at him, the dark eyes in which I am reflected. For a moment we are deathly still. Then I bark. I bark as hard I can, until my throat is raw. Hear the cries and barks and everything that is inside me erupt from my stomach and lungs, out through my teeth. Somewhere in the noise the dog is on top of me and I bite and tear and bark until my voice and teeth and jaw give in. I open my eyes. The dog is lying against me, on his back, tail folded over his penis in a pool of foaming piss that seeps away into the ground. Look: Coenraad de Buys stands up and spits out the dog's ear. (2014:24-25)]

It is notable that Buys — having failed to beat the dog pack with his gun (a human tool historically used in the spread of civilisation) — can only emerge victorious when he confronts the dog on its own level, by acting like a dog (barking on all fours). Not only is the notion of humans as absolutely distinguishable from animals hereby rejected, but the humanist belief in the superiority of human over nature is undermined.

The autonomy of human subjectivity is further unsettled, as it becomes clear that Buys has been deeply affected (or infected) by his encounter with the dog. His sister Geertruy claims:

Die kind is sleg gebyt. Hy het iets aangestekk by die gediertes, maar wát, Mientjie, dit sal ek nie kan sê nie. (2014:26)

[The child was bitten badly. He caught something from the creatures, but *what*, Mientjie, that I cannot say. (2014:26)]

Indeed, Buys becomes more animal-like after his fight with the dog: he moves differently, becomes stronger, treads more lightly, sniffs the morning air with his nose raised like a snout, he is more alert and senses things that others do not (2014:25). He also takes the place of the leader of the pack, as they follow him when he leaves his brother-in-law's house for the last time. From that moment, they are always close by (2014:55;58) — they become Buys's shadow (2014:142) and scavenge from his battlefields (2014:330).

In contrast to a humanist framework in which the human — as the dominant species in control of all others (Nayar, 2014:par. 168) — is situated above the non-human other, Buys makes it clear that he cannot be regarded as the master of the pack. When people complain that the dogs have been killing their cattle, Buys's answer subverts the humanist notion of

humankind as the crown of creation by referencing and refuting God's command to Adam in Genesis 1:28, when he is ordered to have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moves on the earth:

Vir wat kom julle na my toe? snou ek hulle toe. Het ek dan seggenskap oor die wolwe van die veld? (2014:367)

[Why are you coming to me? I snarl at them. Do I have dominion over the wolves of the field? (2014:367)]

At the end of the novel, the final boundary between human and animal is crossed and Buys is subsumed into his dog pack in the most literal manner. Old and weak, Buys is no longer human. He is described as "die swak ding", "hierdie sleepoontding" (this weak thing, this paw-dragging thing) (2014:427); "ondier", "onmens" (beast, non-human/inhuman) (2014:428); with animal attributes: "stank", "pote", "klou", "pens", "pels", "bek", "[hy] sluip op al vier pote", "[hy] vreet", "[hy] grou en trek en knaag" (stench, paws, claw, (animal) belly, pelt, snout, he creeps on all four paws, he devours (like an animal), he digs and pulls and gnaws) (2014:427); "[s]y neusvleuels sper", "[hy] grom", "[hy] snuif" (his nostrils flare, he growls, he sniffs) (2014:428).

Buys's merging with the pack of animals takes place symbolically as well as materially: acting like an animal, he becomes one of them, and is sniffed at and greeted by the pack like they have been doing for generations (2014:427). In his final act of "humanity" he uses a gunshot to scare off the dogs from the eland they had killed — although this use of a human tool is immediately and ironically subverted by the way in which he falls upon the eland carcass and tears at it with his teeth and bare hands just like a dog (2014:428). Finally, the pack attacks, kills him and eats his body — making Buys part of them on a corporeal level, thereby undoing the human/non-human boundary not only symbolically, but on a material, ontological level as well.

The meaning of the dog pack is widely discussed by reviewers. Van Schalkwyk (2014) reckons that the dogs can have various associations of meaning and suggest that they function almost like the Cuban in Etienne van Heerden's short story "My kubaan" (1983), except that in Buys's case it is exactly the *lack* of conscience that is foregrounded. Following on Buys's heels, the wild dogs are rendered almost as portents of death (Van Schalkwyk, 2014); and similar to a wild dog, Buys also collects a pack of criminals as "drosters" around

himself (Van Schalkwyk, 2014), foregrounded by the fact that he refers to his group of family and comrades as his pack (Anker, 2014:188).

Snyman (2014) reckons the dogs become a sort of alter ego for Buys, being his true equivalent as one whose nature is to fight, rebel, destroy and kill, finding pleasure in lust and sex. Botha (2015:249-250) argues that the animal motif in *Buys* enables the transgression of boundaries. He refers to Deleuze and Guattari's theory regarding subjectivity and the becoming-animal (a topic that Botha points out Willem Anker researched for his PhD thesis, in relation to Alexander Strachan's novel *Die werfbobbejaan* (1994)).

Botha (2015:249-250) maintains that this theme manifests in Anker's own novel as well, and could provide valuable insight into the dog motif: the becoming-animal does not imply that animal and human are the same thing, but rather refers to the animal becoming a feverish thought in the human. It is not about identification with the animal, but the question is posed whether the nomadic subject could provide its own elements with the affects that would make of it an animal.

Van Schalkwyk (2014) goes further and links the animal theme with the transgression of the boundary between death and life. For him, the novel is framed by the animalistic — as can be seen in the role of animals in its beginning and ending — and is dressed with dimensions of the animal.

The dog motif in *Buys* can be read on a more abstract level as undermining a humanist narrative of civilisation as the thing that separates humans from animals. Since the dogs keep far from civilisation as if they are afraid of being infected (Anker, 2014:250), they can be said to symbolise the primal, animalistic aspect of humanity, as Snyman (2014) argues that the stray dogs that progressively look more like wolves are returning to their primal existence. Civilisation does not affect them, and they become symbol of the brutal, the primal, the part of the human unconscious where civilisation's censorship is not active. In this, they become the alter ego of Buys, the human without varnish (Snyman, 2014).

Rather than a simple juxtaposition of civilisation and nature, *Buys* shows the baselessness of any claims that civilisation is in any way superior to unformed nature. Van Schalkwyk (2014) reads *Buys* in terms of Nietzsche's argument against rational and moral delusions in *On the genealogy of morals* (1887). Nietzsche claims that the belief that humans act on noble and rational motivations is false, and that we (should) act instinctively, like animals, and civilisation is thus not something to be strived for, but something to be rejected, as its

rational and moral claims only weaken the pure strength to be found in the instinctive (Van Schalkwyk, 2014). In connection to this idea, Van Schalkwyk (2014) also refers to a poem of W.H. Auden, "Our hunting fathers", where Auden engages critically with the notion that the human is superior to the animal and can "tame" or repress his animal nature through Reason in order to reach the higher goals of civilisation.

The case of Martha Ferreira, a woman accused of killing seven of her workers and maiming four others (Anker, 2014:302-308), is another example of how *Buys* contests the notion of civilisation. In contrast to the animalistic *Buys* who has always openly scorned any notion of civilisation and has never pretended to be cultured, Martha is the very epitome of the civilised woman:

Die stil geweld van ordentlikheid. Hierdie wit vrou wat haar dra soos 'n dame, opgevoed soos min vroue van haar stand, opgevoed en opgelei en opgeneuk; elke haar vasgesteek en bedek; die persing van die keurslyf tot alles daarbinne stol en versteen. (2014:302)

[The quiet violence of propriety. This white woman that behaves like a lady, educated like few of her caste, educated and trained and messed up; every hair pinned and covered; the pressing of the shackles until everything inside sets and petrifies. (2014:302)]

Yet Martha is shown to have committed cruelties and atrocities that could rival that of *Buys* and his hunting buddies, if she is not in fact worse in her hypocrisy and protestations of innocence. The outward trappings of civilisation do not preclude the brutal and primal drives to inflict suffering and death on others, and humans — just like animals, if not more so — are subject to the same laws of nature, which demands slow and deliberate cruelty, like that of a spider killing its prey (cf. Anker, 2014:32).

Similarly, during a dog fight that *Buys* attends, the anthropocentric categories of civilised human and primal animal are reversed. The human spectators are inhuman in their cruelty:

Die gesigte om die kraal trek vreemd en onmenslik in die skaduwees van die vlamme. (2014:66)

[The faces around the kraal twist in strange and inhuman ways in the shadows of the flames. (2014:66)]

In the atmosphere of violence and death, the lines between human and animal are blurred:

In die kraal is daar geen linies nie; die dodelike kring word 'n heelal waar grond en vel en strooi en tande en hare en bloed versmelt tot nuwe verskriklike wesens wat alles om hulle insuig tot 'n sinkgat. (2014:67)

[Here in the kraal there are no battle lines; the deadly circle becomes a universe where soil and skin and straw and teeth and hair and blood melt together into new terrifying creatures that suck everything around them into a sinkhole. (2014:67)]

The men who are gathered to watch the dogs and baboons fight are likened to dogs in heat:

Die mans huil na die maan soos jagse werfbrakke. (2014:72)

[The men howl at the moon like horny yard dogs. (2014:72)]

One of the men imitates the fighting wolf. Buys describes it as if the man is being controlled by the animal — a reversal of the traditional narrative of the human controlling and dominating the non-human other:

'n Blaaskaak met 'n sak vir 'n hemp skel en sis en boots die geveg na in 'n klugtige gebarespel. Wanneer die wolf spring, gryp hy en 'n makker mekaar vas in dieselfde greep as waarmee die wolf en honde mekaar te lyf gaan. Sy mond gaap oop as die wolf blaaf, sy tande kners as die honde knor, asof hy die pop is en die honde die buiksprekers. (2014:73)

[A fellow with a sack for a shirt yelps and hisses and imitates the fight with farcical gestures. When the wolf jumps, he and a buddy grasp each other with the same grip as the one in which the wolf and dogs are attacking each other. His mouth gapes when the wolf barks, his teeth grind when the dogs growl, as if he is the puppet and the dogs the ventriloquists. (2014:73)]

In contrast, the animals are described in human terms: the human-like hand of a baboon (2014:67); its gaze and cries of pain being unbearably human (2014:68); a dog who has the eyes of a deeply devout person ("n diepgelowige") (2014:72); the way in which a wolf and a dog embrace each other, their open mouths finding each other's like those of hungry lovers (2014:72).

The men are blind with bloodlust — "Hulle skree en blaaf en spoeg en vee die bloed uit hul oë en hoe kan hulle dit nie raaksien nie?" (They scream and bark and spit and wipe the blood from their eyes and how can they not be seeing it?) (2014:74) — but the animals are "pure"

with "something" in their eyes (2014:68). When Buys kills off all of the animals in an act of mercy, he describes the eyes of one of the wolves:

Die vuurlig vind die wolf se oë. Ek sien weer dieselfde ding wat ek by die baviaan gesien het. 'n Suiwer ding, iets wat ek nog net by diere in slagysters so digby gesien het. (2014:73)

[The firelight finds the wolf's eyes. I see again the same thing I saw with the baboon. A pure thing, something I've only ever seen up close like this with animals in traps. (2014:73)]

Here, the traditional notion of humans as the sole origin of meaning is unsettled, as Buys finds more to engage with in the eyes of the animals than in those of the men. In addition, the embodied finitude of animals is shown to be a site for relationality through their shared capacity for suffering. This is echoed later, when Buys refers to wolves in the night that sound like the pleading of women and children and the laughter of men (2014:169); and also when he describes his affection for his horse, Glipper, in terms of mortality: "Hoe sag is diere se lywe, skaars meer as sakke vol bloed, net-net regop gehou deur hol bene" (How soft are animals' bodies, barely more than bags filled with blood, scarcely kept upright with hollow bones) (2014:115).

As a novel which engages with notions of landscape and the animal other, *Buys* serves to unsettle traditional notions of anthropocentrism: the lines between human and landscape and human and animal are constantly blurred, undermining the humanist belief in the uniqueness and superiority of the human species and emphasising the interrelatedness of all material things instead. By showing that humans are always still subject to their primal and instinctive drives, the central place traditionally given to reason and rationality to separate humankind from animals is undermined. In this way, the "Great Divides" between nature and society, non-human and human are flattened into negligible differences (cf. Haraway, 2008:par. 216), and the narrative of civilisation itself is destabilised. The decentring of the human subject, along with the undoing of the power relation between knowing subject and known object — founded in assumptions of rationality and superior reason — renders Buys as posthumanist subject open to a sense of the world, through which he can connect with animals as with humans, connected in a recognition of shared finitude.

relationality, noun. (also relational, adj; relationally, adv.)

In its most basic sense, "relationality" indicates the quality of relating to, or being characterised by, relationships; it is that which relates two or more things or expresses a relationship (OED, 2015). In critical theory, relationality is a characteristic of critical approaches that emphasise "the co-constitution and mutual entanglement of otherwise different (and often far distant) phenomena" (Castree *et al.*, 2015). Relational approaches across the sciences have in common an "antipathy to Cartesianism and its stringent commitment to analysis", and insist that

the world of "things" (people, institutions, trees, animals, etc.) has no meaningful existence outside various more-or-less stable, more-or-less enduring relationships and processes. Relational thinkers thus reject reductionism in explanation, see causation as lacking a single locus, and regard materiality as something dispersed among a great many interconnected phenomena. (Castree *et al.*, 2015)

Phrased differently, relationality refers to the function of any network of relation between entities that acknowledges the similarity and correspondences between as well as ontological kinship of its component parts. Relationality as a mode of being thus operates on a certain understanding of SIMILITUDE and ALTERITY. It implies a recognition of FINITUDE and an embrace of OPENNESS that leads to the loss of individuality, i.e. the DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD. Relationality has an impact on the understanding of ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, and SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES, as well as temporality in the form of HETEROCHRONICITY — all of which figure in a REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION.

As modernism is considered the age of rationality (characterised by a belief in teleological progress, a humanistic focus and a commitment to stylistic experimentation), and postmodernism is seen as the age of irony (marked by an apathetic, nihilistic lack of faith in anything, and an overemphasis on textuality), it is possible that metamodernism will become known as the age of relationality. Metamodernism's emphasis of affective processes and interconnected (inter)subjectivity as a response to an ethical demand, along with its renewed focus on ontology, materiality and corporeality and its rejection of textual and epistemological analyses, create the feeling of an era that is much more relationally oriented than anything that has come before.

Elias (2012:738-739) locates the centre of metamodernism in intersubjective communication — as an aesthetic as well as an ethical imperative — when she indicates how the arts are responding to twenty-first century reality:

Whether or not postmodernism is still with us, certainly the twenty-first century began with an insistent return of history precisely in the context of geographical spatiality, ironically in the deeply politicized contexts of a global war on terror, a backdraft global financial crisis, new concerns about global climate change, and national democratic movements aided and abetted by global technologies. In some surprising ways, the arts were prepared, armed with newly reworked techniques and aesthetic language that focused not on a utopian vision of the socioeconomic future but on a redefined ethical relation between people in the spaces of the present. Stemming from different fields and working from a post-1950s countercultural move toward the "everyday", arts discourses have produced critical keywords that share an imperative of connection: interactivity; relationality; activated spectatorship; intersubjective relationship; remix; participation; collaboration; connectivity; conversation; poetics of relation; translation; cosmopolitanism.

