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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

MIRANDA JULY'S WORKS: A METAMODERN READING

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ABSTRACT

MIRANDA JULY'S WORKS: A METAMODERN READING

EDA CENİK

This dissertation is a study that employs a recent cultural theory approach called "metamodernism" to analyze several works by Miranda July – a contemporary American woman writer – in an effort to capture the latest developments in the cultural theory scene as represented in a popular versatile artist's oeuvre. July's works that are discussed in this work include her short story collection *No one Belongs Here More Than You*, her monograph *It Chooses You* and two feature movies *Me and You and Everyone We Know* and *The Future.* Metamodernism is claimed to incorporate some features of the postmodern perspective in addition to the new sensibilities it has introduced. Thus, throughout this dissertation, there will be references to postmodernism. Since metamodernism differs from postmodernism particularly with regard to its view on subjectivity, the subjects in July's works are examined in this work through their relationships with others and their own self. Also, the central means of analysis applied in metamodern approaches to fiction is to do with an oscillation between opposite ends. Therefore, to decipher how July asks the recipient of her art to connect to and keep some distance from her characters at the same time, some ordinary affect theory works – to capture the tonal shift towards hope in fiction – as well as the estrangement tools at play will be analyzed.

Keywords: Metamodernism, Miranda July, attachment, affect theory

ÖZ

MIRANDA JULY ESERLERİ: METAMODERN BİR OKUMA

EDA CENİK

Bu tez, Amerikalı kadın yazar Miranda July'ın bazı eserlerini (öykü kitabı *No one Belongs Here More Than You*, anı kitabı *It Chooses You*, filmleri *Me and You and Everyone We Know* ve *The Future)* 2010 yılında Timotheus Vermeulen ve Robin van den Akker tarafından geliştirilen "metamodernizm" kavramı aracılığıyla okuma denemesidir. Metamodern olarak addedilen çalışmalarda ağırlığı hissedilen özellik, çeşitli uçlar arasında salınarak eseri okuyan/izleyen kişide farklı duygulanım durumlarına sebep olan bir tavırdır. Metamodernizm kendisinden önce gelen postmodernizmden de beslendiği için tezin her bölümünde bu kurama atıf yapılacaktır. Tezin bir bölümü, metamodern öznelerin ilişkileri üzerinden nasıl kurulduklarını tartışmak üzere ilişkisel psikanaliz kuramından faydalanarak July'ın öykü ve filmlerindeki karakterlerin bu bağlamdaki analizine ayrılmıştır. Metamodernizmin en belirgin özelliklerinden bir diğeri de sanat eserinin alıcısı ile karakterler arasında bir tarafıyla mesafeli, diğer yandan pozitif duygulanım durumlarına yol açan bir ilişki kurdurmasıdır. Bu ilişki tezin bir başka bölümünde incelenmiş, July'ın bu ilişkiyi sağlarken kullandığı stratejiler de aynı bölümde analiz edilmiştir. Metamodernizm olarak adlandırılan bu görece yeni kültürel araştırma yaklaşımı aracılığıyla, değişmekte olduğu gözlemlenen kültürel arka plan hakkında da çıkarımlar yapılması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Metamodernizm, Miranda July, duygulanım teorisi, ilişkisel psikanaliz

PREFACE

This dissertation can be considered as an effort to read a contemporary American artist's works through tools and strategies that are based on what writings on metamodernism has suggested so far. Miranda July's works have already been labelled metamodern by several theorists working in the field; nevertheless, those articles were usually dedicated to explaining the metamodern approach thereby making brief notes on July's works. Therefore, this thesis aims to offer a more thorough analysis on how her works can be regarded metamodern by introducing the concepts associated with metamodernism and applying them on July's stories and movies. Owing to the fact that it is a relatively new approach, the greatest challenge was to reach enough resources written on the subject. However, since I first started working on this project, there has been an increase in the number of publications in the field.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Prof. Hürriyet Özden Sözalan, who has never given up on me even when I myself was not really sure about where this path would take me. I am also indebted to the other members of the academic community in our department at İstanbul Üniversitesi; especially Prof. Hasine Şen Karadeniz and Kudret Nezir Yunusoğlu, whose classes equipped me with a perspective to approach works of art. That was what I needed in and expected from this program as a graduate of translation studies who is interested in literary translation.

Last but by no means least, even though I probably cannot find the right words, I still want to express my gratitude to my family and best friends, who have always stood beside me during this intellectually satisfying as well as painstaking journey. My dearest mother has the greatest role in ingraining this desire and courage into me to follow my inner voice. I am very lucky to have Görkem by my side; my love and best friend, who has put up with me during this incredibly stressful adventure in my life. I also owe Irmak, my childhood and oldest friend, many thanks for never leaving me alone; even when she is in Germany and expecting a baby, the newest member of our family. Thank you all, this journey would not be possible without you.

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INTRODUCTION

THE EFFECTS OF POSTMODERNISM ARE VANISHING

Miranda July is a versatile artist from Portland, the USA, who has several video works, two feature movies, a novel, a short story collection, internet projects, applications as well as exhibitions. She has attracted a lot of attention with her distinct style and is critically-acclaimed. Her work is usually centered on themes such as sexuality, disconnection, individuation, creativity in an everyday setting usually involving "outsiders" of the society – poor people, queers, people from different races. This quality leads her works to be associated with the independent art productions rather than the mainstream. Kathleen A. McHugh, for example, assigned her work the role of the exemplar in indie film sphere on the grounds that July is communally-styled, multi-medial, understands filmmaking through social networking and works on intimacy in the internet age, all of which are ascribed to the new trends in indie filmmaking. (McHugh, 2016)

July's oeuvre is varied and consists of works created in different means of media, but for the purposes of the present study, only her short stories in *No one Belongs Here More than You* (2007), her monograph *It Chooses You* (2011) and the movies *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) and *The Future* (2011) will be analyzed here. This decision was made both to be able to discuss them thematically and have the opportunity to allocate enough space for each of them. July's debut feature, *Me and You and Everyone We Know,* won a great deal of public attention when it got the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. During the creation process of the second feature, *The Future*, July suffers from a creative constipation and overcomes it by meeting owners of advertisements for second-hand goods published in a local gazette. In *It Chooses You*, along with artistic photographs, July shares anecdotes from her interviews with the sellers and tells the story of how she overcame her writer's block. *No one Belongs Here More than You* is a collection of short stories all, except

for two, written from the point of view of the first person narrator, which makes them sound profoundly personal.

As for what makes July's aforementioned works distinctive, the way she handles disconnection, the quest for intimacy and "socially awkward" characters outweigh the other extraordinary features of her fictional works. She is known especially for her approach to the socially disadvantaged characters and described as an artist "[…] who has focused a considerable amount of her attention as a writer and multimedia artist on the not-so-accepted and frequently awkward in contemporary America" (Balestrini, 2015: 138). The reason why her approach is highlighted in different studies is that even though such characters are usually depicted only as a source for laughter, July's characters require empathy to be understood and at the same time find a way to make the recipient uncomfortable somehow drawing attention to their artificiality, usually by virtue of laughter.

Because of the fact that the other common denominator for her works in different media is the focus on communication, the concept of "relationality" is significant in understanding July's works; thus it will be of use throughout one chapter of this work. The theory of relationality, basically, zeroes in on how relationships play an important role in the establishment of a subject. Most characters in July's fictional world are transformed as a result of their encounters with others or through reflections on themselves. At that point, the difference between the metamodern and postmodern look on subjectivity will also be explained to some extent.

Affect theory is also highly relevant as far as July's works are concerned, which is why a whole chapter is allocated for an analysis drawing on affects. Some studies in the field can be applied to her works to pin down how the recipient feels when faced with her art. What is of interest to the recipient of her movies and stories is that there is an oscillating call for various affects that would not normally be expected to co-exist. Positive and negative affects take turns to achieve a balance on the recipient's reactions, one end being empathy while the other is keeping their critical eye open. To this end, this dissertation intends to explain how July manages to put these two different extremities in use in her artworks through certain affect theorists' writings.

Affect theory will be beneficial in explaining how the call for empathy is first built and then undermined to some extent by estrangement strategies. I will attempt at analyzing these works of art focusing on the interaction between positive and negative affects.

Since the analytical tools applied in this study for the analysis of July's works are from affect theory and relational theory, a new approach that makes use of these two theories and reaches beyond them will be introduced. This new approach to works of art is called "metamodernism"; it is proposed as an alternative to label the post-postmodern era that started at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In spite of the fact that the term has been used by several theorists in different senses, all of the usages of the term in the present study are based on the sense that two Dutch thinkers, van den Akker and Vermeulen, have loaded it with. They call it a sensibility, a structure of feeling rather than an art movement. The concept oscillation is often referred to when the idea that metamodernism incorporates opposite ends is considered. The first chapter will be on the different usages of the term and the most recent form it got in light of the discussions in the field. The metamodern sensibility is built on different foundations, the most relevant ones being modernism and postmodernism. It reconciles modernism with postmodernism in a sense and in this work this reconciliation will especially be discussed in relation with subjectivity.

Because postmodernism was the latest dominant theory in the cultural theory scene, metamodernism has been compared to it very often and some strategies prevailing during postmodern times are also perceived in the metamodern atmosphere; thus, a look at the current situation of postmodern theory will be needed to set the background.

Postmodernism has been the main tool for us to make sense of the world since the demise of modernism. Modernism fell short of expectations when it came to helping explain the new age that was surrounded by major changes to technology, economy and media. Truth with a capital T became a thing of the past whereas fiction was thought to haunt every narrative human beings had ever created, including the grand narratives. A certain level of irony and playfulness accompanied all statements that were to be hurled into the atmosphere; it became apparent we could never put forth

what we actually had in mind; hence the irony. What set off as an architectural style dominated the way social sciences viewed the world as of 1950s. It was the new way of reading everything around us and it is highly probable that there will be no way back; postmodernism cannot be undone even if the climate is changing one more time. The subjects of current changes are, in a way, pushed to interpret the age they live in with a residue of the postmodern thought in the background.

The turn of the century elicited a bunch of questions in regard to the periodization of postmodernist works of art given critics could finally address twentieth century literature from a certain temporal distance. Some scholars published their ideas in a joint symposium paper in 2001 to discuss how to categorize twentieth century literature in the new century: whether to regard it as contemporary, postmodern or something new and whether to tread in the footsteps of critics having assessed works according to some pre-determined criteria with reference to modernist or postmodernist traits. An ambiguity as to the future of literary criticism is detectable in the papers by the panelists of this symposium. For example, John Burt emphasizes the unpredictability of the new century's most prominent literary theory saying even though "esoteric forms" lost their popularity, there was a case where they had been in the same condition; yet, they came back from the dead (2001: 15).

In 2003, another collection of essays rekindled the heated debates as to the place of postmodernism in the new century. Klaus Stierstorfer recruited essays on postmodernism in an attempt to revive the discussions in the field. The book he edited is worthy of attention in that it incorporated several viewpoints on the fate and current state of postmodernism at that time. The omen that led him to think a new phase was beginning for postmodernism was the subtitles such as "A History" added to the books on the subject, as he explains in the introduction part of the book. To him, that was a sign that suggested postmodernism finally came to stand as an "entity", something that can be archived (2003: 1).

When the attitudes of the contributors to the book are to be taken as representative of the general atmosphere of the time, they can be mentioned here counting on Stierstorfer's categorization. The first group consists of those who read postmodernism with sensitivities belonging mainly to modernism. The second

approach is ascribing new meanings to old concepts and thereby reading postmodernism under a new light. As for the third, he says it is too early to make statements about what is to emerge from the ashes of this theory; yet, there are essays in the collection struggling to see "beyond postmodernism", the expression after which the collection is named. Stierstorfer reconciles the essays in these three categories by revealing their common denominator:

> Postmodernism as a whole may have become too blunt a tool to be useful in debating many of the most hotly contested issues today. Thus, while the umbrella concept may be less frequently invoked, many of the central issues it once automatically subsumed seem as important and contentious as ever. (2003: 9)

He then goes on to offer an explanation for the need to tackle these central issues drawing on other tools instead of postmodernism. The most important factor has something to do with the need to make up with some sort of ethics and identities. This rough explanation is actually what puts the discussions about the new state of postmodernism into a frame.

One of the pieces Stierstorfer places under the title "Beyond Postmodernism" is an essay by Ihab Hassan, who is known as one of the most famous theorists of postmodernism. Hassan in his article "After Postmodernism" starts off from an outline of what postmodernism actually meant before moving on to analyze the new theoretical climate. There he describes postmodernism as:

> […] [A] collective interpretation of an age. More than an artistic style or historical trend, more than a personal sensibility or Zeitgeist, postmodernism is a hermeneutic device, a habit of interpretation, a way of reading all our signs under the mandate of misprision. I simply mean that we now see the world through postmodern-tinted glasses. (Hassan, 2003: 305)

He admits postmodernism is still here but the reason why he is regarded by Stierstorfer as a theorist trying to see beyond postmodernism is that he calls for new relations that host "trust" as an indispensable element. And he also heralds the return to realism, since his definition of trust brings with itself paying attention to the outside world. Still, this is not a regular realism; he calls it "fiduciary realism". He considers

“falsity and pretence” opposite to trust. (**Ibid.**, p. 210) His insistence on trust and love can be observed in works by metamodern scholars, too.