The prevalence of these "keywords" and the importance attached to them lead Elias (2012:739) to identify intersubjective communication as an aesthetic that had its beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, but has since "deepened":

If how to see and hear the Other was at the heart of the postmodern debates of the mid-twentieth century, often figured in tropes of difference and in the mode of irony, a strong query in the twenty-first-century arts is how to speak with the Other and how to set discourses in dialogue, often on a global scale.

The distinction that Elias makes between the project of postmodernism — how to see and *hear* the Other — and metamodernism — how to *speak with* the Other — has an important implication. In a postmodernist aesthetic, communication with the Other is conceived as unilateral. In this framework, a subject-object binary is created in which the Other is considered the object of knowledge, to be heard and seen and, by extension, known by the artist/theorist as knowing subject. In contrast, the metamodernist ethical imperative to "speak to" the Other is interactive, intersubjective, interrelational: the artist/theorist is tasked with the responsibility to *respond* to the Other, to enter with the Other into dialogue — a back-and-forth, give-and-take relationship of reciprocity and exchange which leaves neither party unaffected or unchanged.

Scholars who are often cited regarding theories of relationality are Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Kaja Silverman, and Bracha Ettinger. Judith Butler's more recent work, specifically *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence* (2004a) and *Undoing gender* (2004b), touches on certain aspects of relationality, as is for example discussed by McIvor (2012), Culbertson (2013), and Hekman (2014). Her theories are discussed by Stuit and Jansen (2011) in relation to Antjie Krog's poem cycle "land van genade en verdriet" (*Kleur kom nooit alleen nie*, 2000), and Lochner (2014) in connection with Aravind Adiga's *White tiger* (2008).

Internationally, Leo Bersani's work on relationality in terms of psychoanalysis and aesthetic experiences has gained a following, as can be seen in an interview of him by Tim Dean, Hal Foster and Kaja Silverman published in *October* (Dean et al., 1997), and in the 2008 Modern Language Association panel on Bersani's career in writing that resulted in a collection of essays about his work published in *PMLA* volume 125, number 2, in 2010. With regard to relationality, Bersani's book with Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of being: cinema, aesthetics, subjectivity* (2004) is most often cited, being regarded as a refinement of ideas put forth in their earlier *Caravaggio's secrets* (1998) (although Dean (2010:387) argues convincingly that Bersani's *Homos* (1995) can stand as the "transitional work" which marks Bersani's "passage" towards his more recent focus on "new relational modes").

Silverman's work on relationality is closely related to that of Bersani's, a fact which she points out herself in *Flesh of my flesh* (2009:245, note 7) as well as in her essay for *PMLA* on his theories (Silverman, 2010). *Flesh of my flesh* in particular resembles Bersani and Dutoit's *Forms of being*, particularly in its reading of Terence Malick's film *The thin red line* (1998). Silverman's chapter on *The thin red line* was published earlier, enabling Silverman, Bersani and Dutoit to acknowledge each other's readings, which they do "with purely affirmative gestures" (Beckman, 2010:261).

Silverman's formulation of relationality in *Flesh of my flesh* (2009) has gained some popularity in Afrikaans literary criticism and is referenced by Van Schalkwyk (2011) on Eben Venter's *Santa Gamka* (2009); Nel (2012a) in relation to *Die benederyk* (Ingrid Winterbach, 2010); Nel (2012b), discussing Marlene van Niekerk's *Die sneeuwlaper* (2009); Nel and Van Schalkwyk (2013) in relation to Karel Schoeman; Linde (2014), discussing Marlene van Niekerk's *Die sneeuwlaper* (2009); Nel (2015) with regard to *Die sneeuwlaper* (Marlene van Niekerk, 2009), *Klimtol* (Etienne van Heerden, 2013) and *Wolf, Wolf* (Eben Venter, 2013); and Nel and Ströh (2016) with reference to the poetry of Johann de Lange.

Bracha Ettinger's work — especially her model of the matrixial borderspace — corresponds with that of Bersani and Silverman in its psychoanalytic roots and its use of the aesthetical experience to formulate relationality (Ettinger, 2004). As artist and theorist, her work resonates with feminist and psychoanalytic scholars (see for example Zajko and Leonard (2006) and Armstrong and De Zegher (2011)). Kathrin Thiele draws on Ettinger's theories in her formulation of a relational, "(post)humanist ethics" (2014:203). In terms of literary criticism, Van Schalkwyk (2006) uses Ettinger's ideas in his analyses of the closing poem in Antjie Krog's *Country of my skull* (1998) and the poem "Fire" (2004) by Adam Zagajewski.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on notions of relationality as formulated by Silverman, Bersani and Dutoit, with less emphasis on Judith Butler. Silverman, Bersani and Dutoit's frames of relationality are closely aligned with the aesthetic ideals of metamodernism, while Butler's ideas are to a great extent still informed by poststructuralism. While Silverman, Bersani and Dutoit approach the question of relationality from a psychoanalytic angle, referencing affective responses which are situated in the body, Butler is more preoccupied with the subject's interpellation in and through discourse and discursive structures, and even though she calls for "an insurrection at the level of ontology" (Butler, 2004a:33), her ontology never quite materialises to the extent that a metamodernist aesthetic demands.

ALTERITY, noun.

"The fact or state of being other or different; diversity, difference, otherness; an instance of this" (OED, 2015). In postmodern and poststructuralist theory specifically "otherness or a radical sense of difference" (Oxford dictionary of media and communication, 2011).

Relationality is based on a recognition of SIMILITUDE. This recognition does not come naturally to human subjects, as individuality can exist only as long as differences between subject and object, self and other, "I" and "you", are maintained. Consequently, the natural instinct of the subject is to fight similitude in order to establish and preserve individuality. Silverman (2009:1) describes this instinct as the notion that "we cannot be ourselves unless we are different from everyone else".

Bersani (2006:171) argues that the belief that insurmountable differences separate humans from each other (and humans from non-humans) is so pervasive and taken for granted, that "the dominant relational mode in our culture" has long been simply "negotiating" difference. These negotiations

have primarily consisted in attempts to overcome or destroy difference or, at best, to tolerate it. Our most liberal injunction has been: learn to communicate (or pretend to communicate) with a world where differences practically guarantee failed communications. (Bersani, 2006:171)

The cultural injunction to "overcome or destroy difference" is at the root of what Bersani terms the "appropriative relation of self to world" (Bersani, 2006:163), or the "appropriative consciousness" (Dean, 2010:391).

Given the (perceived) fundamental hostility of the world to the self, the very possibility of object relations depends on a certain mode of appropriation of the object. That appropriating mode is identification, which plays a major role in the psychoanalytic theory of self-constitution. (Bersani, 2000:644)

In other words, the concept of selfhood is based on the illusion of a definite, absolute boundary or division that enables the self to establish, maintain and stabilise itself and its own hegemony by either eliminating or dominating what it perceives to be the other. Barad (2014:169) refers to this as a "colonizing logic": "a geometry of exclusion that positions the

self on one side, and the other — the not-self — on the other side". According to this division, the self "only ever sees itself, and not the other. The other, the 'non-I', is consigned to the shadow region, the space behind the mirror" (Barad, 2014:170).

Silverman (2009:1) also uses the analogy of a mirror image — a perfect, identical reflection of the self — and refers to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in an infant's life to explain the subject's aversion to similarity:

because the subject's identity will continue to be propped upon external images, its battle-to-the-death with its own mirror image is only the first installment in a life-long war between itself and everything else. This rivalry makes similarity even harder to tolerate than alterity, since the more an external object resembles the subject, the more it undercuts the latter's claim to be unique and autonomous. Sometimes all that it takes to get the war machine up and running is a whiff of likeness.

Bersani and Dutoit (2004:171) elaborate on Freud's ideas in his 1915 essay "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" to put forth the notion that self-preservation instincts are responsible for the "hatred" felt by the self towards others and the external world. Instead of the "oceanic feeling' of ecstatic oneness with the world" which Romain Rolland suggests, Freud argues for "an intractable hostility between the human subject and the world". This hostility drives the self to a rage of destructiveness directed towards the other. Convinced of the "profoundly hostile difference of the world, the subject wars against that difference, and the world that harbours it" (2004:172). The subject aggressively strives to destroy the hostilely different world, yet — through destroying it — seeks to unite with it:

"the blindest fury of destructiveness" is accompanied by an ecstatic sense of having broken down the barriers between the self and the world — not Rolland's joyful religious union with the universe, but accompanying the illusion of an omnipotent aggressiveness that would destroy the world as such, the world as distinct from (and distinctly hostile to) the human ego. (2004:172)

Bersani and Dutoit further emphasise the preservation of the illusion of difference as the basis of human conflict, especially in the form of warfare: "Nations kill in order to preserve differences that don't exist or are easily overcome" (2004:139). This misguided effort to preserve difference feeds an impossible attempt at attaining community, namely nationalism — impossible because, in turn, it can only lead to further struggles to maintain difference.

For Bersani and Dutoit (2004:175) "the 'resolution' to the problem of evil, in this instance the evil of war, lies in nothing more dramatic than the recognition of ... connectedness". Bersani (2000:642) takes to task previous attempts of "thinking about new ways of being together" and points out that the "criticism of hierarchical relational structures" (like those found in poststructuralism and theories based on deconstruction) only criticised the way in which difference is conceived in terms of "superiority and inferiority, of dominant groups and oppressed groups". This criticism has not resulted in "a questioning of the prioritizing of difference itself as a foundational relational structure" but only in "praiseworthy but somewhat ineffective pleas for the respect of difference and diversity".

An alternative to a relational structure found on difference would be one found on similitude, the recognition of similitude between self and other, between subject and other subjects, between subject and object — similitudes that are always already immanent in every subject (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:117) and that can connect "even the most categorically disparate of things" (Silverman, 2009:3). Once this connectedness is recognised, "a hospitable world of correspondences, one in which relations, no longer blocked by difference, multiply as networks of similitudes" can be created (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:117).

The natural reluctance to recognise the similitude between self and other is partly based on the fact that acknowledgment of similitude is wounding to the ego-self. A major part of the argument that Bersani and Dutoit put forth in *Forms of being: cinema, aesthetics, subjectivity* (2004) is that the recognition of similitude requires the dispersal of subjecthood and a loss of individuality [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. Similarly, Silverman (2009:40) blames the resistance to similitude on the subject's reluctance to accept its own mortality: the subject cannot affirm the correspondences between itself and others without acknowledging that it is bound by the same limits of FINITUDE.

Silverman (2009:111) refers to Heidegger's philosophy to further explain this notion:

Being is "essentially finite". There is no world beyond our own — no outside into which we could escape or expel other beings. And since there is nothing outside our world, there is also nothing that is not within it; everything is part of the same Whole — of "beings as a whole". But although no force can undo this totality, it cannot be fully itself unless we assume our place within it — and since this requires us to face "the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of our [own] existence", we are reluctant to do so.

Because everything is part of the same Whole, the same totality, violence directed towards the perceived other is in fact violence directed towards the self. For Bersani and Dutoit (2004:175), this means that relationality cannot in itself be offered as a solution to war. Instead, relationality is found in acknowledging that the aggression is not directed towards something separate from and outside of the subject. The "evil of war" that Bersani and Dutoit (2004:175) refer to is not the fact of war itself, but the illusion that outwardly directed aggression can serve to preserve difference:

war is the occasion for a demonstration of a universal relationality of which the violation is only a part... It is within the relatedness that the violation occurs, not as an attack on something essentially distinct from our own being. (2004:161)

In fact, conflict and destruction are part of the "oneness of the world", and threats to "our oneness with the world... this being-togetherness" are always already included in the oneness of everything (2004:174). In the end, what is really called for by a relational mode of being is a "demystification of difference" (2004:138).

Karen Barad (2014:169) emphasises the need to "demystify" differences to enable a relational mode of being. She states that, in the human sciences, difference is still conceptualised by many writers and thinkers as a "tool of segregation", an "apartheid type of difference" which can exert power on the basis of "essences", e.g. racial and sexual identities. For Barad, however, difference should be understood neither as separateness nor in opposition to sameness: "[t]here are differences as well as similarities within the concept of difference" (2014:169). What is needed is a disruption of the binaries between self and other, between sameness and difference (2014:170).

Barad draws on the physicist Niels Bohr's description of particle behaviour to illustrate the possibility of such a rupture of binaries. Describing the mutual, reciprocal interaction between self and other in a relational network as "enacted cuts", she states:

Bohr explains how it is possible for electrons to perform particle-ness under certain experimental circumstances and wave-ness under others. The key is understanding that identity is not essence, fixity or givenness, but a contingent iterative performativity, thereby reworking this alleged conflict into an understanding of difference not as an absolute boundary between object and subject, here and there, now and then, this and that, but rather as the effects of enacted cuts in a radical reworking of cause/effect. (Barad, 2014:173-174)

In this context, difference can be understood not as something separating self and other, subject and other, but instead something that is "formed through intra-activity" (Barad, 2014:175). Ettinger refers to the self's relation to the other through the relational network ("matrixial borderspace") as "differentiation in co-emergence" (2006:218) or "differentiating-in-jointness" (Ettinger, 2006:221).

Differences are thus formed only because self and other are always already "entangled", always already in a relational network with each other and interacting/intra-acting with each other. At this point, even though self and other do not become indistinguishable identical reflections of each other [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES], the idea of a separating, binary-creating boundary between them is rendered impossible: "[s]ubjectivity and objectivity are not opposed to one another; objectivity is not notsubjectivity" (Barad, 2014:175) [EPISTEMOLOGY].

DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD

The undoing of the subject's illusion that it is a unique, contained, fully realised and clearly demarcated entity, set apart from others based on difference.

Metamodernist SUBJECTIVITY rejects the postmodern idea of the subject — a shifting signifier caught up in an endless interplay of signification, a social construction existing primarily in the structure of language (cf. Timmer, 2010:36) — in favour of a more centred, self-contained, coherent sense of self, even though it remains informed by the postmodern notion of the subject as fragmented and dispersed.

The metamodernist negotiation between fragmentation and coherence allows a conceptualisation of the subject that avoids the trite universalism of modernism as well as postmodern deconstruction's overemphasis of irreconcilable, insurmountable differences. As Timmer (2010:117) suggests with reference to the fiction of David Foster Wallace:

[t]he "new" sense of self that I detect in Wallace's fiction, then, is not grounded in any preconceived idea of similarity and sameness between self and other, and so does not signal a return to some form of "universal" humanism, but is also not (any longer) grounded

in the idea of non-negotiable differences either... [Wallace's stories] conceptualize... the self neither as a traditional autonomous self, nor as completely determined by an *other*.

The metamodernist subject — neither an autonomous individual, nor defined solely in terms of the other — is constructed relationally through shared affect. Responding to the need for meaningful engagement that hinges on concepts of agency, meaning, and truth, a metamodernist subjectivity is constituted through intersubjective exchange (cf. Amian, 2008:181). Being contingent on intersubjective relations, it is paradoxically precisely because the subject is fragmented that it is able to restructure itself through a relational understanding — because it is not an autonomous, fully realised and fully accomplished individual set apart from everything else based on difference, the subject is able to extend, to respond, and to relate.

The tension between the subject as clearly demarcated individual and its need to connect is an important part of theories of relationality. In the texts of Bersani and Dutoit (2004), and Silverman (2009), the concept of relationality is construed in juxtaposition with the notion of individuality. Relationality proves a threat to individuality, yet, at the same time, relationality is haunted by the concept of individuality — the one informs the other and they are mutually interdependent.