Just like Hassan, Jose Lopez and Garry Potter, in their *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism,* written at the very beginning of the twenty first century, also assert that postmodernism somehow continues, nevertheless, they have no second-thoughts about its falling out of favor today:

> [T]he single most significant fact about postmodernism as an intellectual phenomenon in the year two thousand is this: it is in a state of decline! It lingers on, its influence for good or ill continues, but postmodernism has 'gone out of fashion'. Some academics in reading the above may feel that this is a premature announcement. However, what is indisputable today is that all of postmodernism's most radical propositions no longer seem outrageous; most now have a cliched ring to them. (2001: 4)

Their argument is that postmodernism says nothing new and surprising today and their solution is resorting to realism, too, but a realism equipped with some wisdom resulting from having witnessed the reign of postmodernism. When did this “hermeneutic device”, as Hassan called postmodernism, fail to live up to expectations? Toth chose realism as the savior, as well and he even set an approximate date for the end, maybe not of postmodernism but of its popularity: mid-1980s (Toth, 2010: 2). As for postmodernism itself, he announces that it persists, which places him in the same position as Hassan, Potter and Lopez towards the new role it assumes (**Ibid**.). Toth contends that it is both continuous and discontinuous with modernism and that what comes after postmodernism has the same relationship with it. From his point of view, each epistemological shift is a kind of reconfiguration, thereby incorporating the “specter” of the previous cultural dominant and having idiosyncratic features at the same time. To him, it goes without saying that the successor of postmodernism, which he calls “neo-realism”, carries some of its characteristics. Still, as a successor, this new gesture had the opportunity to reflect upon the faults that led postmodernism to lose its dominance and therefore to establish itself as a better version of it (2010: 17). This also applies to the metamodern approach; the existence of remnants from postmodernist thought in metamodern theory is overtly stated in introductory essays on it.

There are a good number of theorists who list explanations for the shift towards a new cultural theory to encompass holistic methods to read fictional works. At first glance, the rise of realism against the playful postmodernism suggests a tendency to account for its failure with a focus on individualism, solipsism and an insistence on staying esoteric and closed. Yet, Toth argues, the reason why it got out of control was that it was too public, hegemonic and utopian despite setting off to be the opposite. (2010: 117)

Jeremy Green also acknowledges the retreat of this once-popular movement: "What once seemed a new and exciting way of looking at problems has now been absorbed to a greater or lesser extent." (2005: 24) However, there is more to it; postmodernism has not just disappeared from the scene.:

> To say, however, that postmodernism has come to an end, or that the impulses that encouraged the formulation of the concept in the first place are now played out, entails a return to earlier modes and concerns. In this case, the way forward-beyond postmodernism-turns out to look very much like the way back-back to the less contentious issues and paradigms that postmodernism supposedly destroyed. This is not a return to modernism, but an attempt to bypass the formal challenges that link postmodernism to modernism, to return to transparency and representation, or put aside, once and for all, radical innovation and new stylistic practices. (Green, 2005: 24)

Green does not think postmodernism is replaced by something new; he just divides it into two periods and calls the recent one late-postmodernism. His approach assigns postmodernism to the duty to deal with formal challenges and come out being more transparent. Hassan and Green have a similar stance at that level.

So far I have mostly discussed different viewpoints on the developments after postmodernism lost its power to relate to the contemporary issues; although there are various points about the route it followed, we can infer based on the arguments here that there is strong consensus that its grip on the contemporary critical theories is getting loose. As to what is going to fill in the massive place it has occupied so far, there are countless alternatives being proposed such as "digimodernism", "post-postmodernism", "altermodernism" etc. – some of which will be presented in more detail in the first chapter. Yet, the theory that will be applied to capture the recent

trends in cultural criticism as represented in Miranda July's works is metamodernism, as it was explained above.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS TO COME AFTER POSTMODERNISM?

1.1 Which Theory is Going to Take Over the Watch?

Now that obituaries of postmodernism have started to appear – some examples of which I have quoted in the introduction – it seems to be the right time to have a look at the most popular alternatives. The creators of some of the alternatives here later worked with the theorists of metamodernism, the theory that will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. Although there are several theorists that claim some sort of realism will prevail again, I will not discuss realism here again as it is not an entirely new ground for the readers of our time.

I am going to talk about these relatively new approaches following a chronological order, which makes "Performatism" the first one. It is developed by Raoul Eshelman; this theory was first introduced in an article (Eshelman, 2000) and then came other articles on the issue until he decided to explain it in more detail in a book by the same name (Eshelman, 2008).

Eshelman puts his argument in a more straightforward way in the articles, building up the subject in several pieces. He does not only introduce this aesthetic approach but he also offers his explanation for the reason lying behind the turn in question: exhaustion of postmodern devices. Therefore, he recommends a new perspective to save the subject from the trouble of losing his/her way while tracing a sign to find some meaning in postmodernism. His solution is performance as a means to depict the subject and sign as holistic units that do not depend on specific contexts. This gesture is called "performatist" since it forces the reader or observer to assume a certain role when confronted by a work that should be evaluated in its own terms (2000).

In his article "After Postmodernism: Performatism in Literature", published after he presented the overall picture of his approach, he specifically turns to the narrative strategy applied to performatist texts. A performatist text resists

deconstruction, which is associated with postmodernism, by overtly acknowledging its illusory structure at the very beginning. What matters is being aware of this "willful" self-deceit and still connecting with the character and believing in the potential of the story dug up by beauty and faith. Therefore, Eshelman classifies this approach as an aesthetic one rather than an epistemological one (Eshelman: 2005/2006).

After he made a breakthrough with his articles, Eshelman elaborated on his ideas collecting everything in a book. He starts the book by playing up the importance of "frame" in a performatist work of art; it keeps the readers inside the boundaries of the text and asks them to suspend their disbelief within those boundaries while being still aware of this force that make them do so. He designates two different frames: inner frame and outer frame that together constitute a tool called "double framing". The relation between these two frames determines whether what the creator imposed on us in the outer frame was actually meant or not. Such an idea of frame differentiates performatism from postmodernism by separating the work from real life. Yet, despite all their differences, it is known that postmodernism has its share in the way performatism interprets a work since it did happen and it came before. Thanks to postmodernism, we question all requests that require us to have faith in a story since all stories are constructed, thus they are pieces of fiction. Nonetheless, performatism suggests, we can still believe in them without breaking their frame and making them leak into the outside world. (Eshelman, 2008)

Eshelman analyzes performatism by breaking it into its essential pieces such as the plot, narrative structure, and its approach to gender issues. As for the plot, he observes that the most common gestures applied to performatist works are playing God, trying to escape from a frame, transcending through self-sacrifice and returning to the Father, all of which serve to support the "monist" structure of the text. The reason why performatist narratives are referred to as monist is that the reader has no other option but to accept them as a whole. (**Ibid**.)

All in all, it can be said that Eshelman's approach represents something bigger than itself; it encompasses the main characteristic the new cultural environment brought for us. He says:

> [T]he new epoch works first and foremost on an aesthetic, identificatory level, to create an attitude of beautiful belief, and not on a cognitive, critical one. If the performance is successful, then the reader too will identify with it more or less involuntarily – even if he or she still remains incredulous about its basic premises. The reader is 'framed' in such a way that belief trumps cognition. (2008: 12)

These remarks are key to interpreting the climate that can be perceived now in that it epitomizes the tendency to focus on beauty, belief – which is trust in Ihab Hassan's case – and identification with the characters involved in the story.

The other potential candidate for postmodernism's throne is Digimodernism, which was developed by Alan Kirby. I have already mentioned some of Kirby's ideas about the road that made us go past postmodernism and reach digimodernism. His version of the developments leading us here start when postmodernism appeared in works that addressed children and it got even worse, when it lost their favor too – as seen clearly in the example of *Shrek 2.* His next stop is the art movements – Dogme 95, the Stuckists and New Puritans – which came into the picture with a criticism of postmodernism or in some cases what it stands for. Digimodernism is not reckoned on their side considering it sprang from a historical change – namely, the change in textuality and prevalence of digitization. He points out that they might not have killed postmodernism by themselves but they still represented a certain demand for change to that effect, which ultimately called for post-theory era to come complete the deed. He calls it post-theory era only because of the general assumption that theory is not as promising as it used to be and since postmodernism there has not been an all-encompassing theory on the horizon, which causes the speculations about its death. Yet, Kirby explains, what went extinct is actually cultural postmodernism. Kirby's stance on philosophical postmodernism's gradual disappearance is one that foregrounds "absorption" rather than extinction. He thinks it is not possible for a new theory to function as if postmodernism never happened; it is just absorbed and therefore will go on existing as a remnant in the new popular theory. So, digimodernism starts where postmodernism left. (Kirby, 2009)

According to Kirby, what renders digimodernism so different is actually the textuality it brings into our lives. What he means is that until digimodernist texts, even

though they could interpret the text and therefore have a share in the outcome to some extent, readers were not an active element in the process of text-forming. The main features of digimodernist texts are listed by Kirby as follows: Onwardness; haphazardness; evanescence; reformulation and intermediation of textual roles; anonymous, multiple and social authorship; the fluid bounded text; electronic digitality. What can be deduced from all these is that a digimodernist text is not presented to us in its entirety; it does not belong to a single creator and it is created with the help of digitization, which is why it can be traced only up to the second half of the 90s. Among the works epitomizing these features, Big Brother, Pop Idol, Wikipedia, blogs, chat rooms, Grand Theft Auto IV and text messages can be counted. (**Ibid**.)

In an effort to extend digimodernism's hand farther, Kirby analyzes in Chapter 5 of his book the most common aesthetic tendencies underpinning the rise of this theory. He observes an "infantilization" of society prominent in all cultural media as well; stemming from postmodernism's getting loose and letting adult material merge with and benefit from that of children's. The other aesthetic trait innate to digimodernism is the rise of the apparently real. He compares this perception of reality to the postmodern one and underscores the fact that the practitioners of this gesture such as docusoaps, the internet and reality TV shows only *seem* to be real; they ask the viewer for willingness to accept what they are offered as real but also to keep in mind there is more to it – such as a production crew recording those footages. The third element in the digimodernist background is a sense of earnestness corresponding to irony in postmodernism. Kirby speaks of earnestness with negative qualities such as depoliticized, consumerist and desocialized; thus drawing a distinction between seriousness and earnestness. (**Ibid**.)

A more recent theory that has been thought to have the potential to replace postmodernism is Post-postmodernism. That name was chosen on purpose to remind people of its connection to postmodernism as Jeffrey Nealon made clear:

> For my purposes, the least mellifluous part of the word (the stammering "postpost") is the thing that most strongly recommends it, insofar as the conception of post-postmodernism that I'll be outlining here is hardly an

> outright overcoming of postmodernism. Rather, post-postmodernism marks an intensification and mutation within postmodernism. (2012: ix)

Nealon actually sumps up his view on the issue in this paragraph: we are going through a phase in which the basic tenets of postmodernism have been stronger even though the periphery has diverged from these tenets in the center.

He offers his thesis in two sections; the first is about how post-postmodernism can be observed in and applied to contemporary works whereas the second tries to reveal its connection to the critical atmosphere. His first stop is the 80s; before moving any further, he periodizes these years that approximately lasted twenty years claiming our times are a lot like 80s in that cultural theory is almost stuck there and that they have economic parallelisms. To him, the most prominent feature of that period was that capitalism skyrocketed and what differentiates it from our times is mainly its intensity and the lack of optimism. Even though these days feel a lot like the 80s, there is a reason underlying the closure of one and beginning of the other, and his strategy to dig out that reason is comparing 1980s and 2000s economically in an effort to save humanities from getting stuck in 80s. (**Ibid**.)

When he starts to handle the alleged death of theory in the second section, he first tells us his intention is to follow the decline of deconstruction beginning from the times it was deemed as the current situation. He puts deconstruction on one side of the medallion and advanced global capitalism on the other in that they have both de-totalizing effects. In the end, he tells us that theory, which has assumed a deconstructive insight with postmodernism, has not passed away when it has so much work to do; deconstruction might not be enough anymore to help us understand cultural remnants but it is still essential exactly because it is the key to the logic of value in the capitalist system of today. (**Ibid**.)

From there he moves on to discuss the status of literature with claims as to the demise of theory. He reminds the reader that up until the post-postmodern present, all major literary theories – even formalism – somehow followed the path of meaning insofar as meaning was tied to interpretation and all those systems were trying to interpret the text in their own way. On the other hand, claims Nealon, in our post-

postmodern times interpretation is forsaken, yet, it does not mean theory is dead, he emphasizes. Quite the opposite; theory goes on with new paths to follow now. Nealon calls for a new partnership between philosophy and literature but this time, giving literature its due; literature is all about showing the world there is no univocal meaning, so what is worth striving for now is keeping its polysemous nature. (**Ibid**.)

In the process of moving from postmodernism to post-postmodernism, literature seems to have lost ground compared to its former position as the main medium to make sense of life. In the last chapter, he specifically goes for questions to ask literature in an effort to see if it can reclaim this former position. This time his focus is on the linguistic turn which was associated with postmodern times but has had its day and now is being taken over. He claims it is being substituted by a certain curiosity about new ways to manipulate, to put into use – rather than understand – the object of interest. In the end, Nealon does not lay out a new way of being for literature, he only makes clear it used to function as a lot of things before philosophy put its shoulders the burden of totalizing everything. So, he concludes, it might regain a crucial place for itself in post-postmodernism, as well.

All of these successors to postmodernism are successful in capturing some aspect of the emerging transformation in the cultural theory scene. Just like Eshelman, metamodernist theorists also mention a strong inclination towards belief and connection with characters in art works. Also, Kirby, for example, concluded postmodernism cannot be undone, which means its residues are still around, the most prominent one being the irony according to the metamodernist theory. Another point that will be elaborated in the next part is "infantilisation" in Kirby's terminology, or a tendency towards a childish aesthetic in metamodernist theorists' terms. It can be inferred from the brief summaries of the main arguments of these three strong alternatives that there is a major shift of focus in the cultural theory scene, yet the connection with postmodernism has not been undermined fully.

1.2 Metamodernism

Even though all the aforementioned theories have something to tell us about the current age, it seems to me metamodernism is the most helpful one to read the new cultural

environment. The concept I am going to refer to when I begin analyzing the stories is developed by cultural theorists Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen; yet, the term itself was not their coinage, which is not surprising considering the prefix has a meaning of its own:

> According to the Greek English Lexicon the prefix 'meta' refers to such notions as 'with', 'between', and 'beyond'. We will use these connotations of 'meta' in a similar, yet not indiscriminate fashion. For we contend that metamodernism should be situated epistemologically with (post) modernism, ontologically between (post) modernism, and historically beyond (post) modernism. (2010: 2)

Before embarking upon an outline of their study, I would like to touch on some different usages of the term. Abramson in the article "What is Metamodernism?" (2017) in his column in Huffington Post informs the reader that the first usage of the term was in Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's article "The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives", published in 1975. In that article Zavarzadeh applies this term while avoiding the most popular term of his time stating the concept of postmodernism had been used so widely and generally that it did not help much to detect the nuances. He labeled texts that had an issue with modernist fictive and interpretive texts as metamodernist and put "metafiction" and "nonfiction" novels under the heading of metamodernism.

Also, in 2014, David James and Urmila Seshagiri call attention to a return to the modernist traits in literature. What they call metamodernism is a conscious aesthetic that regards modernism as a source for innovations contemporary artists put into effect today. Throughout their article, they underline the advantages of periodization on the grounds that with the trans-national turn, the boundaries of modernism were blurred. Besides, they do not want to be unfair to contemporary art by tying it to a never receding 20th century modernism. (James & Seshagiri, 2014) Their understanding of metamodernism is nothing but the reinvigoration of modernist inventions especially in form, and one of the common threads to bind the metamodernist works is their effort to historicize modernist advances.

Another usage is based upon a comparison of Greek prepositions "meta" and "post". Andre Furlani, in his study on Guy Davenport, resorts to the term

metamodernism to draw on the different connotations it incorporates: "[…] with the accusative, meta; means 'after' or 'next'; with the dative, 'among,' 'besides,' or 'over and above'; with the genitive, 'by means of' or 'in common with.' The metamodernists develop an aesthetic after, yet, by means of modernism." (149: 2007) The reason why he feels the need to use this term is to differentiate Davenport and some of his contemporaries from the postmodernists by placing them somewhere between modernism and postmodernism.

Another theorist to apply the term is Alexandra Dumitrescu; she resorts to metamodernism to label the new cultural paradigm in several of her articles, yet the most extensive study of the concept is found in her thesis *Towards a Metamodern Literature.*

The way I am going to talk about metamodernism in the present text is different from the aforementioned usages, though. In 2010, Dutch theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker published an article in *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* where they noted that they are not the first ones to use the term per se but that their usage differs from the previous usages. After the article was published, they started a website[1] to share their and other theorists' views on metamodernism and to interpret metamodernist works. In the very same website, they also published an essay called "Misunderstandings and Clarifications", in which they mentioned Furlani's and Zavarzadeh's usages of the term and stated theirs are not close to those usages; they find Zavarzadeh's appliance of the term postmodern rather than metamodern in that Zavarzadeh underscores "[…] black humour and parody, a loss of faith in the 'single interpretation of reality' and the abandonment of depth-models, as well as his insistence on authors like Robbe-Grillet, Barth, Barthelme, and Wolfe […]" (2015) As for Furlani's usage, they again emphasize anybody can use the term as they like but the way Furlani theorizes Guy Davenport's oeuvre suggests a sub-genre of modernism. In addition to van den Akker and Vermeulen, Seth Abramson, following their lead, wrote about this concept in his column in *Huffington Post*. Also, *American Book Review* published an issue on metamodernism. Here I am going to combine the views

[1] www.metamodernism.com

expressed in these resources to offer an outline of what metamodernism is and how the necessary conditions for its existence came into being.

First of all, Vermeulen and van den Akker contend that the conditions having created postmodernism evolved: the uncertainty and worrying predictions about the future caused changes in the economic system, – despite the ongoing and self-renewing capitalism – a new sensibility arose, as a consequence of which subjects wound up being more hopeful compared to postmodernism's cynicism. However, this new mood has not come out of the blue all perfect and complete; humanity was put through postmodernism first, it is incredibly hard to be a pushover after grappling with postmodern notions such as the end of history, undermining grand narratives as well as reality and morality.

Abramson, when he starts to bring up the essentials of metamodernism, first says that the internet paved the way for it by closing off distances unlike postmodernism and its alienating effects. (2014) He also believes postmodernism promoted distance with dialectics lying in its heart, which means something needs to be either one thing or another.

In van den Akker and Vermeulen's understanding of metamodernism, the key concept binding all other pieces together is oscillation.

> Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté´ and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. (2010: 5)

Throughout their article they invest the concept with a plethora of connotations which build up to represent something wider than the starting point. The first developers of the concept metamodernism as a cultural sensibility foreground neoromanticism as the main means of expression in that it inhabits metamodernism's two basic premises; the first of which being "oscillation" and the other "as-if sentiment".

They analyze metamodernism with the help of these two key terms, oscillation between modernism and postmodernism constituting the ontological wing whereas the as-if attitude is the epistemological one. Yet, even at the base of the as-if feeling there is an oscillation since what they mean with that is swinging between attempt and failure and pretending the truth can still be reached even if it is not possible. It does not make a difference considering "[m]etamodernism 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" (2010: 5).

In 2011, Luke Turner published an eight-point metamodernist manifesto[2], which was inspired from van den Akker and Vermeulen's work. The manifesto, from the very start, makes clear that oscillation is at the heart of this sentiment: "We recognise oscillation to be the natural order of the world." Even though he does not talk about the details of oscillation in his manifesto, his resource can be resorted to find out more. The oscillation principle does not point to a balance between the two poles; it is more like a "both-neither" situation in which the metamodern work incorporates both modern and postmodern traits but cannot be classified as either of them. Notwithstanding, they insist it is not the exact same thing as postmodernism's in-betweenness. The main difference between the two is that metamodernism applies the strategies leading to oscillation only so the existence of the two poles can be recognized in the work whereas the same strategies when applied by postmodernism serve to eliminate the modernist traces. Plato's "metaxis" is offered at this point to function as a metaphor for the way oscillation works. (2010: 6) Despite the fact that its exact translation is "between" as van den Akker and Vermeulen states, they make reference to the term recognizing other critics' contributions, such as Voegelin, that wound up loading it with a signification that holds for the tension between being here and being nowhere. In their hands, metaxis comes to mean the tension between a modernist effort to make sense and the postmodernist suspicion about the possibility of sense.

[2] It can be reached here: www.metamodernism.org

Going back to Luke Turner's manifesto, it should also be noted that he mentions the as-if attitude just like his theoretical predecessors:

> We acknowledge the limitations inherent to all movement and experience, and the futility of any attempt to transcend the boundaries set forth therein. The essential incompleteness of a system should necessitate an adherence, not in order to achieve a given end or be slaves to its course, but rather perchance to glimpse by proxy some hidden exteriority. Existence is enriched if we set about our task as if those limits might be exceeded, for such action unfolds the world. (Turner, 2011)

"The Metamodernist Manifesto" and "Notes on Metamodernism" explain the concept of metamodernism with a similar perspective, putting oscillation at the center. Yet, Seth Abramson's way of introducing the concept differs from theirs to some extent. He asserts that the way van den Akker and Vermeulen introduce metamodernism reminds one of postmodernism considering they mention different poles, which mean the world is again read in a double-bind. His interpretation of the prefix "meta" is "between and beyond" suggesting a movement first between two poles and then going beyond them unlike the metaxis reference of van den Akker and Vermeulen. Such an interpretation leads the reader to simultaneity; Abramson says the metamodern subject does not have to move because s/he already embodies at the same time what the poles has to offer. He claims the recent writings on the concept have come to eschew mentioning oscillation:

> If the notion of 'oscillation' has gradually faded from view in metamodernism, it's because it depends on the idea that each piece of metamodern literature -- for instance, each metamodern poem -- moves slowly and observably between ideas associated with the two traditions that preceded it, those being the modernist and postmodernist (antimodernist) traditions. (Abramson, Metamodernism: The Basics II, 2014)

In reality, an article as recent as March 2015 still makes use of oscillation to analyze literary works. On Vermeulen and van den Akker's frontier, oscillation is still alive and kicking, it seems.

The article brought up above is by Zachary Hyde and is penned by him to elaborate on the metamodernist point of view on subjectivity. There he builds up the

two poles the character in a story by Manuel Gonzales inhabits and with examples from the story shows how oscillation works in the sphere of subjectivity. (Hyde, 2015) Even though Abramson thinks oscillation is losing favor, his way of discussing "paradox" – which he determines as another fundamental feature of metamodernism – is essentially of use here for it centers a situation in which an individual finds himself/herself when confronted with the values and borders of the others. (Abramson, 2015) Now that our paths intersect with those of the others' more often – the internet – we, on the one hand, get to know that our conduct of life, our attachment to an identity is not unique, thanks to postmodernism and its enforcement of fragmentation. On the other hand, issues such as trust, belief and love have been back in business and they demand a coherent subject capable of affection, communication and identification with others. Abramson's emphasis falls on the paradoxical aspect of our perspective on universal truth versus objective truth.

Simone Stirner, in her article published on Vermeulen and van den Akker's webzine on metamodernism, borrows the concept of "Bubble" from Peter Sloterdijk (1998) and applies it to refer to the functioning of this new subjectivity. What she means with a bubble is an artificial space to cut the individual temporarily off the surrounding context where the interventions of postmodernism are still at play. That way the paradox of being hopeful about the promises of interaction between consistent and loving individuals despite a bitter self-consciousness is accommodated temporarily in a bubble. (Stirner, 2011)

I would also like to make note of one of the latest contributions by the first spokesmen of metamodernism, which I already spoke of above – "Misunderstandings and Clarifications". They felt the urge to clarify some points and summarize why they don't attribute metamodernism the quality of a movement or anything as serious:

> Metamodernism, as we see, it is not a philosophy. In the same vein, it is not a movement, a programme, an aesthetic register, a visual strategy, or a literary technique or trope. To say that something is a philosophy is to suggest that it is a system of thought. This implies that it is closed, that it has boundaries. It also implies that there is a logic to it. To say that something is a movement, or indeed a programme, suggests that there is a politics to it, a belief as to how our environment should be organised. To propose any one "–ism" as an aesthetic – register, strategy or trope – is to suggest that it is a figure that can be pinned

> down and picked up from a text or painting and inserted elsewhere. The notion of metamodernism we have proposed is neither of these. It is not a system of thought, nor is it a movement or a trope. For us, it is a structure of feeling. (2015)

Metamodernism is still in the process of being constructed as a "structure of feeling", as explained by its theorists Vermeulen and van den Akker in their introductory article to the latest publication on the issue – *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism.* They point at Raymond Williams's works for the reason why they prefer to refer to metamodernism as a structure of feeling. They cite several of Williams's articles where he defines the concept as a hard to define, yet easy to perceive sensibility that can be observed to a great extent in arts. (Vermeulen, van den Akker and Gibbons, 2017: 7) Williams coined the term in his *Preface to Film* and pointed out that a structure of feeling can be perceived especially during times of transition and best be spotted in literary and art works (1954). He then refined this term in most of his subsequent works, particularly in *The Long Revolution* (1961). Since then, the metaphorical language he uses to define the term has not changed much:

> We learn each element [of the past] as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life. (Williams, 1961: 63)

The concept structure of feeling appears as a response to the difficulty he mentions in the quotation above. Williams focuses on change in a particular era and comes up with this concept to capture the transforming atmosphere through the shift in sensibilities. In another publication bearing the same name as his term, Williams explains how structures of feeling can help us understand the present as opposed to the fixed forms inherent in the past and in works of art. He sees a strong potential in active readings of works of art in an effort to be loyal to the formative process they are made. (Williams, 2015: 21) Williams's term is one of the founding concepts in metamodernism as constructed by Vermeulen and van den Akker, particularly due to this vagueness in the definition of the term and the emphasis on its benefit in making sense of change.

In the publication cited above as the most recent one on metamodernism, Vermeulen and van den Akker along with Alison Gibbons compiled several articles by theorists that have been writing about post-postmodern times even though the theorists themselves might have first chosen different names to ascribe to their work. As to where their definition of metamodernism differ from that of others – Seth Abramson and Alexandra Dumitrescu, they count three fields:

> Nevertheless, our employment of 'metamodernism' is different on at least three counts: (1) the aim and line of inquiry; (2) the selection of cultural texts and practices, and, inevitably given these differences; (3) the (preliminary) findings. (2017: 5)

For the last few years metamodernism has grabbed the interest of more and more researchers; there are several studies where 20th and 21st century fictional works are analyzed through a metamodern approach. J. van der Merwe's PhD thesis *Notes towards a Metamodernist Aesthetic with reference to Post-millennial Literary Works* (2017) with its comprehensive compilation of metamodern details hints at the arguments most widely-spoken of by theorists working on the concept. His chapters are on "relationality", "metamodernist theories", which he categorized as affect theory, chaos theory and posthumanism, as well as on aspects such as sincerity, optimism and realism.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METAMODERN SUBJECT IN JULY'S WORKS

2.1 Relationality and Subjectivity in Metamodernism

"Death of the subject" is one of the founding events of postmodern movement, which entailed dethroning the subject that used to have a unified and autonomous being. Decentering of the subject was a natural outcome of dissolving realities; admitting there could be no grand narratives anymore including the subject having constructed them. Linda Hutcheon, while explaining the basic tenets of poetics of postmodernism, allocates a chapter to the changing position of the subject focusing on the role of discourse and historical context in forming a subject. Modernism's stable and consciously-driven subject was mentioned in most theory books on postmodernism including Hutcheon's: "Human reality, for both sexes, is a construct. Obviously such a view is bound to pose problems for traditional humanist notions of the stability of the self and of the equation of the self with consciousness." (2004: 159) In a nutshell, modernism and its emphasis on "the human" brings with it a belief in a rational, stable subject whose boundaries then get blurred with the succeeding cultural movement postmodernism.