The subject's concept of uniqueness is based on the mistaken notion that it can be fully realised, or accomplished, becoming fixed, immobile and stagnant. This is, however, only an illusion, since fixing a subject in time and space is, in fact, impossible. Echoing Heidegger's notion of Being as always in a process of becoming, Bersani and Dutoit (2004:6) explain this impossibility by referring to the different registers of being that constitute a subject: "being at once empirical and metaphysical, or, also ... being at once realised... and potentialised". Yet none of these registers are final, separable or mutually exclusive:

The individual subject doesn't go *from* one register *to* another; what we are calling "registers" could also be figured (although figuration fails us here...) as parallel modes or lines of being. (2004:5)

The potentialised subject is an "imaginary" self which moves outside the social power networks of stable identities. Ettinger (2006:219) refers to the self as embedded in the "trans-subjective unconscious web" that is always "working-through under intersubjective relationality and communication", so that even while the web appears to be "foreclosed", it

nonetheless "precedes and sometimes overrides" the subject's illusion of being separate and only self-identical.

In this way, a mode of relationality is made possible that is not dependent on identitarian categories that find similarity only by defining difference. The difficulty with this relationality, however, lies in the fact that, as Bersani and Dutoit (2004:9) describe it: "the lightness of imaginary being is an ontological gain, but it is also a psychic loss". The dispersed, unrealised subject's lack of finality or containment is "catastrophic", since

the multiplication of the individual's positionality in the universe is, necessarily, a lessening or even loss of individuality. We are not as distinct subjects but rather as that which gives appearance to different modes or functions of being. (2004:5)

The individual subject is dispersed — a state which is wounding and traumatic, but which opens up the possibility of relational being. The subject is only capable of recognising and apprehending the formal correspondences between itself and the world "once the individuating carapace of the ego has been renounced" (Dean, 2010:391).

In a process that echoes the disregard for linearity and causality that characterises relationality [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION], connection to others is both the cause and the effect of this dispersal of subjecthood:

the subject's dispersal [comes about], principally, through unexpected couplings — connections both to the human and to the non-human that are to the side of, or "before" (*en-deça de*) more officially sanctioned connections that confirm such identities as husband, or mother, or soldier... Traumatised perception shatters the security of realised psychic and social identities; it makes visible traces of every body's limitless extensibility in both space and time. These connections are universally immanent. (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:8-9)

The connections between the subject and others, based on similitude, traumatises the subject's notion of uniqueness and individuality. And once the notion of autonomous identity that is founded on a perception of difference is shattered, the subject is open to connections and relations with others.

If individuality is, as Bersani and Dutoit (2004:154) describe it, "a wilful non-connectedness that violates the continuities of being", it is also a non-connectedness that seems to serve to protect the individual from suffering, grief, and loss. Not only does it protect the individual from painfully empathising with (feeling *with*, as opposed to sympathetic feeling *for*) the

suffering of others as ontologically equal to one's own suffering, it also prevents the subject from recognising its own mortality in that of the other [FINITUDE].

As an example of the trauma of being subsumed into a relational network of being, Bersani and Dutoit (2004:171) refer to the character of Witt in Terence Malick's film *The thin red line* (1998), describing him as "inevitably, a melancholy witness". Witt finds joy in relational connectedness, but this same connectedness "makes it impossible for him to be detached from the governing illusion of the world: the illusion of *disconnectedness*" (2004:171).

As embodied by Witt, the poignancy of relational being is metaphorically likened to death and resurrection:

To be that extraordinarily receptive to the being of the world is perhaps to be shattered by it (an ontological truth that Witt's death metaphorises) — shattered in order to be recycled as allness. (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:176-177)

Ettinger, too, emphasizes the paradoxical pain and beauty of relationality. She describes what she terms "a fragile, fragmented and dispersed mode of co-becoming" (2004:78) — founded on the "impossibility of not-sharing with the other" (2004:78) — which is "profoundly fragilizing; it demands its price, but also gives rise to its own beauty" (2004:77).

Silverman (2009:78) uses the example of Orpheus's dismemberment to show the trauma of being joyfully integrated:

The disintegration and dissemination of Orpheus's bodily ego permits him to be psychically integrated into a much greater Whole — the one Ovid calls "flesh".

The dispersal of subjecthood, however traumatic it might be, is in the end a necessary result (and cause) of relationality. Simply put, the unsettling of the self/other binary undoes the notion of the self as self-contained unity. In a constant state of becoming, open and heterochronic [OPENNESS; HETEROCHRONICITY], relationality reconstitutes the self as a "multiplicity, a superposition of beings, becomings, here and there's, now and then's... [s]uperpositions, not oppositions" (Barad, 2014:176).

The self doesn't hold; the self is dispersed in an un/doing of self as a result of being threaded through by that which is excluded. There is no absolute outside; the outside is always already inside. In/determinacy is an always already opening up-to-come.

In/determinacy is the surprise, the interruption, by the stranger (within) re-turning unannounced. (Barad, 2014:178)

EPISTEMOLOGY, noun. (also **EPISTEMOLOGICAL, adj.**)

"The theory of knowledge and understanding, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope" (OED, 2015). It is concerned with "how the world can be known and what can be known about it" (Oxford dictionary of media and communication, 2011).

Metamodernism, with its renewed focus on ONTOLOGY — as can be seen in its formulation of REALISM and the importance it places on notions of the body, the corporeal, and the material [AFFECT THEORY; CHAOS THEORY; POSTHUMANISM] — is a response against critical theory's privileging of epistemological frameworks for the larger part of the twentieth century. The rejection of epistemological modes of viewing the world in favour of ontological engagement is a result of the fact that poststructuralist epistemology is seen to be politically and socially debilitating (cf. Hemmings, 2005:554). Metamodernism's ethical, political, social, and environmental commitments (Gibbons, 2015:29-30) [ETHICAL CONCERNs] are contingent on an ontological engagement that precludes the detachment associated with epistemological frameworks.

Instead of a detached, distanced epistemological viewpoint that is founded on an uneven power relation between seeing, knowing subject and seen, known object — a viewpoint that reduces the other to the epistemological product of the human subject's reason and interpretation — metamodernism calls for an embedded perspective founded on ontological equality between subject and other subjects: an intersubjective relation.

Theories of relationality account for the ethical and moral function of resisting an epistemological framework in favour of one that allows reality to be as it is, independent from human consciousness, perception, language and interpretation (Sartwell, 2015) [REALISM; REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION].

A relational mode of being refuses to own or possess, refuses to submit the other to the subject's interpretation, and refuses an epistemological hierarchy between the knowing subject and the object that is known to it. In their discussion of Godard's film 1963 *Contempt*,

Bersani and Dutoit (2004) investigate the power networks of desire and love as they manifest in an epistemological framework where to love is to know and to own, and where the object of desire is reduced to a reflection (or projection) of what the subject desires it to be [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES]. In contrast, a relational mode of being gives the other the "freedom to reappear, always, as subjects too inconclusive, too multiple, too unfinished, ever to be totally loved" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:68).

There is a long anthropocentric tradition of othering nature in Western thought, posing the world as something to be known, understood, explained and interpreted by man's reason. According to the laws of physics described by Newton, the matter making up the world was considered as "simply located, without relations, without a becoming" (Sehgal, 2014:190). In this worldview with its deterministic conceptualisation of nature, humans have excluded themselves on the basis of possessing reason, having the ability to have values, make choices, follow purposes, to be free from "blind determination" (Sehgal, 2014:190). Following Descartes, the world became an object constructed by the human subject's look: "The human subject... stopped tracing the similarities between himself and other beings; he strove to be unique, freestanding, and identical to himself" (Silverman, 2009:2), as these kinds of epistemological relations are dependent on "the illusion of an ontological discontinuity between the knowing subject and who or what is to be known" (Dean, 2010:391).

Karen Barad (2014:168) identifies relationality as a way of interacting (or "intra-acting") that troubles these conventional dichotomies that are based on an epistemological divide between subject and object — "some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/inanimate". Elaborating further on the dissolution of a subject/object binary, Sehgal (2014:189) claims that a relational mode of being would put the "entire distribution of subject and object, knower and known, words and things, words and world" under reconsideration. Caught up in a network of connections, interactions and interferences (the reciprocal impact of subject on other and vice versa), the "relation between knower and known can no longer be described as one of distant gaze" (Sehgal, 2014:189).

Silverman (2010:410), in her discussion of Bersani's theories, makes the distinction between looking *with* and looking *at*. According to her, Bersani's gaze throughout his oeuvre is characterised by an approach to the visible world — a "looking *with*" — that challenges the notion that seeing is a one-way action, performed by a seeing subject on a visual object.

This approach further exemplifies one of the key principles of Bersani's thought: "the notion that there is no such thing as an individual", since everyone and everything relate to everyone and everything else through "formal correspondences" (Silverman, 2010:410).

In contrast, the "distant gaze" — one that is founded on a division between seeing, interpreting subject and seen, interpreted object, the act of "looking at" — is described by Bersani and Dutoit (2004:68) as precisely "the inability to see". In the context of their bigger argument, "to see" (with its epistemological connotations) would be better understood as "to perceive". This "inability to perceive", with the accompanying insistence on *seeing*, understanding and interpreting, is at the heart of "human neurosis" (2004:68).

Bersani and Dutoit (2004:68) pose an alternative by asking the question: how would nature appear if it were "uninjured" by the "human neurosis" that insists on interpreting? The answer, they suggest, lies in "presenting nature as pure appearance", that is, something that is not knowable and cannot be interpreted [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION] — rather than epistemologically repudiating others by trying to "possess" them through knowing (cf. Silverman, 2010:410).

Epistemological repudiation as mode of relating to the world has been presented in orthodox psychoanalysis as the only mode available to the subject in language. The various instances of this mode — namely identification, projection, and introjection — indicate the traditional privileging of "an appropriative relation of the self to the world, one that assumes a secure and fundamentally antagonistic distinction between subject and object" (Bersani, 2006:163).

Bersani and Dutoit examine this problematic by engaging with visual and literary art, with their work together over the years posed to answer the following question:

[C]an the work of art, contrary to psychoanalytic assumptions, deploy signs of the subject in the world that are not signs of interpretation or of an object-destroying jouissance, signs of what I will call correspondences of forms within a universal solidarity of being? (Bersani, 2006:164)

The answer to this, as Bersani and Dutoit have shown through their studies of the arts — ranging from ancient Assyrian sculpture, Plato's *Symposium*, the work of Caravaggio, Mark Rothko and Ellsworth Kelley, Proust's literary work and the films of Resnais and Godard — is "yes": "certain perceptual recognitions... have provided the evidence for our argument for the human subject's nonprojective presence in the world" (2006:164).

However, the subject's nonprojective presence — its looking at the world without subjecting it to interpretation — does not ask for a completely passive, unreflective, unquestioning way of interaction. Rather, a "certain mode of registering the world" is suggested (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:144) that does not negate questions about the world, but "inaccurately replicate[s] those questions as a viable relation to the world" (2004:143).

These questions are asked without the expectation or even need of answers, and, most importantly, they affect the observing subject as much as the observed object. The act of looking is imprinted on the subject of the looking (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:145). Referring to *The thin red line* (1998), Bersani and Dutoit state:

the silence of Malick's faces clears the facial field, so to speak, for the deployment of the world their features are recording. Thus the soldiers in Malick's "war film" are individuated not as personalities but as perspectives on the world. This sort of individuation and psychic individuality are, inherently, mutually exclusive. Malick of course shows us the world his characters are registering. But their faces also independently manifest their perspective on the world; their world is inscribed on their faces... The human subjects of *The Thin Red Line* are, then, sharply differentiated — although we shall also have to recognise that the most powerfully individuated perspective on the world in the film is also an erasure of perspective itself. (2004:146)

This "erasure of perspective" comes about because, by refusing to interpret, the subject shatters the boundary between itself and the world, the boundary which demarcates its individuality [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. Not expressive of its own individuality, not possessive, not interpretative, this mode of receptively registering is an act of witnessing rather than looking in the epistemological sense of the word. It is a "non-projective angle of vision, one that fails to impose an identity on the world" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:161).⁵⁷ And this witnessing is a "mode of implication, of connectedness... a form of participation" (2004:159) that cannot be possible if the subject separates itself from the object of observation by the interpretative act of looking that reduces the object to a mere "spectacle distinct from the looking" (2004:160).

Referring to the character of Witt in *The thin red line* (1998), Bersani and Dutoit (2004:165) describe his mode of registering the world without laying claim to it as "a relational lesson of

⁵⁷ Ettinger phrases it as the "[m]atrixial responsibility" that arises through the subject's proximity to other subjects in the relational network, something which "creates knowledge without domination of and in the Other" (2006:221).

great simplicity, one that appears to ask us to do little more than *to let the world be*". By doing so, the subject who is merely "gazing" at the world receptively without protecting itself against connectedness is a "subject divested of subjectivity", a subject who "approaches the limit of a subject without selfhood", a subject who is willing "*not to be — in order to be the world he never refuses to absorb*" (original italics). This subject is marked by "ontological passivity", which is

not the passivity of someone who submits to the will of others, but the active passivity of someone who, acknowledging that he *is* the world in which he lives, makes his self superfluous in order to multiply his being. (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:165)

Silverman (2009:26) uses yet another metaphor for this relational mode of experiencing the world by referring to Lou Salomé's work, namely "identification" — the process through which the subject participates in the connectedness of everything in existence. Elsewhere, Silverman describes identification as the "psychic affirmation of our primordial kinship with other creatures and things" (2009:35). Her description of identification emphasises affect and ontology and refuses an interpretative, explaining mode of looking and interpreting:

To identify with someone or something in the Saloméan sense of the word is not to transform this other into an image of oneself, but rather to *feel* one's togetherness with it in an "unfathomable totality". This totality is unfathomable because it has no limits, either spatially or temporally, and because it defies explanation. It can be affectively registered, but it cannot be *thought*. (2009:26)

FINITUDE, noun. (also **FINITE**, adj.)

The condition or state of being finite, of being "subject to limitations"; the "quality or condition of being limited in space, time, capacity, etc." (OED, 2015).

In *Flesh of my flesh* (2009), Kaja Silverman suggests finitude, or mortality, as the basis of relationality. Recognising all bodies' shared vulnerability not only has ethical implications [ETHICAL CONCERNS; POSTHUMANISM], but it also affirms relationality as founded in the body and its affective processes, thus informing metamodernism's turn to ONTOLOGY. Recognition of mortality is a recognition of material existence — emphasising the corporeal transience of the flesh rather than a transcendent ego, pointing to the "equalizing materiality of death" (Silverman, 2009:128). Beckman (2010:26) indicates that this recognition is essential to understanding Silverman's argument: the insistence that the "expansion" of the subject never "gesture[s] toward human transcendence", but instead emphasises "human limitation and death".

Mortality is an inevitable and inescapable fact for all life forms in existence — a common, shared characteristic — and by recognising its own spatial and temporal finitude, a subject can situate itself within a bigger whole that extends beyond its own limits.