The relations the subject holds also get their share of trivialization. Best and Kellner criticizes the postmodern view on subjectivity, which is devoid of an opinion on the connection between the subject and its social and intersubjective relations. They point out that as well as destroying the idea of a subject, postmodern theory also goes for erasing its bounds with the community. Yet, it tries to equip the subject with newly emerging desires and discourses. They state that especially in the postmodernism of 1960s, that kind of a "[…] politics of subjectivity valorizes desire, pleasure, intensities, and the body over reason, discourse, and intersubjectivity. It celebrates fragmented and libidinal states of being while rejecting such concepts as personal and social identity, unity, or harmony as terroristic and oppressive." (Best & Kellner, 1991: 290)

The subject of the 21st century has to confront something much bigger than itself and it makes sense to expect a paradigm shift in such a condition. In contemporary cultural theories, subject has resurrected after being announced dead in postmodern times, but this time it is not the subject that was heard to be fragmented and motivated by his/her impulses. After psychoanalysis dissected the individual, relationality appeared in the scene in 1980s to make it a whole again by foregrounding the relations the individual is in. It has been discussed since then but come to the focus recently pulling the human to the center one more time, albeit a different one. To discuss the concept of relationality, theories of psychoanalysis will be addressed. At the core of relational psychoanalysis lies recognizing that the subject is basically motivated not by instinctual drives – as Freudian psychoanalysis put forward – but by interpersonal relations. Although there are many names associated with this school of thought, what concerns us for the purposes of the current work is the basic tenets they share. Contrary to the theory that subjects need other human beings to satisfy the needs of their drives, the way relational theory regards their connection to other people is quite different. For Stephen Mitchell and his followers, human beings need communication with other human beings from the very first days of their lives for their survival and mental health. (Perlman & Frankel, 2009) What this means in a larger picture is formerly throned and later dethroned subjects started sharing their stage with other subjects; which is to say their relations to other subjects started to be accepted as the driving force behind their actions and character formation process.

Relational theory (also known as object relations theory) ensures that subjects have to be scrutinized through other subjects rather than being considered a universe of their own. In an anthology of relational theory edited by Mitchell, Nancy J. Chodorow in her article on individuation summarizes this as follows:

> Object-relations psychoanalysis, in reformulating the psychoanalytic conception of self, also reformulates a self for social theory and analysis. This self is intrinsically social, and, because it is constructed in a relational matrix and includes aspects of the other, it can better recognize the other as a self and, ultimately, attain the intersubjectivity that creates society. (Chodorow, 1999: 117)

In order to become an individual, the subject has to come to terms with the fact that s/he is not a complete, distinct being; subject-hood is dispersed, is formed through relations with the others. Each subject is united with the world, as well as other subjects even though they perceive themselves as autonomous beings. Kenneth Gergen explains the importance of relations in meaning-making processes of experiences:

> The experiential action acquires its intelligibility within processes of relationship. On this account, to experience happiness or sadness is to manifest a particular immersion in a cultural tradition. My moment-to-moment sense of the real is premised on my history within the culture; in effect, there would be no experience of "happiness" save through a particular array of coordinated practices within the culture (Relationships, for example, in which we come to agree that happiness exists and these are the conditions in which we feel it.) (Gergen, 1997: 221)

These changes are too big to be incorporated into postmodernism, the most recent top gun in the field of cultural theory – which is now believed to have turned its back to the human-centered way of thinking. Thus it won't be wrong to say a new sensibility started to emerge that located the subject in a whole new setting whereby the de-humanizing approach retreated – as identified by Nicoline Timmer in her book on subjectivity in contemporary works. She suffices it to call the prevalent approach of our times the post-postmodern sensibility. Yet, what she classifies as the tenets of this sensibility is very similar to what has been called metamodern here so far. Later, in 2017, she wrote an article in the book *Metamodernism - Historicity Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* edited by van der Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen, in which she does not refrain from calling the new sensibility metamodern, unlike her first suggestion. (Timmer, 2017: 103) In the center of Timmer's work is the changing position of subjects seen in late postmodern writers' work. She attributes some common characteristics regarding the new perception of subjectivity to particular works (by three authors: David Foster Wallace, Mark Danielewski and Dave Eggers) and highlights the fact they overflow the postmodern boundaries:

> Most notable in the work of this younger generation of writers 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)

As the most salient conditions surrounding subjects in the defining contemporary literary works, Timmer counts three: lack of decision-making tools, not being able to feel anything and the need for a "we". With the first trajectory, she draws attention to how the subjects of our times suffer from being lost in countless options to the point of paralysis. The second "symptom" traces a feeling of emptiness inside the subjects that precedes the search for something real. Traumatized subjects step forward with a whole mess of feelings. Timmer points out feelings here are not impersonal as former postmodernist theoreticians claimed, but are inter-personal (**Ibid.**, p. 44-45). She suggests feelings might serve as the mediator between subjects. As for the last symptom, the name already makes the last common trait obvious: in the exemplary contemporary novels, the characters cry for being understood by somebody, to share their feelings with the others, at least to know they feel the same, too. Timmer again compares the postmodern and the post-postmodern approaches to draw attention to this "need for a we": "[T]hey stress receptivity, reciprocity and a sense of 'openness' that signals a departure from a more postmodern preoccupation with a self-obsessed and self-deconstructing subject ('I doubt I am')" (**Ibid.**, p. 354).

Another well-known figure in the metamodernist circles, regardless of the differences between her and van den Akker and Vermeulen's notions on metamodernism, Alexandra Dumitrescu also emphasizes the new focus on relations between people and a tendency towards a more united subject: "[…M]etamodernism relates to aspects of globalization in its search for the unity of the self, and for renewed connections with nature and one's fellows" (Dumitrescu, 2014: 168). Another reference in her thesis to the significance of connecting with the others is stated as follows: "The aspiration is to connect with the other – other people, other cultures, nature, and other times – in order to make sense of and to enrich the present and the self" (Dumitrescu, 2014: 208).

In the same vein, van den Merwe in his dissertation on metamodernism called our age "the age of relationality" (Merwe, 2017: 227) and about its effect on the new subjectivity, he says: "The metamodernist subject — neither an autonomous

individual, nor defined solely in terms of the other — is constructed relationally through shared affect" (**Ibid.**, p. 236). He explains how relationality is relevant in metamodernism through the concepts such as dispersal of subjecthood, alterity and similitude by going over the main arguments in relationality theories.

Relationality did not start with metamodernism; it was also made use of to discuss postmodern subjects. Gergen in his book *The Saturated Self*, summarizes the state postmodern identities were in by giving credit to relationships:

> In the postmodern world there is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed. One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships. (Gergen, 1997: 139)

Metamodernism also admits the role of ever-changing relationships in a subject's process of meaning making. However, in metamodernist works, the recipient gets to see determined, coherent subjects within their own contexts needing the help of others to understand themselves and the world. Timmer explains this difference from postmodernism as: "Instead of just concluding or simply positing that we are mediated and fractured, the focus is on how we still do try to make sense of our selves, even when fractured and mediated" (2010: 41-42).

In the following part there will be a discussion on how interpersonal relations in July's work define being a subject and how their meaning building process for their feelings is affected by their relations to others as well as how her characters learn to communicate with the Other instead of just using the Other to pin down his/her own position in life.

2.2 Relationships in July's Work

Unlike the characters created during the heyday of postmodernism, July's characters are not being undermined to prove the reader a point, that they are fragmented, that engaging in the story and empathizing with the characters there is an outdated stance for a reader. These characters manage to convince the reader of their sincerity, authenticity no matter how lost they might seem. All the stories in July's short story

collection, except for two ("The Birthmark" and "This Person"), are written from the point of view of the first person narrator, which makes it possible to follow the condition of the subject in each phase of a story.

Relationships are especially significant insofar as how they are handled in works of fiction can determine what differentiates a metamodern work from a postmodern one. Rachel Greenwald Smith's *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* scrutinizes how the neoliberal lifestyle of our age is reflected in American literary works. In the introduction part of the book, she manages to demonstrate how social engagements with the others as well as emotions are regarded as contributions to self-development in that they are supposed to be managed by the subject as investments rather than authentic experiences (Smith, 2015: 6). This is not the case in metamodern art, and how relationships are covered in July's works and how they are transformative for the both parties involved rather than a one-way response will be discussed throughout this chapter.

2.2.1 In July's story collection: *No one Belongs Here More Than You*

At the beginning of most of July's stories there are lonely characters whose situation is either already obvious or made known a bit later in the story as a result of the highly individualized society – also a feature of the postmodern times, yet, what characterizes them as metamodern is how they react to this individualized society. They have problems with it; these are subjects that give us the signal that they know there is something wrong with them; still, they do not mourn over this fact and isolate themselves. Even when they drag themselves into the arms of make-believe, they are reluctantly conscious of it now that they cannot exist without any trait of knowingness as metamodern subjects. They act, they try to change, they reach out for the others as will be demonstrated with some examples. The focus here will be on the metamodern reflexes in July's stories and movies and this part is allocated solely to the way her characters relate to the others in her stories. About how metamodernism is interested in this communication, and how it differs from the postmodernist view on the Other, van der Merwe writes:

> In [the postmodern] 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. (2017: 228).

In July's works what is the easiest to detect as a metamodern trait is how her characters' interaction with the others affect them as subjects, a good example of which is seen in "The Swim Team", the second story in the collection.

In "The Swim Team" the reader learns about the narrator's loneliness in the beginning from her own mouth: "That's not true, I yelled. These were the first words I'd spoken out loud in weeks" (July, 2007: 15). She is not very keen on being social at this point; she cannot even dare to tell people her actual name:

> The citizens of Belvedere thought my name was Maria. I never said it was Maria, but somehow this got started, and I was overwhelmed by the task of telling all three people my real name. (**Ibid**., p. 14)

These are the words of a woman first person narrator who is writing a letter to her ex-boyfriend, explaining why her life was very strange during her stay in a small town called Belvedere and those three people are people she overheard talking about swimming in a store. She interrupts them because one of them says you have to breathe underwater to be able to swim. In that first encounter, her swimming memories attract them so much, she is surprised to find out.

> I told them about how I'd been on a swim team in high school, and even competed at the state level, but had been defeated early on by Bishop O'Dowd, a Catholic school. They seemed really, really interested in my story. I hadn't even thought of it as a story before this, but now I could see that it was actually a very exciting story, full of drama and chlorine and other things that Elizabeth and Kelda and Jack Jack didn't have firsthand knowledge of. (**Ibid**., p. 15)

Before meeting these three old people, she had no company in the small town she was in for some reason the reader did not know – maybe creating art, she mentions she did not make art during her stay there – let alone somebody who wouldn't be

interested in her stories. Judging from the way she reacted, it can still be sensed the people around her had not found her life very exciting and interesting, which is probably why she wanted to be with these old people longer. The reader can follow the change in her attitude; at first, she is so shy that she equals offering something to the strangers with dying: “I suddenly felt like I was going to die. But instead of dying, I said: I can teach you how to swim” (**Ibid.**, p. 16). Yet, towards the end, she assumes the role of the affectionate coach so well, when she runs into them outside, she asks them if they have been practicing swimming. The funny part of the story is there is no body of water to swim there and they practice swimming by immersing their head in a bowl of water and moving their body on the floor.

This unnamed character successfully re-invents herself; first she had no aim in the town she couldn’t move from because of being broke and she winds up having three students that adore her and treats her like a professional coach. They build their reality together; for an outsider, what they are doing sounds unbelievable, which is why she does not share this experience with her boyfriend at the time. Knowing how it would seem to an outsider shows she has enough life experience to have this knowledge about the norms in the society. She finishes her letter with a goodbye note to her ex-boyfriend:

> If I had thought this would be at all interesting to you I would have told you earlier, and maybe we would still be going out. It’s been three hours since I ran into you at the bookstore with the woman in the white coat. What a fabulous white coat. You are obviously completely happy and fulfilled already, even though we only broke up two weeks ago. I wasn’t even totally sure we were broken up until I saw you with her. You seem incredibly faraway to me, like someone on the other side of a lake. (**Ibid.**, p. 18)

It is very interesting they have not talked about what happened in Belvedere, she seems very certain that the boyfriend would not be interested, which shows there is already distance between them. Yet, she gets to see that distance after connecting with those three old people, with whom she gained self-esteem. This kind of unexpected warm encounters happen very often in July’s universe. The main character seems to be disillusioned with a broken relationship through this sudden companionship she ran into.

In postmodern works, communication is usually questioned; the meaning is built with the others but how it is deciphered depends on the subjects. In July's work, communication is actualized somehow, albeit sometimes through self-delusion, some other times through make-believe, which is the case in the story mentioned above. Sometimes this communication cannot be put into words; its transmission is not through language all the time. Yet, it can be supposed that it can still happen, at least it is possible in a peculiar way as in the story "It was Romance". In this story the reader follows the main characters as they are attending a seminar on romance as the narrator tells the reader: "We were forty women gathered on a Saturday morning to become more romantic" (**Ibid**., p. 59). In italics the instructor's comments on romance are seen, which are important for the route the plot will take:

> Humans make their own worlds in the small area in front of their face. […] Because the area in front of our faces is our most intimate zone. […] Remember, you don't have to make the whole world romantic, or even the whole bedroom. Just the small space in front of your face. (**Ibid**., p. 58-59).

During the lunchbreak, the narrator sees one of the women in the seminar sitting on the floor and July's humor leaks through the poignant scene:

> I walked down the hall and saw that Theresa was sitting on the floor next to a chair. This is always a bad sign. It's a slippery slope, and it's best to just sit in chairs, to eat when hungry, to sleep and rise and work. But we have all been there. Chairs are for people, and you're not sure if you are one. (**Ibid.**, p. 60).