Finitude is the most capacious and enabling of the attributes we share with others, because unlike the particular way in which each of us looks, thinks, walks, and speaks, that connects us to a few other beings, it connects us to *every* other being. Since finitude marks the point where we end and others begin, spatially and temporally, it is also what makes room for them — and acknowledging these limits allows us to experience the expansiveness for which we yearn, because it gives us a powerful sense of our emplacement within a larger Whole. Unfortunately, though, finitude is the most narcissistically injurious of all of the qualities we share with others, and therefore the one we are most likely to see in them, and deny in ourselves. Our refusal to acknowledge that we are limited beings has devastating and often fatal consequences for others. (Silverman, 2009:4)

Paradoxically, despite its impression of limiting the subject to time and space, finitude is not seen as a "painful but necessary constriction of human existence" but rather as a means to experience "an extraordinary expansion" (Silverman, 2009:25) [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. By becoming aware of its own finitude, the subject can gain "psychic access to the limitlessness of Being" (Silverman, 2009:27) and is thereby "inducted into relationality"

with the lesson, taught by death: "This is where you end and others begin" (2009:94). In other words, "[b]ecause we are finite... our capacity for relationality is infinite" (2009:156).

Referring to the writing of Rilke, Silverman states that ignoring the death inherent in life renders the subject less definite and earthly and less "akin to tree, flower, and soil" (2009:28). She also refers to some of Freud's work to explain the equalising effect of embracing mortality: "By declaring that the aim of life is death, Freud levels the ontological distinction between humans, plants, and animals" (2009:28) [POSTHUMANISM].

Acknowledging mortality does not come easily to humankind. As Silverman repeatedly points out — referring to thinkers such as Nietzsche, Rilke, and Heidegger — religion is one of the biggest ways in which humanity has sought to circumvent the problem of death. Christianity, for example, has historically provided an easy defence against mortality by promising eternal life. Read in this way, the realisation of finitude is not only traumatic because it brings about the dispersal of subjecthood and therefore threatens the notion of the individual, it also renders the subject vulnerable to myths or narratives of community such as war, religion, group psychology, nationalism, love, ethnographic fantasy and the "fantasy of a sovereign subjectivity" — anything that promises "to render us omnipotent and omnipresent" (2009:42) or "to deliver us from our limits" (2009:113) [SIMILITUDE]. Luckily, coming to terms with mortality means that this vulnerability should be embraced as well: "There is no way of transcending this vulnerability; it is part of what it means to be mortal" (2009:42).

Recognising mortality is not an epistemological process that takes place through reason or interpretative understanding [EPISTEMOLOGY; REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION]. Silverman (2009:111) reckons it is "through our affects rather than our cognitive faculties that our mortality is disclosed to us, and that we acknowledge or deny it". She explains "affect" as referring to what Heidegger calls "Stimmung", which is "not an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way" to "put its mark" on other subjects and objects, things and people. Instead, it is "an attunement of the 'inside' to the 'outside'" (2009:111) [AFFECT; AFFECT THEORY]. In fact, relating to death epistemologically, as onlookers, is just another way of "establishing the alterity of death": by reducing it to a spectacle, even one that can be viewed with sympathy, merely confirms that death is happening "elsewhere" (2009:185). This is a way of othering death, exteriorizing it, locating it in an "outside agency" — thereby changing the ontological anxiety of mortality into mere fear.

Silverman (2009:111) shows that, for Heidegger, the individualising fear of mortality can be countered if the subject accepts its own finitude and the anxiety that accompanies it. The acceptance of finitude would furthermore render the anxiety into ontological "guilt" which summons the self to be alongside and with the other, thereby enabling relationality once more. For Silverman, however, guilt is a "closed" affect (2009:111) — it turns the self only towards the ego, that regards the other either in opposition to or as an extension of itself (2009:112) — and is therefore not best suited to enable relationality. Instead of guilt, she proposes the expression of mortality that Terrence Malick puts forth in *The thin red line* (1998): mortality is in and of itself already pure relationality. Finitude is experienced through the realisation that the self is part of a larger whole — hereby privileging wonder rather than anxiety: "the most 'opening' of affects instead of the most 'closed'" (Silverman, 2009:111).

As Silverman shows with regard to the paintings of Gerard Richter, recognising mortality does not only mean to correspond with the victim, or the dead, but most importantly, to correspond with the perpetrator, the killer — to realise that cruelty and the capacity for violence and murder are present in each of us, in ourselves. The subject should analogously correspond with both sides of the "divide" and recognise not just its capacity to be destroyed, but also its capacity for destruction (2009:206-208). However, all too often the subject's fear of suffering at the hands of others is lesser than the fear to recognise in itself the same capacity for inflicting suffering. This is because this fear, too, "protects us from something even more unthinkable: our own mortality" (2009:180). Relationality undoes the comfortable moral illusion of a clear division between aggressor and aggrieved (2009:109). It is traumatic, yet it opens the subject to connectedness with all aspects of the world.

HETEROCHRONICITY, noun. (also **HETEROCHRONY, noun**; **HETEROCHRONIC, adj.**)

Quality of something that occurs at different times, irregularly or intermittently (OED, 2015); the condition of being constituted by multiple temporalities, of indicating a "proliferation of histories" (Moxey, 2009).

In terms of temporality, a relational mode of being affirms connections which span space as well as time (Silverman, 2009:3). It is characterised by temporal openness: a result of and precondition for connecting and interacting with the world in a reciprocal way, a way to "live through more than we are" (Silverman, 2009:45).

The lack of temporal boundaries in terms of relationality manifests in the fact that any body shares an "inescapable mnemonic contiguity with other bodies" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66). Any entity becomes contemporary with every other one in history, because each one always remains an unaccomplished event [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD]. Being self-contained and fixed in time is a function of individuality: once events are accomplished or considered finished, they become fixed, stagnant and immobile, aiding the subject's illusion of uniqueness.

This illusion cuts the subject off from being in communication with any other. Once the "unending extensibility of simple duration... settle into the realised, incarnated event", the subject can no longer circulate in "an always unfinished expressiveness" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66). This leads to the "events of time" becoming "fully expressed sediments of duration, blocks of self-contained matter", a state of being where the subject can only look back at an "infinitely remote, impenetrable, and improbably similar other" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66) [ALTERITY].

Self-contained, accomplished, realised, fully expressed and unique — the individualised subject is closed off from connecting within the limitless "totality", as Silverman (2009:26) refers to the all-encompassing network of similitude that connects everything in existence. Since the totality has neither spatial nor temporal limits (2009:26), the subject that is accomplished in time situates itself outside of the totality — and so succumbs to what Bersani and Dutoit (2004:67) describe as an "ontological fall, or sin".

However, once an unaccomplished and limitless selfhood is embraced, linear temporality and a causal interpretation of history and time are refused [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE

[INTERPRETATION]. The recognition of the identical ontological status of events from past and present (an analogy between past and present in Silverman's interpretation) makes it impossible to interpret history as a series of hierarchically causal events. In a passage that describes limitless totality as "the Book of Life", Silverman (2009:179) again refers to the resistance against acknowledging connectedness, and the importance of unaccomplishedness — the process of becoming:

[analogies] connect our present to specific moments from the past. They also do so in the face of powerful opposition; we do not want to acknowledge the affinities upon which they insist. Our resistance strengthens the link between us and our predecessors, since what we call "history" has been one long refusal to open the Book of Life. Over the centuries, the pile of unacknowledged analogies has grown ever higher, impeding our vision, and our capacity to change. But although the past prefigures the present, it does not predetermine it. It shows us not who we are, or who we will be, but rather who we are in the process of becoming. It does so in the hope that we will prevent this particular analogy from being realized. If we succeed, we will not just free ourselves from the repetition compulsion of history but also change the "specific character" of the past by generating an altogether different analogy... this mysterious reciprocity between what is and what has been... (2009:179)

The argument for temporal limitlessness should not be confused with Silverman's notion of finitude (defined as being localised in time and space, 2009:115) as a basis for relational awareness. The difference is that, for Silverman, the awareness of the subject's end in time — its death — is an awareness of where the self ends and others begin, where it is possible for self and others to intersect or touch each other. Being finite, localised in time, is not the same as being an accomplished event with clearly demarcated boundaries of individuality, and being limitless and open to temporality is not the same as refuting finitude. Rather, it is precisely *because* the subject is finite, mortal and localised in time that it *can* connect to others in a relational network spanning time and space [cf. SUBJECTIVITY]:

Only at the moment of our death will a period be inserted into the sentence of our life, thereby fixing its meaning. Since until that moment we will remain in a state of perpetual becoming, this futural relationship to ourselves makes it possible for us to change. It also makes room in the world for others. (Silverman, 2009:180)

The idea that past and present are analogous and that it is therefore impossible to interpret history in a linear, causal manner connects with metamodernism's sense that time is out of joint — since history is moving beyond its prematurely claimed end — resulting in what

Boxall (2012:702) refers to as "historical disorientation". A new way of understanding temporality is necessary: Gąsiorek and James (2012:615) call for a "new critical language for thinking about the production of temporality in the new century", after postmodernism's "pervasive and often playful skepticism toward temporality and historiography". Gibbons (2015:32-33) refers to Vermeulen and Van den Akker's (2010:12) notion of the metaphor of time as space, interpreting it as an indication of an "intermixing of temporal chronologies". Discussing the novel *Kapow!* by Adam Thirlwell (2012) as an expression of a metamodernist sensibility, Gibbons (2015:33) argues that its use of "multiplicities of place and time" and its "multiple temporal parameters" (2015:34) create a "heterochronic *topos*" (2015:33).

Metamodernist temporality entails a relationally heterochronic understanding of past, present, and future. Bersani and Dutoit (2004:66) indicate that a relational mode of being recognises the "identical ontological status" of past and present — both past and present are marked by possibility, since they are "immanent" rather than "imminent":

neither one is about to be, both constitute a universal temporal montage in which everything, always open, communicates with everything as a phenomenon of mind or spirit. (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66)

Bersani and Dutoit's notion that neither past nor present is "about to be", yet is marked by possibility (2004:66), resonates with Toth's characterisation of the strange, even impossible, temporality of the Derridean spectre. The spectre is the future, it is always yet to come, "it presents itself only as that which could come *or come back*" as it is "always a type of return, a coming back", being as it is a "revenant", a "return of what is already past/passed" (Toth, 2010:152). It is the presence of both past and future in the present.

Relating to the idea of the returning future yet to come, Karen Barad (2014:168) describes the heterochronic aspect of relationality as "re-turning": not a returning or a reflection of a past that was, but re-turning in the sense of turning it over — "iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetimematterings), new diffraction patterns". Using the phenomenon of diffraction as analogy, Barad claims that, in a relational mode of being that is constantly interacting/intra-acting with everything else in the world, there is "no leaving the 'old' behind", there is "no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then. There is nothing that is new; there is nothing that is not new" (2014:168).

In this way, a relational heterochronicity that recognises the identical ontological status between past and present and the lack of boundaries between "now", "then", and "to be" resonates with the "atemporality" of metamodernism indicated by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:12). Metamodernism is deliberately "out of time", pretending that atemporality is possible even though it might not be (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:12). The metamodernist embrace of heterochronicity condemns the teleological "promise of the end" that postmodernism inherited from modernism (Toth, 2010:4). Instead of a linear progress that will culminate in an ultimate end, metamodernist time is "rapidly growing and changing", "difficult even to inhabit", difficult to "hold ... still long enough to glean a clear understanding of its features", it is "new and unformed", it is the future that has arrived ahead of schedule to contaminate the "obsolescent present" (Boxall, 2012:681).

On a metatheoretical level, metamodernism's heterochronicity manifests in the way it seems to be a return to the past of modernism, yet remains informed by the present of postmodernism to indicate a future that is as much a return as a renewal. Thematically, metamodernism's heterochronic nature allows for romantic and occasionally sentimental attempts to recover the past through its revival of MYTH, even though this past is acknowledged to be "irrevocably irretrievable" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:8-9). Simultaneously, it allows for OPTIMISM that dares to imagine the present as being other than it is (cf. Moore, 2011:par. 88), and informs an utopian impulse that imagines the future filled with alternative possibilities.

ONTOLOGY, noun (also **ONTOLOGICAL, adj.**)

Pertaining to the "existence of things", concerning itself "with what exists" (Oxford dictionary of critical theory, 2010); the "science of being in general, embracing such issues as the nature of existence and the categorical structure of reality" (Lowe, 2005).

A renewed emphasis on ontology is central to an understanding of metamodernism. This is a response to what is considered to be lacking in postmodernism's abstract and epistemological preoccupation with textuality, linguistic structures and self-reflexivity. After an era of ontological uncertainty due to an overemphasis on hyperreality and hypermediation, metamodernism is characterised by a "desperate appeal to the Real" and a call for a "materialist ontology" (Crockett, 2007:265,268), a demand for "new ontologies" (Moore, 2011:par. 271). This gives rise to an insistence on the objective and ontologically independent existence of reality — outside of language and text — and an intensified engagement with the physical and material reality of the world.

The ontological turn can be seen in theories which arose in response to postmodernism — like AFFECT THEORY, CHAOS THEORY and POSTHUMANISM — that are marked by a turn away from epistemological interpretations of the world towards a focus on material interactions between different components of embodied nature.

The formulations of relationality put forth by Bersani and Dutoit, Silverman, Ettinger, and Butler have in common that they are all founded in the body and its affects. In her recent work, Judith Butler (2004a; 2004b; 2005) has shifted her attention to mourning as acknowledging humans' "common vulnerability to loss" and their "universal susceptibility to suffering" as a basis for relationality (McIvor, 2012:411). As this activates notions of identity and bodily affect, Smith (2004:256) reckons that Butler deploys these themes "within a developing matrix of what has to be called an ontology" — and indeed, Butler calls for "an insurrection at the level of ontology" (Butler, 2004a:33).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Even though he is arguing from the standpoint of a Marxist critique of identity politics — namely that identity politics disregard the economical, historical and material conditions under which subject identities are formed (Smith, 2004:257) — Smith's central criticism against Judith Butler is one all too often levelled against a postmodern, post-structuralist notion of the subject: it is "simply pointing to" (and thus limiting her ideas to) "some of the discursive structures and attitudinal habits" that make up the social landscape, disregarding the "material factors" which inflect it (2004:257).

Bracha Ettinger also focuses on the body for her relational model that "breaks with both the Freudian-Lacanian paradigm and the intersubjective as a field of communication" in order to rethink desire and the unconscious (Ettinger, 2006:218). She uses the "corpo-Real of intrauterine experience" as analogy for matrixial meaning: just as the very late-term fetus exists in "a trans-subjective symbiosis" with its mother, so trans-subjective experience is based on the notion that "all events are 'co-events' with several subjective elements; no event occurs only to I or non-I, but always to both at once" (Powell, 2011:130).

Ettinger's notion of matrixial borderspace is thus based on the underlying proposition that meaning exists "outside of any system of oppositions, and so outside of linguistic signification" (Powell, 2011:129). As a result, while traditional Lacanian thought held the Real to be outside of language, Ettinger claims that "the Real is not totally foreclosed; it is foreclosed only for that part of the psyche that functions according to phallic logic" (Powell, 2011:130).