What happens afterwards is the narrator first rubs Theresa's back, thinks it is too familiar and starts patting her shoulder until she gets too self-conscious to continue and finally when the woman bursts out into tears, she hugs her and cries herself, too. There is nothing said, no words used but in her narration, she assigns some meaning to their crying together, probably what she has gone through, but she sees it likely to happen to Theresa, as well:

> We wetted each other's blouses and pushed our crying ahead of us like a lantern, searching out new and forgotten sadnesses, ones that had died politely years ago but in fact had not died, and came to life with a little water. We had loved people we really shouldn't have loved and then married other people in order

> to forget our impossible loves, or we had once called out hello into the cauldron of the world and then run away before anyone could respond. (**Ibid.**, p. 61)

After a while they stop, and this time she refers to the seminar for the explanation behind their short sentimentality. Together they figure out how easy it was actually to catch a glimpse into romance:

> There were things of this general scale to cry about. But the biggest reason to cry was to drench the air in front of our faces. It was romance. Not the falling-in-love kind but the sharing of air between our shoulders and chests and thighs. There was so much air to share. Gradually, we slowed, then stopped, and after a long, still pause—goodbye—we broke apart. (**Ibid.**, p. 61)

This story epitomizes another way to communicate with somebody, without language. As can be seen, in July's fictional universe, unexpected engagements occur even though it does not mean these kind of attachments change the character's life or takes away their loneliness for good. Now that Raoul Eshelman connected his "performatism" with the metamodern movement, it would not be irrelevant to mention how he interprets the new subjectivity. To him, subjects now "form closed, performatively realized wholes that resist dispersal in surrounding contexts" (Eshelman, Fall 2000 / Winter 2001), which is to say they are presented as wholes within their own contexts. He concludes that the new subjects transform their relationships with people within their closed contexts through their belief in love. In the storylines summarized below, the subjects' wholeness can be discerned in what might seem like strange settings, if they are to be decontextualized. Similar performative scenes occur in July's movies, as well.

2.2.2 In July's movies: *Me and You and Everyone We Know and The Future*

A very unusual attachment comes up in July's debut movie, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* just like the one in the story "It was Romance". It can lead us further towards the tone of that very tender way for communication.

In the movie, the sons of a newly divorced young dad try chatting online pretending to be older. On the other side of the conversation, there is Nancy

Herrington, the curator of the local gallery, who is shown very uptight in her interactions; she is portrayed too tense and kind of superficial for the sake of being artistic. She has no idea that she is writing erotic instant messages to a child, neither does the audience at that point. Robby's way of being sexy is typing "I'll poop in your butt hole and then you will poop it back into my butt and we will keep doing it back and forth with the same poop. Forever", which he even draws with symbols on a computer:)) < > ((. (Me and You and Everyone We Know, 2005) Therefore, their communication is not through established, conventional means. They decide to meet in person and it takes Nancy awhile to figure out Robby is the man she is waiting for. When she finally does, her reaction does not involve any speech, but smiling and kissing him on the cheek, preceded by Robbie caressing her hair. The audience later sees Robby's graphic in the poster hung in the exhibition area curated by Nancy. It is named "Warm: 3-D and Touch in the Digital Age)) < > ((." In the exhibition, the protagonist of the movie, Christine also has a work, first treated very condescendingly by Nancy. In her book *Sex, or the Unbearable* – co-written by Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman – Berlant, mentions this short interaction between Nancy and Robby and thinks of her transformation as follows:

> For Herrington, the conversion of the pooping icon into a device signifying a general intimacy among survivors living the atmosphere of ordinary crisis in the present happens only after she reroutes, through the encounter with the boy, her ambivalent sexual optimism from romance and the couple form to scenes of aesthetic transformation in which many spectators come to open themselves to being touched and undone. (Berlant & Edelman, 2014: 26)

Berlant's point is that Nancy got touched by that small encounter; her belief in being undone by a chance romance leaves its place to something she can actually be active in. She invites others to this experience, too.

About the experience these characters share, there is a good example in the same movie. Christine, the protagonist played by July herself, is an artist and also makes her living driving old people around. In the scene in question, she is driving one of her elder cab customers to the facility his lover is cared in. They see a car with a golden fish in a plastic bag on top which the man puts before opening the car door and forgets there. Christine and the old man discuss what to do and finally decide the best

thing that can happen to it is the driver goes straight steadily forever, which is impossible so they say their final words to the fish. Christine says: “I want you to die knowing that you were loved. I love you” (Me and You and Everyone We Know, 2005). At some point the plastic bag jumps to the car in front of them and finally the father and daughter also see it. Christine is worried that the girl will also see the fish die, to which the old man responds: “At least they know, at least we are all together in this.” (Me and You and Everyone We Know, 2005) This consolation actually holds a feeling that pervades the communication that has been discussed so far. That feeling is about sharing the weight of an experience, touching the other or at least trying to touch the other for the sake of trying. Van den Akker and Vermeulen’s “as if reality” can be referred here:

> 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 willfully 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. (2010: 5)

July’s characters are aware how hard it is to understand and be understood, yet they keep trying. Sometimes they manage to touch others briefly, some other times, even though they are sure it will not happen, they still reach out “as if” their efforts will pay off. This scene also exemplifies one of the symptoms of post-postmodern syndrome, proposed by Timmer, “a structural need for a we”. This is a need that 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” (2010: 46).

July’s second movie, *The Future,* is more about disconnection than it is about connection, there will be references to it again in the next section, yet, its making process is relevant here. When July was about to finish writing the script, she gets paralyzed having lost focus and finding herself only surfing on the internet. She reads the local magazine the PennySaver, which lists second-hand goods along with a short description and the seller’s phone number. On a particular day, July decides to call a leather jacket seller and everything starts with her offer to him: “Actually, I was wondering if, when I come over to look at the jacket, I could also interview you about

your life and everything about you. Your hopes, your fears…" (July, 2011: 11) The recipient of her work gets to learn about all this, the story behind the making process of the movie in her book *It Chooses You,* in which she interviews local second-hand goods sellers first to procrastinate and keep herself away from writing, but later to connect more to her writing. Although this book is a work of non-fiction, it would still be appropriate to include it here considering the fact that it intertwined reality and fiction when July asks one of the interviewees to act in her film and also the fact that it reveals the interpersonal relations having contributed to the production of this movie as their presence added to the structure of feeling around the movie. After her first interview, she writes:

> I had become narrow and short-sighted at my desk. I'd forgotten about boldness, that it was even an option. If I couldn't write the scenes, then I should really go all the way with not writing them. I decided to remove myself from my computer and the implication that I might be on the verge of a good idea. I would meet with every PennySaver seller who was willing. I would make myself do this as if it were my job. I would get a better tape recorder and drive all over Los Angeles like an untrained, unhelpful social worker. Why? Exactly. This was the question that my new job would answer. (**Ibid**., p. 26)

Her quest is similar to the female character of her movie; Sophie decides to choreograph a dance video for each day of a month. What ignites her challenge is finding an injured cat that she and Jason, her boyfriend, will adopt once it fully recovers. When they decide to take it home, they believe it only has 6 months to live, but then as it turns out it can live up to 5 years, which causes both to panic and quit their jobs to fulfill their dreams within the one-month period they will be waiting for PawPaw the cat to recover in the clinic. In a moment of despair, they equal getting older with having only loose change: "[Jason:] 40 is basically 50, and then after 50, the rest is just loose change" (The Future, 2011). After that conversation, Sophie quits her teaching job for her choreography and Jason stops providing technical support over the phone to sell trees door-to-door to do something beneficial for the planet. They both start to be overwhelmed with the burden of having to achieve something after putting everything at stake, yet, they choose different paths. While Sophie has an affair with an older suburban dad, Jason meets Joe, one of the sellers July met during her *PennySaver* adventure. July first plans to give a part to each one of the sellers she

interviewed, which gets cancelled because they turn out to be a different person when the camera is on, except for Joe.

July explains her reason for the quest as: “All I ever really want to know is how other people are making it through life — where do they put their body, hour by hour, and how do they cope inside of it” (2011: 157).

Each interview carries July closer to her big moment of epiphany, the biggest contribution to which comes with the one with Joe. She writes intricate revelations about how she comes to terms with her mortality, which is the path she makes her characters Jason and Sophie tread. July refers to the “loose change” metaphor giving her first impressions after meeting Joe, an 81-year-old-man who has earned his living painting houses and shopping for old widows and in his free time has created cards with limericks for his wife:

> I thought about his sixty-two years of sweet, filthy cards and something unspooled in my chest. Maybe I had miscalculated what was left of my life. Maybe it wasn’t loose change. Or, actually, the whole thing was loose change, from start to finish — many, many little moments, each holiday, each Valentine, each year unbearably repetitive and yet somehow always new. You could never buy anything with it, you could never cash it in for something more valuable or more whole. It was just all these days, held together only by the fragile memory of one person — or, if you were lucky, two. And because of this, this lack of inherent meaning or value, it was stunning. (**Ibid.**, p. 199)

July overcomes the dead end in her movie script by letting Jason walk in her footsteps and experience her epiphanies thanks to his bond with Joe. She sees Jason and Sophie as two different versions of herself: “If Sophie was all my doubts and the nightmare of who I would be if I succumbed to them, then Jason could be the curiosity and faith that repel that fear.” (**Ibid.**, p. 201) Jason’s curiosity leads him to spend more time with Joe, which makes him learn to make peace with his ordinary life. All Joe does is inviting him to have a glimpse at his pretty simple life, talk about his 62-years-long relationship and seem content despite not creating anything significant in other people’s eyes. Just as Jason calms down and appreciates somehow participating in life in one’s own way, Sophie tells him she is leaving him for somebody else; his response

to this is stopping time and talking to the Moon. When the Moon suggests he restart the time, Jason responds:

> I know exactly what's gonna happen at 3:15. At 3:15 we aren't gonna get back in bed together, and she isn't gonna wrap her legs around my legs, and we arent gonna fall asleep. And then in the morning, she isn't gonna say, 'Hi, person,' and then we aren't gonna have another day, just an ordinary, boring day. And then we aren't gonna have kids, and then we aren't gonna grow old together, we aren't gonna look back on our lives because we won't even know each other. (The Future, 2011)

Jason seems to have realized the beauty of his ordinary life just as it starts to fall into pieces. His visits to Joe's; witnessing a zestful life there instead of a gruesome one wipes his existential fear away. However hurt he is, he still takes the Moon's advice, decides to let Sophie be and agrees to restart time to no avail at first. Eventually, he manages to do it, which means he is ready to face reality and the responsibilities it entails. At the end of the movie, Jason seems to be stripped of his insecurities about achievement and ready to embrace the delicacies of ordinary life.

2.3 The Relation with the "Self"

Not all stories by July resolve with two characters' somehow possible communication, there are times the communication is one-way, meaning the characters reflect on themselves. In this part of the chapter, the focus will be on how July's characters communicate with their "selves" and why their ways of doing this is metamodern. Postmodernism is known to see subjects as fragmented and decentered; Madan Sarup summarizes another important aspect: "Identity in postmodern thought is not a thing; the self is necessarily incomplete, unfinished—it is 'the subject in process'". (Sarup, 1998: 47) Subjectivity in postmodernism is defined from the same respect by Stuart Sim in *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*:

> For poststructuralists and postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented being that has no essential core of identity, and is to be regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time. (Sim, 2001: 299)

In contrast with this continuously dissolving being, metamodern subjects still emerge as holistic ones at times despite the postmodern dispersal of identities; when in need, they have their selves to remind them who they are. On the website "metamodernism.com", started by Vermeulen and van der Akker, Simone Stirner has an article on metamodern subjects and describes them as follows:

> The reemerged subject is not the old modern one. It contains no transcendental justifications. Concepts of identity, selfhood and subjectivity can always be dismantled and deconstructed. But while the awareness about this still rightfully persists, new times call us to acknowledge that the subject nevertheless appears, in moments of intersubjectivity, in reciprocal spaces of belief, trust and love. (Stirner, 2011)

In postmodernism, the characters are there to represent something bigger than themselves as Victoria Lipina Berezkina suggests in her chapter in the book *Beyond Postmodernism*. She puts forward the idea of "depersonalized subjectivity", which is a strategy emphasizing the core of human experiences rather than the idiosyncrasies of characters. (Berezkina, 2003: 274) In July's works – a good example of the metamodern sensibility – there are characters; their purpose of existence is not offering insight into the big picture of humanity. Another criticism towards the postmodern way of handling characters comes from Sherry B. Ortner with the term "flattened subjectivity". She refers to this term to explain how postmodernism fails to represent the complexities of subjects, how it "flattens" the depth of a subject creating and seeking meaning constantly. (Ortner, 2005: 42) As Stirner argues, they are subjects that come into the scene with questions about their selfhood; nevertheless, they take the text/movie into their hands; they are often portrayed as wholes in their transformed relations and their presence pervades the whole story.

Czudaj's thorough academic study on July will be referenced several times in this and the following chapter. The importance of this academic work is its detailed analysis on the connection between July's characters and the role self-help culture plays in today's white-class American individualized society. Throughout her work, Czudaj defines July's characters "expressive individuals" including the ones in her first movie, borrowing the term from Bellah et al.: "Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be

expressed if individuality is to be realized" (as cited in Czudaj, 2016: 12). After first summarizing how Bellah et al. explains the term, Czudaj goes on to discuss what makes July's characters expressive individuals, searching for their inner selves through reflection being the most discernible factor (**Ibid.**, p. 168).

Even when they turn their backs to their selves, those selves remind them who they are, they haunt them as in *The Future*. In the previous part, the path Sophie chose was mentioned briefly; she panics as a result of failure and the pressure she feels when required of being more reliable to adopt a sick cat in need of constant care. She starts an affair with Marshall, a suburban dad who can watch her do nothing all day. Before she leaves Jason for him, she tells Marshall that throughout the day she imagined he had watched her all day and he responds:

> Marshall: It would make me very happy to watch you all the time.
> Sophie: If it was really all the time, then I wouldn't have to do anything ever. I wouldn't have to try.
> Marshall: I had you totally wrong. I thought you were more independent.
> Sophie: Yeah... (The Future, 2011)

Sophie gets tired of having to try to achieve something, and for once wants to go with a flow that won't require her to assume any kind of responsibility. A short time after she breaks up with Jason and moves in with Marshall, she sees her yellow T-shirt crawling on the road, trying to reach her upon which she just turns her back and enters the house. It is not the last time she sees the yellow T-shirt, though. In the next scene, she is in the dance school she used to work, asking for vacancies and finding out the only vacancy could be when the current secretary whose dance video became very popular on the internet leaves. That is when Sophie sees her friends Tammy and Sasha, first pregnant, then with the babies and each minute getting older as she herself stays the same behind the front desk as a secretary. This scene heralds her discomfort with the current position she is holding. When she is back home, her T-shirt makes its way through the window and this time instead of being terrified of it, she embraces it and while in the background the music she had been trying to dance to before is playing, she hides herself in the T-shirt and this time dances to it very naturally; her movements in this scene is evocative of a union with her former self.