The matrixial borderspace plays on the relation between ontology and epistemology in its conceptualisation of language. Ettinger describes the "matrixial difference" — that which "conceptualizes the difference of what is joint and alike yet not 'the same', of what is unrecognized yet recognizable with-in a shared trans-subjectivity" (Ettinger, 2004:78) — as independent of "the cleft between signifier and signified", and not "derived from the exchange of signifiers". In this sense, it is

woven in a human relation and therefore in some human language — to begin with, in the language of bodily signs or the language of affective channelings, the language of transference that "speaks" with its sensations and affections among subjects that co-emerge or co-fade in a matrixial alliance. (Ettinger, 2004:79)

By shifting the attention to the "language of bodily signs" and notions of affect (which itself is dependent on bodily sensations), Ettinger's model for meaning that is constituted relationally is based on an ontological focus on the human body — what she terms "corpo-reality" (Ettinger, 2004:77).

Kaja Silverman, in her 2009 work aptly titled *Flesh of my flesh*, argues that "everything emerges from the same 'flesh' and has the same ontological weight" (2009:1-2). Her basis

See also Culbertson (2013) for a discussion of Butler's recent work on mourning as predominantly informed by poststructuralism.

for relationality is the corporeality and consequent mortality of the body, the "equalizing materiality of death" (2009:128) [FINITUDE]. The recognition of the limitations of material existence results in the levelling of the ontological distinction between self and others (Silverman, 2009:28).

Bersani and Dutoit, too, emphasises the material and ontological in their formulations of relationality, as the title of their 2004 *Forms of being* suggests. For them, relationality is based on a recognition of ontological equality between subject and others, between the self and everything else in the world (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66).

This recognition of ontological equality calls for a way of interacting with the world that is not centred in "epistemological appropriation" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:57) [EPISTEMOLOGY]. It is only the possibility of a non-interpretive way [REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION] of relating to something (a subject, object, the past or future) that shifts the focus from "knowing" something to exploring the possible modes of connecting with it on an ontological level (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:57). For this to be possible, the subject must be open — unfinished, unrealised, unsettled — instead of a fixed, self-contained point with clearly demarcated boundaries of individuality (2004:67) [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD; OPENNESS].

In the end, however, instead of merely privileging ontology over epistemology, relationality problematises the very relation between ontology and epistemology. By suggesting a way to perceive the world in a reciprocal manner that affects both the observing subject and observed object, thus erasing the distinction between subject and object, ontology and epistemology are connected relationally into what Barad (2014:165) calls "onto-epistemology" [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES].

OPENNESS, noun.

The relational subject which is not limited by notions of individuality [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD] and which is not fixed in time [HETEROCHRONICITY] or space is characterised by potentiality, openness, unendedness, and permeability.

The metamodernist subject is marked by its embodied experiences and its embeddedness in affective structures [AFFECT], constituted by shared feelings and activated "only by a form of responsiveness" to the other (Timmer, 2010:46) [SUBJECTIVITY]. This gives rise to "new ways of conceiving of the human subject and their relation to the world" (Moore, 2011:par. 271), to respond to the need for communal, shared experiences. In the conceptualisation of the metamodernist subject, relational openness accounts for the way in which the "individual borderlines" of the subject is dissolved (Ettinger, 2004:77), thus allowing it to partake in intersubjective, affective structures.

The relational body is limitlessly extensible due to its refusal of the boundaries of individualism (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:9) — an effect of "being at once empirical and metaphysical" and "at once realised... and potentialised" (Bersani & Dutoit (2004:5). Both art and psychoanalysis provide "ample evidence" of the human subject's capacity and aptitude for "exceeding its own subjectivity" (Bersani, 2006:161):

an aptitude for modes of subjecthood in excess of or to the side of the psychic particularities that constitute individualizing subjectivities. Only those modes of subject-being can both recognize and initiate correspondences between the subject and the world that are free of both an antagonistic dualism between human consciousness and the world it inhabits and the anthropomorphic appropriation of that world.

The relational subject exists in "an ontological regime of correspondences in which the discreteness of all things (including human subjects) is superseded, not by universal fusions, but by the continuation of all things elsewhere" (Bersani, 2006:170). This is not to say that the human subject ceases to have a coherent, centred sense of self, it "does of course exist and act discretely, separately; but its being exceeds its bounded subjectivity" (Bersani, 2006:170). Silverman (2009:180) describes it as being in a state of "perpetual becoming", until the moment of death which fixes the meaning of our life.

Because everything is "always open", it is possible to communicate "with everything as a phenomenon of mind or spirit" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66). Being "open" is a prerequisite as well as an effect of relationality, as Bersani and Dutoit imply by frequently referring to the relational subject's "openness" or "open looking" (e.g. 2004:175-177).

Greene (1990:370-371) relates the notion of openness to the network of correspondences made possible by relational being. For Greene, relationality is defined as the "capacity to grasp things in relationship, to perceive things in patterns, meshes, networks, which are always open, always in the making" (1990:371). Relational being means to recognise a "web of relationships", a "concern for relationships and mergings and openings" (1990:371) which could make it possible for

worldly interest to be transformed into something pulsating, alive, and forever open to more and more perspectives, to more and more dialogue, to more and more interruptions by persistent, unfailing life. (Greene, 1990:374)

Silverman (2009:25) distinguishes between ontological limitlessness based on finitude and egoic limitlessness based on transcendence. Egoic limitlessness perceives other subjects and objects as a mere extension of the self — either by excluding them for embodying the differences that defines the subject as an individual self, or by incorporating them as a reductive reflection of the self [ALTERITY; SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES]. In contrast, ontological limitlessness indicates a dispersal of subjecthood: a rejection of the notion that the subject is contained, accomplished, a clearly demarcated and individual entity that sets itself apart from others based on difference. By recognising similarity and correspondence, the ontologically limitless subject is able to enmesh itself in a network of connectedness.

REFUSAL OF NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION

A narrative can be defined as a structured and unified representation of a sequence of events that are arranged in a certain relation to each other. For a text to be classified as a narrative, the events must exhibit some temporal order as well as some causal connectedness (Le Poidevin, 2005). Because of these characteristics, narrative is often used as an interpretative device — a way to create or convey meaning from something which otherwise would have been only a disjunctive series of unrelated events.

Metamodernism's recommitment to the world and its consequent ethical imperative to engage with and represent reality *as it is* [REALISM] holds that reality exists independently from human consciousness, perception, language and interpretation (Sartwell, 2015). This manifests in CHAOS THEORY, in the notion that reality is non-linear, non-causal, non-deterministic and unpredictable, and that any model that seeks to impose linear, causal rules on nature is inaccurate. This holistic embrace of complexity precludes a final, ordered interpretation of nature — in fact, it completely rejects the notion that reality can ever be fully understood by human reason — and thus resists what is held to be the epistemological violence that would reduce any aspect of (non-human) reality to human terms.

Resisting linear and causal interpretation to apprehend reality as it is is a function of a relational understanding of the world. In contrast to the importance given to temporal arrangement and causal hierarchy in the case of narrative, a relational understanding often eschews linearity, chronology [HETEROCHRONICITY], and causality. As is seen in Bersani and Dutoit's discussion of Terrence Malick's *The thin red line* (2004:136), a relational text instead inhabits a temporality "not limited to, or constrained by forward narrative movement". The film presents a range of different events without providing a causal or temporal framework — a framework which would have posited, or at the very least privileged, a certain interpretation. By refraining from such a framework, all events are given the same ontological weight.

In this way, the film "foreclose[s] the possibility of discursive solutions" by offering neither "explicative nor assertive" — nor, indeed, any definitive — ultimate interpretation of itself or any conclusive answers to the questions it poses (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:69). This emphasises the notion of reality existing outside of discursive practises, instead of being simply a product of human interpretation (Sartwell, 2015). In fact, if narrative and a fixed

subject position are seen as means "that would allow us to measure and to distinguish", then in the relational text "[a]ll subjects — human and narrative — are left behind" (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:69) [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD; SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES].

In an insightful article, Maxine Greene (1990) refers to the prose of Virginia Woolf and specifically the character of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the lighthouse* (1927) to demonstrate how a relational mode of being refuses interpretation. Writing before the rise of queer theory as major discourse in the humanities, Greene's argument utilises an unfortunate binary opposition between "masculine" and "feminine" "intelligence". However, her distinction between a relational and non-relational mode of perception is valid for an understanding of relationality. For Greene, a non-relational interpretation of the world (which she terms "masculine") is overly dependent on reason or rationality to make sense of the world. It "[runs] up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world" (1990:371). It assumes an "abstract, detached standpoint" — that of the subject who believes in the possibility of being impersonal and objective in its observation — and uses this as a vantage point from where to rank and arrange the world in "some hierarchical order" [EPISTEMOLOGY].

In contrast, a relational perception of the world (which Greene terms "feminine") is "ambivalent, fluid, uncertain, involved" and has the capacity to think "in many modalities" (1990:372). It has "no desire to submerge" the other into a hierarchy or frame of interpretation that would "obscure their distinctiveness or obliterate their dissonances" (2009:371). Most importantly, however, the relational perception realises its own finitude and uses this to relate to the world (in a way reminiscent of the observer of CHAOS THEORY who is embedded in the system she observes):

Her vision is... that of someone who knows she can only see from the vantage point of her own lived situation... It is also the vision of someone who knows she is mortal, flawed, who feels a "wedge of darkness" within her and sees the darkness pressing against the windows.
[FINITUDE]

This relational perception precludes any fixed meaning or interpretation unilaterally imposed by the subject on the world. Instead, it is "more communicative and contains the possibility of reconciliation through conversation or dialogue" (1990:371). Dialogue, based on reciprocity, moves the participants to look at one another, thereby enabling them "to become, to desire, to reach beyond themselves". Most importantly, perhaps, "dialogues never finally conclude" (1990:372) [OPENNESS].

SIMILITUDE, noun.

The quality of "resembling, or having the likeness of, some other person or thing"; having the "form, likeness, or image of some person or thing"; the "quality or state of being like; resemblance, similarity, likeness" — a characteristic shared by things which resemble each other, each other's "counterpart or equal" (OED, 2011).

Despite humankind's insistence on individuality [ALTERITY], we also possess an innate yearning for recognition and correspondence. Bersani (2000:656) claims that it is "an ontological reality" for all being to move toward and to correspond "with itself outside of itself" in a "self-desiring movement" which "defeats specular narcissism", as this "erases the individuating boundaries within which an ego might frame and contemplate itself". In other words, "we relate to difference by recognizing and longing for sameness".⁵⁹

The longing for sameness has not often been recognised in Western thought and history. Instead it has been refuted, firstly by a religious project that imposed a hierarchical structure on nature, and later by the Enlightenment project which privileged the kind of epistemological relations that sought to "master otherness by means of knowledge", depending for that mastery on "the illusion of an ontological discontinuity between the knowing subject and who or what is to be known" (Dean, 2010:391) [EPISTEMOLOGY].

While similitude — or similarity between everything in existence — as an organising principle for the world dates back to a Platonic and an early Christian worldview, these views were not based on ontological kinship (Silverman, 2009:1). In Plato's thought, a hierarchy existed: the material world was only an imperfect copy of the realm of ideas. In an early Christian worldview, too, a hierarchy between earth and heaven, or man and God, subjected the world to a divine order of nonreciprocal relationships.

⁵⁹ In *Homos* (1995) — the work which Dean (2010) reckons to be transitional in Bersani's oeuvre as it marks the passage to his focus on "new relational modes" — Bersani coins the term "homo-ness" to indicate a kind of sameness which displaces "the axes of both identity-difference and self-other in our thinking about subjectivity, sexuality, and sociality. Sameness (or homo-ness), not synonymous with identity, is the solvent in which the barrier between identity and difference may be overcome" (Dean, 2010:389).

Silverman (2009:1-2) contrasts this hierarchical, nonreciprocal order of the world with the perspective put forward by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, where "every phenomenal form rhymes with many others" because "everything emerges from the same 'flesh' and has the same ontological weight". Because Ovid includes death as an indispensable part of life [FINITE], he is able to formulate correspondences that "connect us to both ourselves and others, promoting transformation rather than stasis, equality rather than hierarchy, and an 'unfinished universality' rather than a closed order" (2009:2) — in other words, analogy.

Silverman, in *Flesh of my flesh* (2009), uses the notion of analogy to describe the function of similitude within a relational mode of being. Analogy is defined in a footnote, with reference to Stafford (2001), as "the vision of ordered relationships articulated as similarity-in-difference", taking care to point out that "this order is neither facilely affirmative nor purchased at the expense of variety" (Silverman, 2009:223).

According to Silverman (2009:2-3), some writers and thinkers in modernity emphasised kinship rather than separation by formulating analogies focused on similitude — connecting "even the most categorically disparate of things" (2009:3) — where every "being bears a physical resemblance to many others, and all beings derive from the same flesh". At the core of analogy is similarity, correspondence or resemblance: the ontological kinship between things derived from the same flesh — although not at the cost of alterity and heterogeneity (2009:215, 216) [ALTERITY]. Silverman (2009:173) claims that "analogy brings two or more things together on the basis of their lesser or greater resemblance". In some instances, similarity and difference are given equal weight, in some one or the other is more prevalent or visible. However, by its very structure, analogy "neutralizes" identity (the complete lack of difference) as well as antithesis (the complete absence of similarity) (2009:173).

With regard to the analogous relationship between a photo and its subject, for example, Silverman (2009:174-175) explains the importance of neutralising identity as well as antithesis by stating that the "small but decisive difference that separates" the representation and its referent is a "precondition for relationality":

Although it is through their resemblances that the two correspond, it is only because they are at the same time different from each other that they are able to do so. It is also only by turning to one that we can approach the other.

These differences, however, do not translate into oppositions [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES]. It remains a non-hierarchical relationship between equals where each "also points toward, and finds itself within, the other" (2009:169). It is therefore important that neither term "takes priority over, or constitutes a replacement for the other" (2009:174). Instead, analogy as a function of ontological kinship and basis for relationality should be reversible and not linear (2009:155), and is founded on mutuality, interdependence and reciprocity (Silverman, 2009:40).

In terms of correspondence, Silverman's insistence (2009:40) that it is not correspondence *to* (one thing to another), but correspondence *with* (to or more things with each other), clearly indicates that analogy is not unilateral and is not based on hierarchy or the subordination of one term of the analogy to the other. In this regard, analogy is distinguished from metaphor: A metaphor substitutes one thing for another in a hierarchical and "profoundly undemocratic relationship", where the substituted term is only a "temporary stand-in" with "only a provisional reality" (2009:173). In contrast, the terms of an analogy are ontologically and semiotically equal — they "belong to each other at the most profound level of their being" (2009:173).

This insistence on reciprocity and the ontological equality between the components of analogy is part of why humans seem to find it so hard to accept: "[s]ince we cannot affirm the analogies linking us to other people without acknowledging that we are bound by the same limits, we are reluctant to do so" (2009:40) [FINITE].

Because everything is linked analogically, the recognition of correspondence with any one thing brings with it the recognition of correspondence with all things, according to Silverman (2009:45):

Since the unconscious is only in a position to affirm the analogies that are perceptually and mnemonically available to it, and always privileges some of them and repudiates others, it might seem difficult to see how it could open onto the All. But since everything is connected to so many other things, and each thing bears within it the weight of all things, if we are able to recognize even one of our primal siblings, we will immediately find ourselves surrounded by kin.

Silverman (2009:45) explains this further by referring to Lou Salomé's metaphor of a rosebush: if one reaches into a rosebush and grab a handful of flowers, no matter how many

one holds, it is only a small portion of the whole. Nevertheless, a handful is enough to experience the nature of the flowers:

Only if we refuse to reach into the bush, because we can't possibly seize all the flowers at once, or if we spread out our handful as if it were the *whole* of the bush itself — only then does it bloom apart from us, unknown to us, and we are left alone.