After “regaining” her true self, she remembers PawPaw and rushes to the clinic, after which she cannot resist going back to Jason. About Sophie’s struggle, Miranda July says in an interview:

> That [idea] that you might just defect from your life, I've been carrying around for so long. You don't want that to be a constant threat. So I think I was like: “O.K., what would happen? So you leave. Then what happens? Then I realized: You're probably haunted by yourself. Your soul follows you.” (Onstad, 2011)

“Something That Needs Nothing” is another example with a character that finds her path through her self that springs from within; here again there is a self that leads the character through the unfamiliar area she finds herself in after parting with her best friend/secret love. The narrator confesses the reader her passion for Pip at the very beginning, which makes her miserable in return because Pip does not seem to desire her although they left their parents to live together and had some sexual experiments together as kids. These are the only sexual experiences the narrator has had in her life; she represses her sexuality to be reserved for Pip. Because of this unrequited love, the narrator positions herself as inferior, and always makes decisions considering her position in Pip’s eyes, or lets Pip take care of everything about both of them:

> Each morning Pip made a list of what we needed to do that day. At the top of the list was usually go to bank, where they had free coffee. The next items were often vague—find out about food stamps, library card? —but the list still gave me a cozy feeling. I liked to watch her write it, knowing that someone was steering the day. (July, 2007: 75)

They are penniless and they even try prostituting for money; however, as long as Pip is around her, the narrator is fine with waiting for an unspecified length of time. She does not meditate on a plan to win Pip, deep down she knows she is just not somebody Pip can desire: “And I knew she did not want me in that way. She never would. Other girls, any girl, but not me” (**Ibid**., p. 73). Everything has to change when Pip decides to move in with another girl. At that point, the make-believe story she is living in cannot be sustained anymore and she has to build herself a new story. She could only think of being worth loving for Pip by achieving sexual independency and

starts performing in a peep show with a stage name, Gwen. She loses her faith in a "precious inner self", which she was thinking very dearly of before: "I hated my job, but I liked that I could do it. I had once believed in a precious inner self, but now I didn't. I had thought that I was fragile, but I wasn't" (**Ibid**., p. 85). She foregoes that self without any complaints secretly waiting for that moment she can show Pip her new self. That moment finally arrives when she needs a ride home to be safe from an obsessed customer.

During the re-union, she is Gwen, with her wig and performance clothes on. They have sex that night and for the next couple of days; Pip calls her Gwen all those nights and although does not state explicitly, expects her to keep her stage costume on; the narrator says:

> So this was what it was like not to be me. This was who Pip was. Because, make no mistake, I kept my wig on the whole time. I believed it made all of this possible, and I think I was right. The wig and the fact that I did not cry even though I wanted desperately to cry, to tell her how miserable I had been, to squeeze her and make her promise to never leave again. (**Ibid.**, p. 89)

On the ninth day, she comes down with a fever because she does not take the wig off for almost thirty hours; she expects Pip to show her some affection as her old self; she wants to take the wig off but Pip never tells her to. This is the turning point of the story; this is the last straw for the narrator. She reflects on herself again after a long time: "If I died this way, as Gwen, would the rest of me still go on living? And what was the rest of me?" (**Ibid.**, p. 90) The next morning, she refuses to put the wig on thereby making a statement to Pip; there is no argument, they both understand where this will lead to and she leaves Pip's apartment just like it was a regular day for them. She goes to work with quitting on her mind. The ending is open-ended; but she tells the reader she will quit if nobody comes through the door for her for the next twenty minutes, then when it is time, she tries twelve and finally, in the last 8 minutes of her shift, she sets the bet to eight minutes. The story ends in the final seconds of those minutes. About the ending of the story, Czudaj has positive remarks:

> Instead of fashioning herself according to how Pip desires her, she learns that she cannot hide her self just in order to be desired by Pip. Accepting the fact

> that she will always be inadequate for Pip is an agonizing struggle for her. She needs to be her undisguised self. Only when she is true to herself can she be self-reliant. (2016: 197)

What this means is her relationship with Pip makes her achieve her goal of being able to perform sexual acts, she wants to be a certain somebody; when she achieves that, there is no point in going on with that miserable life, so she quits. This is not a character that can be fit into a postmodern frame; she tries to destroy her inner self to get rid of the idea of a fixed being, yet out of her self-respect she cannot go on becoming that person Pip desires, she comes to terms with her self in the end. So this story is a fight with one's self over gaining recognition from the other.

"The Birthmark" is another example of a situation where the main character needs confirmation from the other to be a certain somebody. The story is narrated through the third person point of view and neither of the characters have a name. It opens as the protagonist is having her birthmark removed through a quick laser operation. About her true feelings regarding the operation, it is said: "She didn't think she would have bothered if she hadn't been what people call 'very beautiful except for'" (July, 2007: 170). The message being transmitted to the reader is she has done this for the sake of perfect beauty, and that is what she gets, yet it is not what she imagined:

> Poor people who win the lottery do not become rich people. They become poor people who won the lottery. She was a very beautiful person who was missing something very ugly. (**Ibid.**, p. 171)

She changed her appearance and expected to feel as if she had always looked like that whereas in reality she felt exactly how she should have: somebody who got her birthmark removed. Why this does not satisfy her has to do with what the birthmark came to represent for her. The peculiar point in the story is how this birthmark actually came to embody a piece of the protagonist's self. This point is suggested in a wittily humorous way when an acquaintance asks her where her Norwegian accent has gone after commenting on the removal of the birthmark. The way the main character feels

– a sense of loss – is thus projected into the way other people see her, as well, which implies it is not in her imagination:

> And she felt a real sense of loss. Even though she knew she had never had an accent. It was the birthmark, which in its density had lent color even to her voice. She didn't miss the birthmark, but she missed her Norwegian heritage […]. (**Ibid.**, p. 172)

The sense of loss becomes so intense at one point that she implicitly blames her husband, whom she met after having the birthmark removed, for not loving her when the birthmark was still on her face. She wishes she had been accepted with her imperfection even though the husband has never had the chance to experience and consider it. Yet, she is unreasonably offended, of which the husband is aware and in time this bitterness piles up:

> It was a small thing, but it was a thing, and things have a way of either dying or growing, and it wasn't dying. Years went by. This thing grew, like a child, microscopically, every day. (**Ibid.**, p. 173)

Then there is the turning point of the story; a jam jar breaks open and the protagonist ends up getting some jam on her face on the same spot as her birthmark used to stand. The narrator first follows her to the bathroom and when she is about to go out, turns to the husband and describes his point of view. During the moments in the bathroom, the character only examines the stain and feels:

> She wasn't thinking anything, she wasn't afraid or disappointed or worried. She was looking at the stain the way one would look at oneself fifteen years after one's own death. Oh, you again. Now it was obvious it had always been there; she had startled it back into sight. (**Ibid.**, p. 175)

With the jam stain, the feeling of loss disappears; the character feels as if it never disappeared, which is actually an enlightenment in the sense that she realizes she is the same person with or without the birthmark. What makes this possible is her reconnection with her self through the stain on her face that gave her another chance to be more affectionate and tender in her relation to this inner self. Her husband, in the same way, realizes he can love her this way, and the suspicion on his mind that

stemmed from not having the experience is wiped away. The case is solved on his mind; he understands that the thing between them which they could not express in words evaporates and they can move forward now: “It was good. It somehow allowed them to have more. They could have a child now, he thought.” (**Ibid.**, p. 176)

Sophie in *The Future,* and the nameless protagonists in “The Birthmark” and “Something that Needs Nothing”, disrupt the connection with their selves at some point, and through different means they manage to cure themselves. During the time they spend under chaotic conditions without a solid ground under their feet, they tend to consider themselves liberated from their old commitments as new subjects. However, when they find the opportunity, they reconnect with the selves they took off and however transformed they think they are, they still act in liaison with their selves, which they tried to dispose once. Metamodern characters exemplified here with July’s works are depicted as distinct individuals that can find their paths reflecting upon themselves or their relationships with other people.

CHAPTER THREE

METAMODERNISM AND THE ZEITGEIST IN JULY'S WORKS

As has been emphasized in the first chapter of the present study, although theorists name the contemporary theoretical background in different terms, one thing seems to be sure: a significant number of contemporary works has begun to have similar traits in terms of the affective relation they demand from the recipient. To elaborate, while most researchers on the issue feel a need to refer to the new structure of feeling by first announcing that it is not postmodern, Rachel Greenwald Smith in an article on postmodernism and affect theory is in an effort to prove how contemporary works are affective and draw upon postmodern strategies at the same time. She considers "warmth" to prevail in the tonal trait these works have. (Smith, Fall/Winter 2011)

Joe David Bellamy, as early as 1995 draws conclusions about the change of focus observed in the "new" fictional works:

> Another obvious aspect of the newest fiction that tends to differentiate it from the postmodern is its emphasis on suffering or feeling rather than on intellect. While the absence of interest in gameplaying, metafictional interpolations, parody, and formal high jinks (all primarily "intellectual" or academic concerns associated with the postmodern) may be easy to document, the return to an interest in emotion may be more difficult to accept or substantiate (Bellamy, 1995: 75).

Bellamy does not specify this "feeling" and differentiates it from the postmodern view on fiction, which is well-known for the games and metafictional elements it pushes the reader into. There will be a more elaborate analysis on the details of what this turn to emotions brought about and how it can be traced in contemporary works, here by Miranda July for our purposes. To trace the zeitgeist as captured by metamodernism in Miranda July's work, affect theory will be introduced in general terms drawing upon the works by affect theorists working on the ordinary.

3.1 The Affective Turn

Affect Theory is incredibly vast; Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, in their introductory chapter to the famous *Affect Theory Reader*, in which Clough's article mentioned above also appeared, locates affect theorists in line with the routes two pioneers in the field opened: "1. Silvan Tomkins's psychobiology of differential affects and 2. Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010: 5).

As postmodernism started to wane, a tendency to focus on affects in social sciences came into the scene. As Rachel Greenwald Smith in her aforementioned essay points out, up until the affective turn, emotions were believed to be unique to individuals and the connection between the intimate and the public was loose. (Smith, Fall/Winter 2011: 423)

Patricia Clough, as the person having coined the term "the affective turn", underscores where the affective turn and postmodernism's allies – i.e. post-structuralism and deconstruction – come together and where they differ from each other. According to her, what renders affective turn distinct in its approach to subjects does not lie in its emphasis to non-intentionality of affects and emotions, which is observed in postmodernism too, but in its insistence on the dynamism inherent to the relation between affects and outside forces. She goes on to say most affect theoreticians are more interested in the fact that with this turn the subject is observed again as "the subject of emotion". Yet, her focus mostly is how affects are dynamic (Clough, 2010: 206-207) Michael Hardt, another significant theorist in the field makes note of the same point in the introduction to Clough's book *The Affective Turn*: "[Affects] illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers." (Hardt, 2007: ix)

Within the frame of the present study, the main contribution of affect theory is offering an understanding of the new affective relation contemporary works demand from the recipient. This relation requires the reader/the audience to empathize with the characters in the fictional works with the help of positive affects while also having to

keep their distance from them through an ironic stance. Affect theoreticians will provide us with the tools required to interpret the lives of the individualized characters living in neoliberal times and to generalize these lives to be able to empathize. To reveal the link between what is intimate and what is public, theorists such as Kate Stewart, Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed turn to the ordinary, to everyday life, and that is where Miranda July's characters are drawn from.

The terms metamodernism and affect theory have been pronounced together very often lately; the affective turn has coincided with a period that was commonly associated with the end of postmodernism. There are so many examples to provide us with enough material to work on; however, for the purposes of the current study, Miranda July's most distinctive work will be analyzed in terms of ordinary affects and how they work in a metamodern atmosphere.

The reason why Sara Ahmed's and Lauren Berlant's work will be referenced here more often than any other work is because they scrutinize affects from everyday life to reach a better understanding of several structures of feeling.

July unveils peculiar scenes from everyday life; scenes that cause her work to be counted among metamodern works in that they incorporate the oscillation between the most extreme ends that are cited in most of the articles on this subject: sincerity and ironic distance. She points out how she is enchanted with the magical elements in our routines:

> I think there's something spiritual in a very day-to-day, mundane existence. It's impossible to articulate, and it's happening now, almost like a perverse secret. ... That's always sort of fascinating to me. (Onstad, 2011)

Therefore, July traces the magical moments in what seems ordinary at first glance; those moments are usually framed within the borders of exaggeration, naïveté, dream-like atmospheres to intensify the effect. The rest of the chapter will be allocated to decode how everyday affects are at play in the metamodern zeitgeist as depicted in some of Miranda July's works.

3.2 The Affective Present

3.2.1 One Side of the Pendulum: The Empathetic Recipient, The Promise of the Good Life and Its Dissolution in July's Works

As stated above, Miranda July's point of interest can be thought of as everyday life. Therefore, among affect theorists, Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant come to the fore by offering expansive analyses of our ordinary practices considering relationality and making attachments.

About their common ground in regard to affect, Claire Hemmins says "[F]or both Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed (…) affect is mobile and ordinary, producing attachments to the normative, or the normative through those attachments, as well as holding out the possibility of their transformation" (2015: 149). That means from their point of view, affect produces the links that tie us to the normative. Berlant follows optimism in *Cruel Optimism* as the means through which people adapt to worsening situations whereas Ahmed is after happiness in *The Promise of Happiness*. What these two theoretical works have in common is their focus on the link between believing in the promise of good life and sticking to the norms that tie our hands and restrain our lives.