This "whole" constitutes all of existence as a "vast latticework of resemblances" (Silverman, 2009:152). Because similarity is founded in ontological connectedness, even if two things share only a single characteristic, they still belong "to each other at the most profound level of their being"; and because every thing corresponds to many others in this same way, in the end, all things resemble each other on an ontological level and the world is rendered "one single, throbbing organism" (2009:152).

This vast network of relations made up by analogies or resemblances is not limited to humans (2009:40), and are also not spatially or temporally bound [HETEROCHRONICITY]. This network is by turns referred to as the All, the wholeness or the totality. In a passage that uses the metaphor of a "Book of Life" for this totality, Silverman (2009:65) explains its extensiveness and limitlessness, as well as the fact that the illusion of individuality and ownership has no place in it:

Analogies that are not of our making really do connect our lives to many others — to lives that are over, and to lives that have not yet begun, as well as to those proximate to us in time and space. Rather than a self-contained volume, authored by us, our history is only one chapter in an enormous and ever-expanding book, whose overall meaning and shape we cannot even begin to grasp, let alone determine. But this does not mean that there is another kind of author; no one stands outside the Book of Life, to whom it could be imputed. This volume is written from inside, through the analogies we acknowledge and those we refuse. Its production is also a collective process, in which everyone participates and everyone is implicated. As Rilke suggests in a 1924 letter, where there is resemblance, there is also communication, co-endowment, and co-peril. The Book of Life is forever in the making, and later chapters have the capacity to rewrite earlier ones. (2009:65)

If a relational mode of being is founded on a recognition of similitude, then similitude might be at the centre of metamodernist ethics and aesthetics. Elias (2012:746) claims that metamodernism, "[m]ore than did theories of otherness... demands an ethics of recognition, a relation of the face-to-face". Indeed, all of the aspects of metamodernism function with an understanding of similitude.

The transitive nature of AFFECT — moving between bodies [AFFECT THEORY] — enables a sense of self that is constituted through intersubjective affective relations, where the self is contingent on a form of responsiveness to the other that is only possible through a recognition of similitude. Notions of AUTHENTICITY and SINCERITY depend on the possibility of shared understanding and meaningful engagement, for which certain communal connections are necessary. Metamodernist ETHICAL CONCERNs are for the most part founded in a recognition of the absence of difference between self and other — as is manifested in POSTHUMANISM. MYTH and OPTIMISM activate certain notions of universal or transcendental values, which enable communication and togetherness and are both founded on and serve as points of common contact. Metamodernist REALISM posits the independent existence of an objectively quantifiable reality to allow the possibility of shared recognition. The need for a sense of shared experience gives rise to the metamodernist formulation of SUBJECTIVITY, which is constructed trans-subjectively and based on the need for recognition by and responsiveness to an other — an other who is not inaccessible because of difference, but can be apprehended in terms of similitude.

SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES

Referring to the dualism that occurs in most of Western philosophy between the (human) subject of experience — the observer, the knower — and the world, the object of experience, that which is observed and known.

Metamodernism's renewed focus on materiality [REALISM; ONTOLOGY], its relational modes of being such as embeddedness and intersubjective relations [AFFECT; SUBJECTIVITY], and its ethical imperative for greater responsibility and connectedness [ETHICAL CONCERNs] intersect with notions of EPISTEMOLOGY and ONTOLOGY to complicate the traditional separation between subject and object. This complication manifests in AFFECT THEORY as the notion that affect displaces the human subject and reconnects it to the world as whole (Clough, 2010:210), thereby erasing distinctions between living/non-living, natural/cultural, human/non-human and inside/outside. CHAOS THEORY problematises the traditional assumption of the world as an object that can be fully known, understood, or interpreted by the human subject; and POSTHUMANISM undoes traditional dualisms such as alive/non-alive and human/non-human.

In terms of relationality, the undoing of the traditional categories of subject and object is a function of similitude. The recognition of similitude — between self and other, between subject and object, between everything in existence — however does not mean that difference should be eradicated or that the subject should become a perfect copy of whatever shares its relational network. A great deal of the tension of relationality lies in the fact that the non-relational subject seeks to obliterate the threat of the other, either by an aggressive destruction of what it perceives to be different from itself, or conversely by reducing the other into a reflection of itself [ALTERITY].

A possible solution to this problematic is that, instead of identical mirror images, the subject and other are instead viewed as "inaccurate replications" of each other (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:64). Bersani and Dutoit have studied film and painting as "documents of a universe of inaccurate replications, of the perpetual and imperfect recurrences of forms, volumes, colors, and gestures", taking these to be

evidence of the subject's presence everywhere, not as an invasive projection or incorporation designed to eliminate otherness, but rather as an ontological truth about both the absolute distinctness and the innumerable similitudes that at once guarantee the objective reality of the world and the connectedness between the world and the subject. (Bersani, 2006:168)

In terms of inaccurate replications, there exists neither a subject/object dualism, nor "a fusion of subject and object" — instead, Bersani (2006:168-169) describes it as "a kind of looping movement between the two", as "the world finds itself in the subject and the subject finds itself in the world".

Describing the process of recognising similitude between the subject and the other as "coupling", Bersani and Dutoit (2004:64) posit the concept of translation as an analogy for the way in which the subject and other replicate each other:

Translation is a coupling in time. Ordinarily, an original text or speech precedes the translated version of it. As its etymology indicates, translation is a carrying over, the moving of a text from one linguistic "place" to another. It is also, as it has often been said, a betrayal: the relation between the translation and the original can never be an identity. More interesting, however, and more difficult to determine, is the mode in which the original persists, or lasts into, the translation... We do want to suggest that, *within the translation*, there is a relation that is neither a betrayal nor an identity nor, finally, a coming after or a coming before... a kind of temporality without priority. Let's think of translation as the

opening of the text to be translated, its removal from a supposed textual finality and its renewal as something still in the process of being made.

The translated text reoccurs in the translation, albeit in a different form. In this way, hierarchy is rendered impossible and heterogeneity is preserved. However, it is wounding to the notion of individuality and identity [DISPERSAL OF SUBJECTHOOD].

Inaccurate replications — between the subject and the world, among the world's objects — shatter individual identities in order to redesign the world as correspondences that can be illuminated by our perception of them. (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:177)

By doing so, inaccurate reoccurrences "design the mobile oneness of the world, and *our* oneness with the world" (2004:172) and ultimately "represent the ontological implausibility of individuality" (2004:154).

Ettinger's notion of the "matrixial borderspace" and consequent "metamorphosis" provides another way for understanding how a relational connectedness blurs the boundaries between subject and object. The matrixial borderspace refers to

the psychic sphere which is trans-subjective and sub-subjective even if and when it arises in the field of the separate individual self and even if and when it operates in the intersubjective relational field... Subjectivity here is an encounter between I and uncognized yet intimate non-I neither rejected nor assimilated. If we conceive of traces of links, transindividual transmissions and transformational reattunments, rather than of relations to and communication with objects and subjects, in terms of a transgressive psychic position in which the co-emergence and co-fading is prior to the I versus others, a different passageway to others and to knowledge arises — suitable for transformative links that are not frozen into objects. This passage, that I have called metamorphosis, is a non-psychotic yet beyond-the-phallus web of links. (Ettinger, 2006:218)

The encounter that neither rejects nor assimilates resonates with Bersani's call for a relation to the world that is not appropriative (Bersani, 2006:163), but also does not subsume the other into the self in an act of assimilation. Ettinger's designation of "I" and "non-I" indicates the way in which a relational mode of being — constituted by "traces of links", trans-subjective and transindividual affective transmissions — undoes categories of subject and object, rendering them ontologically equal without becoming indistinguishable identical reflections of each other [ALTERITY].

Another analogy that provides an understanding of the interaction between subject and other without reducing either to a mere reflection is that of diffraction. The concept of diffraction as a tool for critical thinking within in the human sciences is the subject of a special issue of *Parallax* (2014, volume 20, number 3), wherein a variety of writers engage with the concept in connection to relationality.

Diffraction as a term is derived from physical optics, where it describes the "phenomenon of interference generated by the encounter of waves, be it light, sound or water and, within quantum physics, of matter itself" (Sehgal, 2014:188). Sehgal uses the example of what happens when two stones are dropped into water and the two sets of ripples caused by the respective stones interfere with each other, thereby producing diffraction, or an interference pattern. The notion of diffraction was developed by Donna Haraway as a "feminist tool to rethink difference/s beyond binary opposition/s" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165), because the interference pattern indicates the mutual interference or interaction between any two terms of a binary opposition.

As Sehgal (2014:188) describes it:

Donna Haraway draws on the optical phenomenon of diffraction as a metaphor and a method for knowledge production, because diffractions crucially differ from reflections. Whereas reflection is bound to "repeating the Sacred Image of the Same", "diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference".

Underlying the notion of diffraction is Niels Bohr's Copenhagen interpretation regarding the "quantum mechanical paradox" by which light behaves simultaneously as a wave pattern and like a particle. This leads to the famous maxim that "the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165), or the notion that the act of observation changes that which is being observed.

Diffraction as an analogy for interaction between a subject and others has epistemological as well as ontological implications. Karen Barad takes the notion that the act of observation changes that which is being observed further to include the observer as well: the act of observation changes the subject doing the observing (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165) [EPISTEMOLOGY]. Diffraction as an analogy for relationality is a "subject-shifter" — it "shifts the subjects of critique" as well as "the foundational ontological and epistemological presuppositions that condition these subject-formations" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165). A "relational ontology emerges that can no longer be categorically separated from its

epistemological processes", it becomes entangled as "*both* method of engagement *and* radically immanent world(ing) where relationality/differentiation are *primary* dynamics of all material-discursive entanglements. Ontology and epistemology become inter-/intra-laced as onto-epistemology" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165).

A relational mode of being thus has implications for epistemology as well as ontology, especially as these pertain to subjectivity. By resisting a distanced, detached epistemological viewpoint of knowing subject that reduces the other to an object to be known — a mere product of the subject's epistemological faculties of interpretation — a relational mode of being undoes such differences and makes it possible for the subejct to relate to others as ontologically equal.

metamethodology: text as network of correspondences

The twenty-first century is a space that inhabits "a new kind of temporality", when new technologies and new networks of global power have shaped and reshaped "the principles of succession, of sequence, the passage from one moment to the next" (Boxall, 2012:701). Moore describes the present as a "time of great change, of speeded up connections and distortions of space and time" (Moore, 2011:par. 106). New technology makes it possible to be more connected than before, and the resulting "enhanced proximity" gives rise not only to creative imaginings from the fertile new possibilities where connections intersect, but also to "clashes of culture, faith and ideology" (Moore, 2011:par. 101). It is a time of multiple, unpredictable processes of change and transformation (Moore, 2011:par. 133), rendering analytical frameworks that depend on binaries such as local/global, inside/outside, micro/macro and western/non-western obsolete.

According to Bourriaud, the current world is one that has extended and "is still in the process of expanding", giving rise to a

heterochrony of globalized societies with various degrees of modernity and a worldwide archipelago without a center; to globally intersecting temporalities and historically interrelated geographies. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:3-4)

Metamodernist theory is a response to this world and its new temporalities, its different organisations of succession and sequence, its plural and unpredictable processes — a world that is self-consciously globalised, interrelated, intersecting, plural, transnational, and heterochronic. Metatheoretically, metamodernist critical theory — as exemplified by AFFECT THEORY, CHAOS THEORY, and POSTHUMANISM — developed from interdisciplinary roots, and deliberately pursues an interdisciplinary approach in response to global problems. Simplistic models developed within isolated disciplines are deemed inadequate to deal with the complexities of a social world that is characterised by interconnections and interrelations on a global scale (cf. Kwiatkowska, 2001:102; Byrne & Callaghan, 2014:par. 152).

Metamodernist critical theory has to engage with a social world characterised by intersubjective relational networks — constituted through transitive affective processes — and a renewed focus on ontology that demands the world be apprehended as it is, as "pure appearance " (cf. Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:68). It also has to respond to an ethical demand to recognise similitude and interconnectedness between everything in existence, and to this

end rejects linear, causal, and hierarchical relations that would emphasise an idealised epistemological knowledge model over an ontological model of relational being.

A new kind of methodology is thus necessary for a metamodernist critical approach, one which can satisfy intersubjective communication as aesthetic as well as ethical imperative (cf. Elias, 2012:738-739). It should not privilege a detached, distanced epistemological viewpoint, but instead formulate an embedded perspective founded on ontological equality. It should also be able to express the interconnected relations that make up the social and theoretical fabric of our current reality — the "vast latticework of resemblances" that are linked analogically, as Silverman (2009:152) puts it. Or, to borrow Bersani and Dutoit's phrasing, it should be a methodological model that can give form to "a hospitable world of correspondences, one in which relations, no longer blocked by difference, multiply as networks of similitudes" (2004:117).

Different methodological analogies and models suggested in critical theory respond to these demands in various ways. Donna Haraway introduced the notion of diffraction — the "phenomenon of interference generated by the encounter of waves" (Sehgal, 2014:188) — as a "feminist tool to rethink difference/s beyond binary opposition/s" (Sehgal, 2014:188). Diffraction is valuable as a metaphor and a method for knowledge production, because "diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference" (Sehgal, 2014:188). In this way, diffraction facilitates a shift in perspective from difference/s as "oppositional to differential, from static to productive, and our ideas of scientific knowledge from reflective, disinterested judgment to mattering, embedded involvement" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:165).

Kathrin Thiele draws on the theories of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad to theorise diffraction as a new methodology to map "alternative worldly enactments... on a planetary scale" (Thiele, 2014:202), in a way that would embody posthumanist ethics as they are entangled with the "onto-epistemological conditions" of the contemporary world (2014:203). She describes a diffractive methodological engagement as one that is neither based on assimilation and appropriation (where differences are flattened into indistinguishable reflections [SIMILITUDE]), nor on epistemologically violent displacement [ALTERITY]:

Difference as inherently linked to the oppositional scenario (in its purest the Aristotelian contradiction) is transformed into a different — a diffractive — methodological engagement. The resulting "new" criticality — for it is still criticality that is needed in any engagement with difference(s) and differentiality — does no longer base itself on reflexivity and reflection, i.e.

on the mirroring attitude that "only displaces the same elsewhere"... but aims at the multiplication and dissemination of differential powers in order to produce other, unexpected, and (hopefully) less violent interference patterns. It habit(u)ates difference(s) differently. (Thiele, 2014:204)

Similarly, Kaiser and Thiele (2014:166) argue that diffraction is attractive "as alternative vocabulary and different technology for critical inquiries", because it provides

a praxis of analysis that foregrounds differentiability; provides alternatives to "reflection" as metaphor for our epistemologies; affirms our knowledge-practices as mattering here-and-now and not merely recording after-the-fact; and highlights the fundamental material relationality of a diffracted/-ing world at the turn of this new millennium. (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:166)

They further emphasise the relational nature of this "alternative vocabulary" and "different technology", and stress its necessity for meaningful engagement with the changed global landscape in all its complexity. Diffraction, as an expression of "[o]nto-epistemology"

departs from discrete, given entities as units of analysis and considers agential forces (selves, cultures, objects, etc.) as processually, relationally and asymmetrically produced (all at once)... To develop literacies for-from-with-in the changing economic, ecological, digital and scientific landscapes and our complex (cultural-economic-ecologico-socio-political) co-dependencies is pressing. (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014:166)

In terms of relationality, Bracha Ettinger⁶⁰ uses the idea of a web to indicate ways in which knowledge can be shaped and expressed without depending on traditional subject/object categories. The "matrixial web" indicates the trans-subjective and sub-subjective psychic sphere which operates in an "intersubjective relational field" where "I and unrecognized yet intimate non-I" encounter each other without either being rejected or assimilated (Ettinger, 2006:218). Through this "web of links" — consisting of "traces of links, transindividual transmissions and transformational reattunements" — "a different passageway to others and

⁶⁰ In a metamethodological way, Ettinger's writing style reflects her theory by foregoing a linear, causal, hierarchical organisation of her ideas. Powell (2011:129;130) points out that Ettinger "develops her images and ideas by means of diffusion rather than delineation, by means of evocative repetitions rather than once-and-for-all definitions... the book's chapters do not proceed via progressive argumentation. Rather, they unfold as a series of repetitive variations on the single theme of the matrixial".

to knowledge arises — suitable for transformative links that are not frozen into objects" (Ettinger, 2006:218) [SUBJECT/OBJECT CATEGORIES].

Ettinger's subject is always already part of "larger subjective clusters", which are embedded in these "matrixial webs" (Ettinger, 2006:221), where the subject "enlarges her capacity for fragilization, compassionate hospitality and wit(h)nessing" through "differentiating-in-jointness" (Ettinger, 2006:221). She describes the matrixial web with its myriad of connections as

[a] *web of movements of borderlinking, between subject and object, among subjects and partial-subjects, between me and the stranger, and between some partial-subjects and partial objects, [that] becomes a psychic space of trans-subjectivity, relating to trans-subjective-objects*, where trans-subjective affectivity infiltrates the partial-subjective-objects.

(Ettinger, 2004:76-77) (original italics)

The metaphor of a web for organising knowledge and information has become so commonplace in the twenty-first century as to be unremarkable, used as it is to indicate the World Wide Web. The digital revolution and the mass digitalisation of culture have not only played a part in how metamodernism is conceptualised, but contributed to its rise as well. Kirby, in his 2009 work *Digimodernism*, argues that only something as unprecedented and prevalent as digital technology could have been able to replace postmodernism, and views contemporary culture as almost entirely the result of mass digitalisation, reckoning that the new paradigm owes its emergence as well as its dominance to the digitalisation of text (Kirby, 2009:1). Fjellestad and Watson (2015:3) suggest that the contemporary prevalence of digital technologies — something which is frequently theorised in terms of networks and connectedness — contributes to the importance of networks and relationality in the conceptualisation of the contemporary moment.

Hayles and Gannon (2007:99) argue that the first commercial Web browser to be "both robust and user-friendly" heralded the demise of postmodernism:

As the World Wide Web exploded at exponential rates, experiences of virtuality ceased to be confined to high-tech research laboratories funded by military grants and became part of everyday life in developed regions across the globe. (2007:99)

This absorption of the World Wide Web into the everyday parallels POSTMODERNISM'S ABSORPTION INTO POPULAR CULTURE:

Fredric Jameson's idea that space, mirroring the inconceivable complexities of the infosphere, had become fractally complex was not so much proved wrong as displaced by the increasingly banal activity of surfing the web... Jean Baudrillard's titillating suggestion that reality had "imploded" into hyperreality ceased to function as a transgressive theoretical conceit, displaced by the everydayness of navigating virtual spaces that somehow left no one in doubt reality was as "real" as ever. (Hayles & Gannon, 2007:99)

Following the dissemination of the World Wide Web and its technologies into everyday life, postmodernism "has not so much disappeared as been swallowed up — or better, engulfed — by the flood of data, associations, information, and cross-references unleashed by the World Wide Web" (Hayles & Gannon, 2007:118-119).

In relation to this, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) suggests that hypertext is in many ways the culmination of postmodernist theories. Early theorists of hypertext (such as George Landow, Jay David Bolter, Michael Joyce and Stuart Moulthrop) hailed it as "the fulfilment of the ideas of the most influential French theorists of the day, such as Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Deleuze, Guattari, and Bakhtin" (Ryan, 2001:6). Hypertext also reflects Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, serves as a metaphor for Lyotard's notion of the "postmodern condition", incorporates Derrida's idea of the infinite deferral of meaning, exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "machinic assemblage", and mirrors their notion of rhizomatic organisation (Ryan, 2001:7-8).

If hypertext in its contemporary form embodies metamodernist ideals, then its postmodern roots testify to the way in which postmodernism continues to inform metamodernism, even after it has been absorbed into popular culture and lost its critical edge. It also attests to the way in which metamodernism continues to utilise postmodern strategies to its own ends.

The structure of hypertext is based on theories of deconstruction that view meaning as "the sparks generated by associative chains that connect the particles of a textual and intertextual field of energies into ever-changing configurations" (Ryan, 2001:6). The text units in a hypertext are organised in a non-hierarchical and decentred manner (Ryan, 2001:8), they are autonomous and linked in a way that facilitates the creation of a polyvocal structure which integrates different perspectives without privileging any (2001:7).

By disregarding the need for coherence and abandoning hierarchical tree structures as well as causal and linear progression, this organisation liberates meaning from linear logic, logocentrism and repressive forms of power (2001:8). The text is regarded as an open and

reconfigurable matrix (2001:191). Since the text itself does not prescribe any canonical order in which the text units must be read, any sequence provides an equally appropriate reading (2001:184), reflecting its aesthetic ambition to be aware of plurality (2001:264), to preserve diversity (2001:7), and to enable a "dialogic mode of collective endeavor" (2001:8). In other words, an either/or logic is abandoned in favour of and/and/and (2001:264).

Because of this non-hierarchical, non-linear and non-causal structure, meaning in a hypertext is relational. Meaning emerges through the linking of text units and is always already embedded within a wider web of meanings, as it implements the interconnection and cross-referencing of different units or texts (2001:46). As a result, the context of any given text unit is formed by other units, not by the whole of the text, and as such, the purpose of reading is "to reconstruct a network of thematic, causal and temporal relations that bears no necessary isotopy to the system of physical connections" (2001:222).

Hypertext is likened to a spatial metaphor, such as a map (Ryan, 2001:195). Watson (2009:295) argues that "mapping" as a metaphor has become an "ubiquitous and dominant operational metaphor" over the second half of the twentieth century in Western culture. Referring to the "spatial turn" in the presentation of knowledge and thinking, she points out that mapping

has superseded other metaphors derived from other fields; for example, today we rarely "chart our position", "give an outline of...", "offer a perspective on...", "lay out the field of...", and so on; we now prefer to suggest something is being mapped, or mapped out. (2009:295)

This is partly thanks to Deleuze and Guattari's 1987 formulation of space in their *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, and Fredric Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping" as a tool for "understanding and interrogating the present and leading to new analysis and action", an idea which was widely discussed in the 1990s in the context of postmodern theory and theorization and that "certainly contributed to the dissemination of the term in realms outside the strictly geographic" (Watson, 2009:295).

However, the notion of the map as organisational metaphor dates further back, to Kim Levin's 1979 article "Farewell to modernism", in which she suggests that the grid — "formal, abstract, repetitive, flattening, ordering, literal" — served as symbol of modernism, with its preoccupation with form and style. In contrast, postmodernism is symbolised by a map, as it

implies that "boundaries are arbitrary and flexible, and man-made systems such as grids are super-impositions on natural formations" (Watson, 2009:296).

The metaphor of the map in terms of knowledge fields also carries a nuance of relationality, as Watson (2009:295) refers to Robinson and Petchenik's explanation (1976) for the prevalence of the map metaphor outside of geography:

Everything is somewhere, and no matter what other characteristics objects do not share, they *always* share relative location, that is, spatiality; hence the desirability of equating knowledge with space, an intellectual space. (in Watson, 2009:295)

Similarly, in formulations of hypertext, the text is seen as a collection or network of relations, analogies and oppositions that connect textual units, determine patterns of accessibility, and trace formal figures (Ryan, 2001:195). The text "as a whole is a territory, the links are roads, the textual units are destinations, the reader is a traveler or navigator" (Ryan, 2001:218).

Ryan (2001:261) refers to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "smooth" versus "striated" space as stated in their *A thousand plateaus* (1987). Striated space is "organized, hierarchical, and largely static", lines are subordinated to points and exist only to connect one point to another. In contrast, in smooth space, as exemplified by the cyberspace of the Internet, the points are subordinated to the lines between them and each text unit is "less a destination than a point of departure" for another "equally elusive destination"⁶¹ (Ryan, 2001:261).

Smooth space is nomadic (like the sea or the desert, it offers no home, only an experience of its immensity), sprawling, continually expanding (you can always add a link to hypertext), amorphous (you can add links wherever you want), heterogeneous, without clear boundaries, tactile rather than visual (through clicking, the reader grabs segments), and constituted by an "accumulation of proximities". (2001:261)

The proliferation and familiarity of hypertext in everyday consumer culture is closely linked to the way in which intersubjectivity (in the form of interactivity) has permeated metamodernism as aesthetic ideal as well as basis for information processing. At the same time, as the spatial metaphor for texts indicates, the Internet familiarised its users with the notion of a discontinuous territory, a relatively loose net of links and nodes, routes and destinations, with nothing in between — the destinations are the only things of interest, the routes are irrelevant.

⁶¹ This can be read as analogous to Derrida's notion of meaning as infinitely deferred.

Fragmentation, non-hierarchy, non-linearity and non-causality were developed as postmodernist strategies, but the way in which they have been absorbed and accepted into everyday cultural points to the "success" (and consequent demise) of postmodern theories. As Timmer (2011:360) argues with regard to postmodern techniques in metamodernist fiction: instead of being "critically targeted" devices, they have "simply come to function as 'realistic' devices" for a newer generation of authors. In addition, echoing the way in which metamodernism is informed by postmodernism and utilises postmodern strategies to its own ends, the underlying principles for the application of fragmentation, non-hierarchy, non-linearity and non-causality differ between postmodernism and metamodernism. While the former held them to be a critical ideal to illustrate the unstable self-reflexivity of meaning and the endless textuality of the world, in metamodernism these notions serve as evidence of an emphasis on relationality.

In presenting the information of this study, I wanted to preserve and express relationality in a way that would echo its function as organising principle of metamodernism. This meant eschewing a linear, hierarchical and causal interpretation in favour of preserving the different concepts "as is" — unaccomplished, not fixed or stagnant (cf. Bersani & Dutoit, 2004:66). At the same time, I wanted to present the different components as embedded or entangled in a relational network that would emphasise the intersections and interactions between them — the "enacted cuts" as Barad (2014:174) refers to it — without privileging any single one narrative movement or interpretation.

This study therefore consists of twenty-seven text units or concepts, arranged into four thematic clusters: namely "theorising metamodernism", "aspects of metamodernism", "metamodernist theories", and "relationality". The four clusters can be read in any order, as can the concepts that are organised under them.

The intersections between the different interrelated concepts are indicated by means of cross references in square brackets. In this way, the interconnections and correspondences between, and similitude of, the different concepts are indicated without imposing a hierarchical relation between them. Instead, various "feedback loops" (cf. Timmer, 2010:324; Bersani, 2006:169) are constructed between the concepts, allowing meaning to emerge through relation.

In this way, the structure of this study is an attempt to respond to Nayar's call for a metamodernist critical theory

in which the constructed and exclusionary nature of the systems of segregation, difference, purity, coherence and separation... is rejected in favour of mixing, assemblages, assimilation, contamination, feedback loops, information-exchange and mergers. (Nayar, 2014:par. 185)

By favouring a structure that resembles a map or a web and functions interconnectively or rhizomatically through feedback loops, I wanted to resist the epistemological violence of simplification through linear abstraction. Law and Mol (2002), in their introduction to *Complexities: social studies of knowledge practices*, formulate a methodology that would answer to the complexity of metamodernist theory. They warn against attempts that

organize phenomena bewildering in their layered complexity into clean overviews. They make smooth schemes that are more or less linear, with a demonstrative or an argumentative logic in which each event follows the one that came before. (Law & Mol, 2002:par. 141) (italics in original)

Refusing to "make an order — a single — simple — order that expels complexity", Law and Mol offer "a list" as alternative methodology, something which assembles "elements that do not necessarily fit together in some larger scheme", makes "no claims to inclusiveness", and does not provide a history or a model of a hierarchical relations in which its elements should be read (Law & Mol, 2002:par. 195).

Imagine, then, not a grid drawn in ever more detail, with ever more subdivisions; imagine, instead, turning the pages of a sketchbook. Imagine looking at different pictures, one after the other. Each orders and simplifies some part of the world, in one way or another, but what is drawn is always provisional and waits for the next picture, which draws things differently. (Law & Mol, 2002:par. 205)

It is my intention with this study to provide one such a list, a map, an assemblage of different views — pictures or snapshots — of this new and as yet largely unmapped emerging cultural paradigm at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Each component of this list, viewed by itself, is a simplification, but by structuring them together in a relational, non-hierarchical way, I hope to make clear the interconnections between them, thus allowing meaning to emerge always provisionally, always relationally.

conclusion

Listen.

Dead people never stop talking. Maybe because death is not death at all, just a detention after school. You know where you're coming from and you're always returning from it. You know where you're going though you never seem to get there and you're just dead. Dead. It sounds final but it's a word missing an ing.

(Marlon James, *A brief history of seven killings*, 2014:1)

If postmodernism must be associated with socio-economic developments that Jameson described, following Mandel, as late capitalism, metamodernism can be seen to be intertwined with social and economic tendencies that have come to be labelled under the cognomen of global capitalism. The various preconditions for this shift from late capitalism to global capitalism — gradually set in place in preceding decades — all converged and coagulated around, or after, the turn of the millennium. It was in the 2000s, after all, that the maturity and availability of "digital" technologies and "renewable" technologies reached a critical threshold; the millennial generation came of age determined to recreate the world in its own image; the BRICs rose to prominence; the era of cheap oil and fantasies of nuclear abundance gave way to fracking-induced dreams of energy independence; "Project Europe" got derailed; immigration policies and multicultural ideals backlashed in the midst of a revival of conservative nationalism; US hegemony declined; the Arab Spring toppled many a dictator that had long served as a puppet for Western interests; bad debts became, finally and inevitably, as much a problem for the First World as it always has been for the Third World; and the financial crises inaugurated yet another round of neoliberalization (this time by means of austerity measures of all sorts), exposing and deepening the institutionalized drive towards economic inequality and ecological disaster. (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:56-57)

The postmodern narrative that heralded the end of history, marked by the triumph of Western capitalism, the universal embrace of liberal democracy, and the pinnacle of social progress (Oxford dictionary of critical theory, 2010), turned out to have been misleading — if not in fact a rather cruel joke. This narrative did not account for or predict the global challenges of the twenty-first century. What is more, if the global landscape facing us today is the result of social and economic tendencies that have been set in place decades ago

during the bloom of postmodernism, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the same forces that animated the postmodern epoch are responsible for the current state of events.