Vermeulen and van der Akker, in their introduction to *Historicity, Depth and Affect* write on the common characteristics of the 2000s where they mention July's name among those artists whose work is associated with "a sense of earnestness and hope, however much their context, genre, rhetorical logic, stylistic register and/ or intention may vary from one another." (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2017: 8). No matter how hopeful it is at the end of the day, July's oeuvre is full of characters going through some sort of a crisis, which is a symptom of the metamodern universe of affects. It is not a big surprise that among the elements that constitute the biggest part behind the metamodern turn in history, the theorists mentioned above count "[…] a growing group of people disaffected with neoliberal globalisation, disenfranchised with representative democracy and at ease with the Internet as a means to discuss, cultivate and rally around shared frustrations" (**Ibid.**, p. 13). Thus it can be said the affective load of metamodernism revolves constantly around two main ends: hope and frustration due to their prevalence in our age and July's art is exemplary of works

teeming with the two. Metamodernism is a very recent theory and understanding; it deeply is linked tightly to understanding the present, which is felt by us as a patchwork of affects as Berlant explains. Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* focuses on the present because "the present is perceived, first, affectively: the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else (…)" (2011: 4). Hence, if Berlant's argument is followed, it is a natural outcome to discuss metamodernism, an approach emerging very recently in the scene, through the affects present in the current cultural scene.

Crisis is pointed at by Berlant as something that is being viewed in our present day as a normal part of neoliberal subjects' lives. It is everywhere in the neoliberal characters' life and is the new norm. Therefore, Berlant suggests, these subjects normalize it by virtue of false hopes. (2011) It can be said, no matter what the present condition is called, a conclusion can still be reached drawing on the affects it evokes in the recipient. From this standpoint, this part of the study will trace the affects of our present time as reflected in July's stories and both movies. Berlant offers some notions to understand the present and while doing that draws on everyday life, which she defines as a "crisis ordinariness" nowadays. Promise of the good life does not size up to expectations. That is why hope in general can be referred to as the defining positive affect of our age. Yet, the question what kind of a hope that is should be answered considering this crisis. Several fantasies of human kind that have kept us alive up to now have started to fail; "[t]he fantasies that are decaying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality and lively, durable intimacy." (**Ibid**., p. 3) What makes it possible then to bear a life that is basically experienced as a situation of ordinary crisis? Ahmed's answer to that is promise of happiness whereas Berlant points to cruel optimism. That is where they meet in that both of them connect the motive to go on putting up with what holds us back with a kind of promise: the promise of the good life.

How does the promise of the good life work? For Ahmed, this promise is linked to our relation with the "happy objects": objects that come to represent happiness as something bigger than themselves and that are passed down. "Objects not only embody good feeling; they come to embody the good life" (2010: 33). Then she asks: How

does the good life gets imagined through the proximity of objects? She thinks the associations between affects and objects are preserved through habit. The happy objects are in a constant circulation through which their connection with happiness gets stronger despite the fact that they don't fulfill their promise. (2010: 38).

Ahmed finds the way out in returning the "hap", the chance factor, of happiness. Happiness as it is now is a promise concerning the future; it guarantees the good life provided you live by some codes thereby destroying the "perhaps" the word originally derived from. The ones she lays her hopes on are the "affect aliens" – namely queers, migrants, feminists; also all those who do not feel the way they should about the happy objects of the others. These "outsiders" are doomed to be unhappy in the existing order; they are the ones who have to come up with a way to bear the woe inflicted on them by this system by following other tracks because other people's happiness-causes will not do them any good. Ahmed does not favor unhappiness over happiness, nor does she find a cold comfort in suffering. What she does is offering a critique of the current situation of the concept happiness that brings with it a huge baggage of connotations. She is in favor of saving the concept from this much pressure, lessening the burden on its shoulders and to serve to the same purpose; she points to the freedom to be unhappy: "The freedom to be unhappy would be the freedom to be affected by what is unhappy, and to live a life that might affect others unhappily" (2010: 195). This freedom, as a result, may save us from pursuing the same path despite having different aspirations since it will then lead to more options once allowed to go for things that might result in something other than happiness. It is then all about giving the chance factor in happiness its due and daring to deviate from the usual scenarios laid out before us. She points to "affect aliens" as those who are not made happy by the happy objects everybody expects something from. Ahmed defines affect aliens as: "[A]ffect aliens are those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world." (2010: 164) In her own words, the reasoning behind counting on "affect aliens" for this deviation is as follows:

> To learn about possibility thus involves a certain estrangement from the present. Other things can happen when the familiar recedes. This is why affect aliens can be creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we have been asked to give up, but we create life worlds around

> these wants. When we are estranged from happiness, things happen. Hap happens. (2010: 218)

Ahmed foregrounds having choices, not being pushed to follow a unique track leading to the same so-called happiness. Lauren Berlant also deems experimenting, having options, getting off the one and only way of living to break free from non-functional promises. For Berlant, opportunities for change emerge in "discovering and inhabiting disturbances in the relation between one's affects and one's imaginaries for action. That discovery is the site of potentially recontextualising creativity" (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 89).

Miranda July's works present us a plethora of examples where the possibility of a transformation in the way affects work emerges and it is the main reason why her work is suitable to introduce a metamodern analysis of some affects.

As has been mentioned several times so far, the metamodern work is supposed to swing between two different ends of a pendulum; positive affects like sincerity, happiness and optimism are located on the one end and they are the most important ones in that they are the main actors responsible for our everyday lives in current times being the way they are, yet, these affects also have the potential to transform them. July's movies and short stories stage incredible scenes in which these affects are at play and about to turn the normative into something else. The present part is an analysis of how July's works reveal the impact of the promise of the good life and how they hold the possibility of liberation from it thereby exemplifying the positive side of the pendulum and asking for an effort to empathize with the characters. In this part, how the crisis ordinariness as experienced by the characters in July's chosen stories and movie scenes still leads to a hopeful tone will be presented with examples. The components that create parts of the promise for the good life will be the main frame through which how the characters experience and deal with the present that is some sort of an ongoing crisis will be examined.

3.2.1.1. Family

"Mon Plaisir" – one of the stories in *No One Belongs Here More Than You* – offers the reader a glimpse into the shattering relationship of a married couple. The story

opens as the protagonist goes to a hair salon in honor of the first day of her "new life". The lack of a reason is an example of Miranda July's sense of humor. The character comes to the conclusion that a new era for her begins; however, nothing specific happens, which makes her look like a "weirdo".

> You could let it grow another inch and then come back and I'll give you a bob. That way everyone wins.
> No, I have to do it today. It's the first day of the rest of my life.
> Oh. I had a day like that last week.
> Really? What happened?
> I woke up and thought, This is the first day of the rest of my life.
> Then what happened?
> I drove to work. (2007: 148)

Yet, July is not mocking her character simply by labeling her as socially awkward, nor is the subject being undermined as in postmodernism; two sides of the pendulum are to be embraced, the situation is funny at one point and it calls for affection at other times. Humor leaves its place to a moment of sincerity leaking through the latent heart-break of the protagonist in response to her husband's indifference:

> When my husband saw the new short hair, he gave me the look we give each other when one of us forgets who we are. We are not people who buy instant cocoa powder, we do not make small talk, we do not buy Hallmark cards or believe in Hallmark rituals such as Valentine's Day or weddings. (2007: 148)

They have to stick to some rules to be that certain person; their individuality depends on keeping these rules in mind and when one of them somehow does not abide by them, the other has a responsibility to remind him/her. This family is constructed by adopting habits together. Habits contribute to the affective value of family. Towards the end of the story, when their relationship draws to a close, the character says it herself:

> In the weeks that followed, we amazed ourselves. Our habits slid apart easily; I woke up early in the guest room; he stayed up late chatting with Buddhist strangers on the Internet. Like college roommates, we instinctively used different shelves in the refrigerator for the foods we now bought separately. It turned out we didn't really like to eat the same things. (**Ibid**., p. 166-167)

Though they did not actually like the same things, they instinctively knew they should pretend so that the promise evoked by being a family work. What is that promise and what does it require afterwards? As a partial answer to that question, it might help to turn to a different work compared to the ones mentioned in this study. Aksu Bora, in her article on the role of family against precarity says it functions as an insurance in that being a family generally evokes the feeling whenever you fall, your family will be there to catch you. Yet, in the interviews she conducted with white-collar unemployed workers, she senses and writes about the existence of a feeling of being indebted wrapped in a form of gratitude, as a result of which the interviewees find themselves following the wishes of their family. (2013: 199, 200) Sara Ahmed calls this "conditional happiness" and foregrounds what it serves to; her conclusion is this inequality – privileging some people's happiness over the others – helps shaping the desires of those rendered indebted into some common end, which is one of the ways of building happiness as a convention in turn. (2010: 56) Going back to "Mon Plaisir", it can be said the protagonist may not be satisfied with the relationship she has, but she feels secure, thereby feeling a need to align her wishes with those of her husband's.

Throughout Ahmed's aforementioned book (2010), it is suggested people learn to expect happiness from certain happy objects little by little, being exposed to discourses that suggest they are not normal if they are not made happy by those certain objects. Other people tell us how to feel the right emotions upon being confronted with certain situations. Such a moment is made visible in the story as the protagonist goes to consult her therapist. Her therapist has loving anecdotes to offer as a response to every argument the main character had with her husband. The protagonist deduces this is the way loving couples treat each other and when her husband's eyes are closed mouths the things her therapist and her husband would probably tell each other. When the husband, Carl, opens his eyes, everything is back to normal. (2007: 152-153)

At one point she finally admits their marriage is not working and stops pushing forward and awaiting the promise being a family elicits. The crucial point is to analyze the terms leading to this epiphany. Here the term "impasse" must be introduced as Lauren Berlant used it. The term impasse refers to being stuck in the present

experienced as a crisis of the ordinary. The reason why an impasse is a significant tool is that it signifies a situation where one cannot deal with the crisis anymore and realizes something is not working. In the sixth chapter of her book she defines three types of impasses; the one that will serve our needs is the one she has loaded with a meaning herself. About this kind of impasse, she says: "[T]here are situations where managing the presence of a problem / event that dissolves the old sureties and forces improvisation and reflection on life-without-guarantees is a pleasure and a plus, not a loss" (Berlant, 2011: 198).

That point in the story in question where the veil before the protagonist's eyes is lifted turns up during the shootings of a film. It is an impasse in the sense that what keeps them in line until then evaporates at that very moment and they come face to face with a whole new situation where their usual coping mechanism stops responding. In their case, the impasse occurs when they are expected to silently pretend to be on a date at an expensive restaurant. They knew viscerally how happy people would act in a scene like that, so they start flirting passionately, which in turn created a huge abyss between their reality and pretense. Witnessing something they knew existed but was not within their reach ignites what come to be their separation. "We raised our glasses and mouthed, To us! And by 'us' I knew we both meant not us but these two people who had met for the first time at Mon Plaisir" (July, 2007: 165). In their case, impasse leads to paying attention to what constitutes the ordinary for them; and once seeing themselves from that perspective, they cannot manage to go back.

In order to refer to the mood the protagonist ended up with, it would be the right moment to bring up Ahmed's term "affect aliens" again. Alienation makes feeling at ease impossible. In "Mon Plaisir", our protagonist ends up recognizing how she is alienated, having stopped believing in family. Although it takes courage to admit what is supposed to make one happy does not work for you, Ahmed suggests there can be a potential in estrangement once its cause is understood. Ahmed focuses on "revolutionary consciousness" drawing on its transformative impact. It can be said that Berlant's impasse refers to those moments that ignite the characters' epiphanies, to be followed sometimes by Ahmed's revolutionary consciousness. Thanks to the impasse, some characters grow out of their false consciousness that "blocks other possible

worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible" (**Ibid**., p. 165). If the situation which the protagonist is in is considered at the end of the story, it can be pointed out she has taken some action finally and that we are left to imagine what she will make out of her new life; she gives the possibility of being unhappy a chance upon recognizing her false hopes on her marriage. Ahmed's description of how revolutionary consciousness makes one feel applies to the mood the protagonist of "Mon Plaisir" finds herself in:

> […] Revolutionary consciousness means feeling at odds with the world, or feeling that the world is odd. You become estranged from the world as it has been given: the world of good habits and manners, which promises your comfort in return for obedience and good will. As a structure of feeling, alienation is an intense burning presence; it is a feeling that takes place before others, from whom one is alienated, and can feel like a weight that both holds you down and keeps you apart. (**Ibid**., p. 168)

She obeyed the rules that pushed her to believe in the promise of a family leading a life built on shared habits with somebody until letting go of the comfort she got in return and coming to terms with the likelihood of not becoming happy; all resulting from her gaining consciousness about her alienation. This story is only one example of a recurring theme in July's oeuvre; just one part of her look on the outcomes of taking the initiative to leave behind the false promises in one kind of a relationship. In the end, the character seems to have tackled a false promise and ended up liberated, albeit alone.

3.2.1.2. Relationships

There has been an analysis into the promise of good life as projected into the happy object family, although it can be said family and the next happy object romantic relationships are intertwined at some point. Among the happy objects or the promises leading to cruel optimism, relationships probably constitute the largest area where disappointments are expected to come about the most often and July's stories are no exception to this. In most of her stories in the collection, the characters crave for intimacy even though what they get in reality drains them of every possible bit of satisfaction.

Berlant wrote an entry for the topic “Desire” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender* in 1998 and that entry came out as a short book in 2012 as *Desire/Love*, which is in line with her previous studies in that she criticizes the discourses around love that aids keeping false hopes alive. Again, she problematizes fantasies leading to the destruction of their holders, yet keep being turned to for years to come.

What makes July’s work distinct from the narratives Berlant refers to as sources helping brighten the halo above love’s head is its metamodern disbelief. Her work does not fall anywhere near what Berlant describes as the two most common narrative tracks:

> The fantasy forms that structure popular love discourse constantly express the desire for love to simplify living. The content of these narratives is, in a sense, just a surface variation on a narrowly-constructed theme: love’s clarifying wash is expressed positively, in bright-eyed love stories, and negatively, in narratives that track failure at intimacy in the funereal tones of tragedy or the biting tones of cynical realism. (2012: 89)

In July’s short story collection, there are many stories that provoke the reader to dwell on the promises embedded in relationships and the poignant, yet usually funny, situations the characters end up in. A common theme among them is the expectation of intimacy either from people about whom very little is known by the main characters or from people from whom expecting something seems ridiculous. One such story where this expectation is addressed with humor and utmost delicacy – meaning the character holding this belief is not ridiculed – is “The Shared Patio”.