Moreover, it transpired that postmodernist critical theory — at least in the way it became consolidated in cultural and literary criticism — does not provide any tools capable of engaging with the current predicament. In its most dominant form, postmodernism busied itself with developing methods to criticise, expose, destabilise, undermine, and deconstruct power structures. It had the laudable aim of making way for the Other who had been silenced for too long by the grand narratives of modernism. Unfortunately, by focusing all of its energy on dismantling oppressive systems of signification, postmodernism rendered itself incapable of attending to, engaging with, and responding to this Other (cf. Geddes, 2007:77). In this sense, postmodernism's strategies ultimately proved to be self-consuming. As a project to deconstruct grand narratives, it neglected the actual construction of any alternative relational structure. Sarcasm, cynicism, and nihilism may be well suited to demolish uneven power hierarchies, but they lack the capacity for affective involvement and social responsibility.

At the beginning of the new millennium, culture and the arts are acutely aware of the deficiency in social engagement and responsibility — the vacuum left by postmodernism.

Susan Sontag, in her essay "At the same time... (the novelist and moral reasoning)", argues for the writer as "moral agent" (2005:7) who has an incontrovertible responsibility to literature and to society (2005:6). Because "even now, even now, literature remains one of our principal modes of understanding" (2005:6), the writer of great fiction must create a new world through "vivid forms" and in language that

*responds to a world, the world the writer shares with other people, but is unknown or mis-known by still more people, confined in *their* worlds...* (2005:6)

Tasked with the responsibility to respond to the world, the writer

by writing truthfully about the society in which she or he lives, cannot help but evoke (if only by their absence) the better standards of justice and of truthfulness which we have a right (some would say the duty) to militate for in the necessarily imperfect societies in which we live. (Sontag, 2005:6-7)

Corresponding to Sontag's call for responsibility and the evocation of justice and truthfulness, contemporary literature is responding to the cultural double-bind of

postmodernism — the overwhelming global challenges brought about by the sociocultural forces that animated postmodernism, and an ineffectual body of critical theories unequipped to engage with these challenges — with an undeniably ethical turn.

In a shift from deconstructive practices, metamodernist fiction emerges around moral and ethical impulses of reconstruction. In its response to the world, it draws on and construes affective structures of intersubjective relations, an affirmation of independently existing reality, a revival of myth, universal and transcendental values, and faith in optimistic formulations of commonality.

This turn indicates a radical change in the way that literature views itself. In contrast to modernist formalism that held up art for art's sake, and postmodernist playfulness and irony that rendered art as spectacle, metamodernism sees a return to a belief in the social function of art, as indicated by Sontag (2005).

The challenge for metamodernist fiction in particular lies in the tension between modernist optimism and postmodernist cynicism in its response to the challenges of the contemporary world. On the one hand, there is a pervasive suspicion in contemporary criticism that metamodernist literature espouses naivety, escapism, and social disengagement in the form of nostalgia and sentimentalism as it returns to values of modernism (see the responses of Amian, 2008:180; Kirby, 2009:18,20; Visagie, 2010:109; Toth & Brooks, 2007:8; Timmer, 2010:52; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2010:9). On the other hand, there is a resigned feeling that, faced with the realities of a globalised world, the only possible response is nihilism, expressed in the form of literary dystopia (see West-Pavlov, 2014; compare also Kirby, 2009:18; Barendse, 2013; Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:57).

Metamodernist fiction navigates these two impulses by inhabiting an in-between space between optimism and nihilism — what Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010:5) call being "inspired by a modern naïveté yet informed by postmodern skepticism" in order to "consciously" commit "itself to an impossible possibility". This is expressed in metamodernist fiction as a "play of possibilities", as Van Schalkwyk (2009:96) argues with reference to Ricoeur, with fiction drawing on the darkness of the contemporary moment to kindle "a true desire for, and a renewed appreciation of, light, illumination, hope, and good".

Metamodernism's navigation of optimism and nihilism is expressed in its belief in the power of fiction, a belief that hinges on the interrelated yet paradoxical notions of art as comfort and art as moral responsibility. Metamodernist fiction believes it has the potential to comfort, to

console and to provide solace — it is art as "social salvation" (Vermeulen & Van den Akker, 2015:59). It also believes in its moral responsibility to ethically engage with and respond to the world — it is art as "vehicle for spiritual truth" (Maltby, 2007:44). Because metamodernist fiction offers salvation, it does not allow itself to disintegrate into unconstructive nihilism. Because it is morally responsible, it does not escape into the sedation of sentimental comfort.

This insistence on functioning in a social, ethical, and moral way demands of metamodernist literature to be intersubjectively and affectively oriented. Metamodernist fiction activates author-reader and text-reader relations in a dialogic process of exchange, as part of its reconstruction of a communal belief in a shared reality. Intersubjective communication is part of the aesthetic as well as ethical project of metamodernism — the metamodernist artist or theorist has the responsibility to respond to the Other, to enter in a relationship of reciprocity, exchange, and mutual affectedness.

These aesthetic and ethical impulses signify relationality as the underlying organising principle of metamodernism. A relational recognition of similitude — between self and other, subject and object, human and non-human — responds to the realities of a changed globalised world that is characterised by greater connection and proximity than before. It fulfils the ethical need in this globalised world for a social model that is not determined in terms of difference, division, and binaries.

A relational turn indicates a renewed emphasis on ontology. Postmodernism's self-reflexive epistemological frameworks of textuality and linguistic practises are no longer politically or socially effective, as they do not have the capacity to respond to the ethical challenges facing the globalised world of the twenty-first century. The ethical, political, social, and environmental commitments necessitated by the current global situation are contingent on ontological engagement.

A relational understanding of subjectivity entails that the dispersal of subjecthood opens the subject to connections with everything in existence, thus immersing it in a relational network of connections. In this way, the fragmentation of postmodernism is navigated without regressing to the trite humanism of modernism. The subject's embeddedness in a relational network activates metamodernism's ethical impulse — and is simultaneously its response to the ethical imperative. Because everything is connected, everyone shares the same vulnerability, and because everyone is equally vulnerable, everyone has a moral

responsibility towards everyone else. In this, metamodernism's relational mode of being responds to the solipsism, detachment, and social disengagement of postmodernism.

Metamodernism's relational underpinnings manifest in the aspects, or themes, emerging in metamodernist fiction. Characterised by social engagement and commitment, metamodernism emphasises affective structures and embodied experiences in order to restructure meaningful intersubjective relations around responsiveness to the Other. These intersubjective structures enable as well as necessitate a renewed faith in the possibility of authenticity (the true and accurate expression of an inner self), and sincerity (the ability to engage meaningfully in intersubjective communication). Authenticity is possible because the subject is no longer a deconstructed, unstable product of discourse, but has been affectively restructured through meaningful intersubjectivity; and the possibility of authentic expression is at the same time that which makes meaningful intersubjectivity possible. Similarly, sincerity is possible because of a stronger sense of social commitment that acknowledges the potential for meaningful intersubjectivity; and intersubjective communication hinges on sincere expressions that are not contingent on the impossibility of fixed meaning (for example as irony is).

The formulation of relational intersubjectivity holds the promise that the self can be integrated into a communal sense of something beyond the here and the now, reactivating notions of transcendental and universal values. The promise of a deeper, universal, connective truth gives rise to a renewed sense of enchantment, wonder, the mysterious and spiritual. Apart from a renewed mythic awareness, this gives rise to a metamodernist sense of optimism — the belief in the possibility of moving beyond postmodernism's nihilistic sense of an end into a future that is as yet new and unformed, and can be imagined alternatively.

Despite notions of transcendence and a deeper truth, metamodernist myth and optimism, as they are made possible by a relational understanding of being, have their basis in the ontological turn. Metamodernist myth engages with the immediacy of the lived world as it is and finds wonder in the everyday and the mundane. Metamodernist optimism is only possible through an engagement with the physical and material reality of the world, as it imagines the future refracted through the realities of the present global world. In this, myth and optimism are inseparable from a metamodernist formulation of realism.

As part of the ethical imperative to respond to global challenges, metamodernism demands an engagement with reality as it is. Relationally speaking, a recommitment to the world as existing objectively and independently is already an ethical imperative, as it liberates the

world from the limits of textual construction and acknowledges it as more than just a product of human reason, interpretation, or signification systems. At the same time, an acknowledgment of the material existence of the world outside of language is necessary for a sense of shared, communal meaning.

These characteristics of metamodernism as a critical project that operates relationally on the intersection between ethical concerns, ontology or realism, and (inter)subjectivity, are apparent in three sets of theories that have risen to prominence in the humanities and social sciences: affect theory, chaos theory, and posthumanism. Responding to the ethical challenges of a globalised world, these theories activate a relational understanding of being by focusing on the ontological correspondences and embodied affective structures that form the social and material environment. At the same time, it is precisely the acknowledgment of the relational interconnections between everything in the social and material world that necessitates an ethical responsibility.

The novels *A tale for the time being* (Ruth Ozeki, 2013), *A brief history of seven killings* (Marlon James, 2014), *Buys* (Willem Anker, 2014) and *The Sympathizer* (Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015) are examples of recent fiction that answer to the ethical demands of metamodernism. While all four these novels can be read as historical fiction, they embed themselves within larger global discourses that span time as well as space to respond to themes of universal humanity. In addition, all four these novels draw on notions of ontology and subjectivity and express this intersection in a relational manner in order to provide and propose a metamodernist ethical model.

A tale for the time being (2013) constructs reality as a relational network, spanning the whole of the planet and the whole of its history. By providing an entangled viewpoint — founded in a relational, ontological understanding of being — the narrative resists a distanced, detached epistemological interpretation of world events. Instead, it provides a moral model for acting in a globalised world by emphasising the consequences any small act by any individual can have, and by framing the intimate, almost domestic stories of Nao and Ruth within the global context that spans from WWII to the terror attacks of 9/11 and the possibility of global war. The ethical implication of an interrelated network, affected and affecting each component, is that every individual has the moral responsibility to everyone and everything else in existence.

Stylistically, *A tale for the time being* achieves this ethical claim by constructing a dynamic reader/writer and reader/text relation that functions dialogically. By activating an

intersubjective reading position, the novel makes a direct ethical demand on the reader. At the same time, it affirms the power of literature —writing as well as reading it — to elicit an emotional response and affect moral change.

Marlon James's *A brief history of seven killings* (2014) also looks at how a single event can have far-reaching consequences that span time and space. In this way, the narrative explores the interrelatedness of subjectivity. It constructs a frame for subjectivity that is not founded on epistemological violence — reducing the other to a construct of the subject's gaze or interpretation — but that presupposes a centralised, coherent subject, self-determining and autonomous, expressive of an internalised reality, who is nonetheless always already immersed in an intersubjective network of relations where everyone is affected and affecting everyone else. In this way, *A brief history* provides an ethical model for subjectivity: a way of allowing the subject to be as it is, uninjured by interpretative impositions, unknowable in the full epistemological sense, yet able to be apprehended affectively and responded to in a network of shared meaning.

In terms of style, *A brief history* stands as an example of how metamodernism draws on both modernism and postmodernism. By using a structure reminiscent of modernist classics as well as postmodern strategies of spectacle, the novel constructs an in-between state that resists the relativising overemphasis on humanism of modernism as well as the affective lack of a postmodern interplay of signifiers. The formal experimentation of a modernist polyphonic structure enables the novel to focus on the characters and their experiences rather than an external plot, but by embedding the narrative within the global history and events of two decades, it subverts the solipsistic effect of modernism's stream of consciousness in favour of a wider and more universal impact.

Buy's (2014) subverts the traditional narratives of civilisation in order to provide a different and more affective model of engaging with the Other, whether human or animal. By affectively structuring an intersubjective reading position through a demand on bodily affects, the narrative confronts the reader with his/her own ethical and moral responses regarding the suffering of others. Placing this confrontation in a historical framework — moreover one that resists the narrative of civilisation as one of inevitable progress and evolution — the contemporary reader is also forced to reflect on his/her position in terms of history, the ways in which injustices of the past inform the present. *Buy's* undoes the hierarchy of self and other and rejects the centrality of the human in narratives of cultural progress and civilisation. It resists an epistemological, detached view on history, and through its relational

understanding of subject/object categories, it affectively constructs an ethical model that recognises the other as subject.

The Sympathizer (2015) provides an ethical model for representation in an era of hypermediation. By insisting on the material existence of reality as ontologically independent and the consequent possibility of accurate representation, it provides a way to alternatively imagine the future independent from the nihilistic vision of postmodern ideology. Indicating the impossible-possible space beyond the accepted binaries of capitalism/communism and globalism/nationalism, the narrative contains the metamodernist promise of a possible alternative in an ethical response to the global world today where neoliberal systems seem poised to collapse and fascism is as big a threat as terrorism. This optimism is contingent on a relational understanding of subjectivity, as the dispersal of subjecthood and the dissolution of individualism are necessary to enable an affective restructuring in terms of connectedness that can make a differently imagined future beyond the constraints of ideological extremes possible.

It is clear, based on post-millennial fiction's responses to the realities of the contemporary, globalised world, that certain aesthetic properties are emerging as part of a critical project that can no longer be described as postmodern. The name by which this new project will be known will be conclusively decided in the following decades, but it is becoming apparent that it is centred around three interrelated impulses — an ethical imperative, a renewed focus on ontology, and a restructuring of subjectivity — that are structured along relationality as organising principle.

This critical project — metamodernism, as it might be called — is a reaction to and rejection of postmodernism. It revives aspects of modernism, but is informed and tempered by the lessons of postmodernism and presented in a renewed form. As such, metamodernism continues both a modernist and postmodernist project, thus carrying the past and present into the future. It indicates a new temporality: situated after "the end of history", metamodernism has to negotiate the teleological impulse that postmodernism inherited from modernism despite its overt disavowal of such teleology.

Relationally speaking, past and present are analogous in metamodernism, defying a causal, linear interpretation of history: metamodernism does not completely reject the past, which is always already present, just as the present is immanent. Embodying a heterochronic space, metamodernism is the return and continuation of a distant past (modernism), informed by the

present that is already being overtaken (postmodernism) to indicate a future (metamodernism) that is as much a return as a renewal.

The terrain of metamodernism is still relatively uncharted, and it has not yet been sufficiently consolidated in academic or popular discourses. As this study has shown, scholars are currently grappling with its issues, approaching it from different angles and providing viewpoints on different aspects of it. In my attempt to contribute to this discourse, I have identified the need to chart the connections between all these different voices and ideas, to bring to light the underlying structure of the intersections and interrelations between the different discussions, in order to present a clearer vision of the shape that metamodernism is taking.

As this study has shown, metamodernism is a response to a contemporary reality that is marked by global interrelations and proximities. Because of this, a methodology that maps metamodernism should preserve these interrelations. Just as affect theory, chaos theory and posthumanism are construed in a self-conscious interdisciplinary way in order to deal with the new complexities of the contemporary world, a metamodernist methodology needs to reflect the complexities of a new set of interrelated critical impulses and their underlying relational organisation. Following metamodernism's turn to ontology, a metamodernist methodology must embody an embedded perspective in a network of relations — resisting the detached viewpoint of an epistemological framework based on linear, causal, deterministic interpretation, and preserving the relational structure of metamodernism as a network of correspondences.

In mapping what I believe to be the underlying structure of intersections around which metamodernism is emerging, I hope to provide an approximation of the direction in which we are headed. Although, to borrow Marlon James's words, metamodernism might know where it's going, but it never seems to get there, just as it knows where it is coming from and are always just returning from it. It sounds final but it is a word missing an "ing".

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