“The Shared Patio” puts a spotlight on a lonely and again socially awkward character who, for example, imagines being close friends with her crush’s wife. As part of her metamodern approach, July weaves a sad tone into the text which can be felt in the advices the protagonist writes for the magazine meant for HIV-positive people. It is only at the end of the story that the reader can make sense of these little intermissions in the narrative. Her advices seem somewhere between funny and moving:

> If you are sad, ask yourself why you are sad. Then pick up the phone and call someone and tell him or her the answer to the question. If you don’t know

> anyone, call the operator and tell him or her. Most people don't know that the operator has to listen, it is a law. Also, the postman is not allowed to go inside your house, but you can talk to him on public property for up to four minutes or until he wants to go, whichever comes first. (2007: 2)

These little musings are there to portray bits and pieces of her daily life. She is lonely and yearning for a chance to talk to the perfect man of her dreams, who is a "New Man" in her eyes – referring to an article she had read. The New Man is described as follows:

> "New Men are more in touch with their feelings than even women, and New Men cry. New Men want to have children, they long to give birth, so sometimes when they cry, it is because they can't do this; there is just nowhere for a baby to come out. New Men just give and give and give. Vincent is like that" (**Ibid.**, p. 3-4).

Berlant says in *Desire/Love* that the law created and brought forward for the functioning of desire is contradictory and "[i]n the popular rhetoric of romance, love is a most fragile thing, a supposed selflessness in a world full of self." (Berlant, 2012: 90) July gives us a character with such a belief in love, yet, the writer's wit comes in as a rupture in the character's fantasy when "The New Man" turns out to be just like everybody else after a monologue delivered independently of her comments, interruptions or reaction. Vincent does not act selflessly, so, that heartbreak could have been used to prove how bad it is to lose the hope of love that would have "simplified" (as Berlant said in the quote above) your living. Instead, here another impasse is encountered where the daily life rules get suspended and the character reaches a level of awareness as to how her dream has pushed her to bear a dead-end fantasy. Thus, July bends the usual tradition of praising love's share in our personal development and her character grows out of her cruel optimism. Yet, she does it in a metamodern way, by fusing heartbreakingly desperate moments with humorous ones – but not heart-warming humorous; the humor here is one that puts a quirky smile on one's face. After going through the scene with Vincent talking incessantly, she destroys the pedestal she put him on before. But seeing him having a seizure, without his former brightness, gives her the chance to see him as he really is: a vulnerable person who is asking for

an almost-stranger's opinion on whether he was to blame for something unimportant at work.

> And it struck me that maybe *True* magazine had been wrong. Maybe there are no New Men. Maybe there are only the living and the dead, and all those who are living deserve each other and are equal to each other. (July, 2007: 6)

Her advices for HIV-positive people are key to understand her mood during the course of events. While the first ones tend to be over-dramatic – aiming anger and loneliness – they get more positive towards the end. The last one reads as follows:

> Do you have doubts about life? Are you unsure if it is worth the trouble? Look at the sky: that is for you. Look at each person's face as you pass on the street: those faces are for you. And the street itself, and the ground under the street, and the ball of fire underneath the ground: all these things are for you. They are as much for you as they are for other people. Remember this when you wake up in the morning and think you have nothing. Stand up and face the east. Now praise the sky and praise the light within each person under the sky. It's okay to be unsure. But praise, praise, praise (**Ibid**., p. 11).

What causes this change in her mood is probably having witnessed private moments of the couple; having seen Helena taking care of her husband with great love after the epileptic fit. During the seizure, she had dreamed Vincent gave up on Helena and told her he could see how perfect the protagonist was. She found out Vincent was not the ideal man, she admitted him the way he was but she couldn't help taking a nap and fantasizing about him in the meantime while he was having a seizure. Yet, as soon as Helena entered the scene, she took all the necessary steps diligently and lovingly. For her, Vincent is so much more than a fantasy object; they built up a life together, the protagonist observes some of it when sent to grab a bag – again, a negligent move during such an emergency. In the end, she just lets them celebrate his recovery and feels euphoric despite being still alone. After all, she got to spend enough time with the man of her dreams and realized he had issues just like her and that didn't stop Helena from loving him and looking after him. The story, which invited the reader to feel for the character instead of ridiculing her fantasies, closes with a hopeful tone.

In most of the stories in the collection, what undoes the characters is their desire for intimacy, regardless of their sexual orientation. It is usually this desire leading to

the incidents of the story. In the story discussed above, the need to connect had a physical side, but could only get expressed in fantasies.

As for how the positive affects that have been discussed so far find their way into July's movies, it will be the right moment to turn to James MacDowell's article, where he analyzes three scenes from different movies and reaches the conclusion that there is a tonal trait that several metamodern movies share:

> [It is] something like an attitude of emotional and intellectual commitment (or affirmation, hopefulness, sentiment) in the face of a nonetheless-present potential for skepticism (or irony, consciousness of absurdity, affected distance) (2017: 24).

In July's first movie, the emotional bonding with the audience is achieved with this kind of a strategy; hopefulness prevails whenever there is room for skepticism. One example from the movie can be the uncanny feeling permeating through the encounters of young characters with the adults in a sexual context. Rob and Nancy's online chatting, which was mentioned in the second chapter, exemplifies this surprisingly balanced tone: it is disturbing to watch a kid exchange obscene messages with an adult woman, yet they come together and things turn out to be quite fine for both of them. A bigger tension is built when the two teenage girls (Heather and Rebecca) start flirting with Richard's colleague Andrew; a single man leaving alone writes dirty messages for two teenagers and hangs them on his window so they can see, to which the girls' response is far from being shocked or negative. When the girls decide to go inside the man's house, obviously to have a sexual adventure, the audience is expected to feel almost a tangible tension; and something unexpected happens: both the girls and the man freak out upon being on the brink of such an inappropriate experience.

3.2.1.3. Other False Promises

Above, a critical look into the themes of romance, family and how relationships work as a false promise was attempted. As the last theme in this part, there will be a brief evaluation of the place of other failures in the promise of the good life such as materialism and consumerism.

Antje Czudaj's book *Miranda July's Intermedial Art* has a full chapter on *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, where she allocates a certain part of the chapter to introduce the idea of "spiritual materialism" through the characters Sylvie and Christine (2016). First of all, she explains, Sylvie has a "hope chest", where she puts her collection of household items in a manner that is more like adults' rather than children, which is another comical element. She is shown while shopping for a blender by herself and from her chats with Peter, the audience listens to her dreams about the future that hints at her motherly nature (July, 2005). Yet, Czudaj argues, she is not a "material girl" as she seems like at first glance because her aim in desiring this white middle-class lifestyle is just securing herself in this complex life (Czudaj, 2016: 91).

In Christine and Richard's first scene together, Christine takes her elderly cab client to the shoe store and is caught by Richard while looking at a pair of pink ballerina shoes. When Richard urges her to try them on, she rejects him and then upon being asked if she is okay in her own shoes, she replies it is fine although they hurt her ankle a bit. (July, 2005) Czudaj emphasizes Richard sounds very philosophical when he tells her she does not deserve this pain and affirms the neoliberal consumer reasoning by suggesting Christine will be much happier if she buys those pair of shoes. Czudaj highlights the fact that Christine is a critical and educated member of the consumer society, and regrets buying them very soon, yet, she cannot save herself from believing in this false promise. (**Ibid**., p. 94) However, she manages to give them a personal feeling by using them in one of her creative video projects where she writes "Me" on one shoe and "You" on the other and moves them constantly closer to and far away from each other, symbolizing her relationship with Richard. From that moment on, the shoes gain another signification and Czudaj reaches the conclusion:

> The shoes stand for the subject's suffering and the feeling that buying them can alleviate pain. In other words, individualism is not constructed here in a binary relation to mass consumerism. However, in line with the strivings of the creative class, one has to be creative in order to turn the material thing into something personal (**Ibid**., p. 98).

Here, materialism and consumerism are presented as false promises; even though they are not the "happy objects" counted among those offered by Sara Ahmed, they still

serve the same purposes. Once more July transforms them into means through which her characters express themselves thereby adding to the positive affects the recipient perceives.

Another example to how being precarious has a transformative effect on the characters is Sophie and Jason's initiatives to build a new life despite the lack of a secure future in *The Future* (2011). Jason, at the beginning of the movie, is a low-level technician providing help through the phone. He works from home while Sophie teaches children how to dance. They have a modest lifestyle; it is obvious they do not have secure jobs. They have a revelation when they decide to adopt a cat, *Paw Paw*, as it was explained above. When they realize they have not spent their lives in the way they have desired, they reach a mutual decision; in a month they will have a cat and they will have to sacrifice their freedom as of then; thus they want to spend that month doing whatever they like. Laurent Berlant mentions their situation in an interview, referring to them to explain how "suffering from disbelief together" is the affect of our times. She explains that Jason and Sophie stopped believing that what they do for a living actually matters. (Berlant & Greenwald, 2012: 81)

Jason does not have anything in mind: "I'm gonna let it choose me" (July, 2011). When a volunteer for helping stop the global warming approaches them, Jason decides this is the sign he has been waiting for. When Sophie points out he is not the environmental kind, he responds: "It doesn't matter what I do. The point is to be alert and notice everything. I'm gonna pay special attention if somebody gives me something or says something to me" (**Ibid.**).

When Jason is turned down several times, he wants to quit this job, as well; explaining the man in charge that this decision was made on a whim, upon which he is told there is not anybody else to cover for him, which shocks him as he is responsible for the whole Los Angeles. The audience at this point, just like Jason, is likely to see him stuck in a dead-end job. It might be thought he would see how meaningless it is to expect a life-changing experience out of such a job. July's characters are affect aliens, Jason is not just going to be happy with the norms of the majority; he gets to be more welcoming to other possibilities after meeting the old man he met through *PennySaver*, just as Miranda July herself did. Jason visits him several times, gets a

glimpse of how an ordinary man built himself a universe by doing the things he believed in and stops feeling anxious about what he is doing; he makes peace with working as a volunteer for a good purpose. Jason gets to be open to the "hap" of happiness; July's character once more is treated with affection, which again stands on the positive side of the spectrum.

3.2.2 The Other Side of the Pendulum: The Detached Recipient and How the Two Sides Interact

In the last part of her book, Timmer lists the features post-postmodern novels have and says "[It] is not 'beyond irony', or itself completely 'irony free', but it no longer uses irony as the default 'language', irony is no longer the social convention or cultural norm in the novel itself" (Timmer, 2010: 360). In most writings on metamodernism, irony is mentioned as a useful tool metamodernist artists benefit from to keep the pendulum swinging between two extremes. Yet, there have been noteworthy efforts to make a distinction between postmodern and post-postmodern irony. The most recent connection between metamodernism and postirony is established in Lee Konstantinou's contribution to *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* by the most well-known theorists of metamodernism – Vermeulen, van den Akker, as well as the famous affect theorist, Alison Gibbons. Konstantinou notes: "Postironists don't advocate a simple return to sincerity – they're not anti-ironists – but rather wish to preserve postmodernism's critical insights (in various domains) while overcoming its disturbing dimensions" (Konstantinou, 2017: 88).

The critical insights of postmodern irony are most famously emphasized in David Foster Wallace's article "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction", where he explains how television recycled postmodern strategies and justified the usage of irony to show how absurd modern world is while using irony at the same time to appeal to the masses. Although he appreciates the rebellious cure-seeking effort of the early postmodernist irony, his criticism focuses on how it later exhausts itself to the point where all statements start to lack meaning because of a tyrannical overuse. At the end of his article, Wallace points to the possibility of the birth of a new generation of norm-changing artists:

> The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the 'Oh how banal.' To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness. (Wallace, 1997: 34)

Wallace foresaw the new sensibility; the metamodernists see irony as more than a mere self-referential tool that plays safely within pre-determined boundaries to make the recipient feel they are part of a smart and closed community if they understand the ironic message.

Linda Hutcheon has a really expansive study on the critical aspects of irony, in which the affective value of it is given special interest. This work gets its name – *Irony's Edge* – from Hutcheon's focus on how it makes the ironist and especially the interpreter edgy and creates an unease mostly because the use of irony almost always requires there being another group of interpreters who would not get it, again just like Wallace's point, Hutcheon also highlights the excluding nature of it. (Hutcheon, 2005: 36-40) However, in metamodernism, irony came to be of use thanks to its contribution to the new relation between the recipient and the character, rather than focusing on a group of people who would get the joke.

It is necessary at this point to go back to postirony as outlined by Lee Konstantinou; he explains the concept through four categories that he set according to the form and content of the irony that is applied with the aim of transcending the type of irony Wallace found ineffective. Konstantinou places July's work in the category "Relational Art", which he applies to works that create an awkward affect thereby setting a "postmodern reality scene through non-postmodern means" – in Konstantinou's own words (Konstantinou, 2017: 98) According to his analysis, awkwardness affect is at play to keep the recipient distant from the character to keep the critical eye of them open. His explanation for why postirony has become so prevalent in our age is the neoliberal focus on project-based working conditions that require the employees to form bonds and get engaged temporarily within that group so that they can dissolve those bonds later and move on to the next one (**Ibid**., p. 101-102). If one is to embark upon applying Konstantinou's point about postirony to July's works, it can be said her work, while calling for empathy and engagement from the

recipient as was discussed in the part above, through irony and other estrangement tools manages to push us to be aware of the distance and disposable temporary engagement involved in fiction. Now is the point where a closer look on the devices she utilizes to achieve this effect is needed.

The comical elements most metamodern movies have as a common denominator are explained by James Macdowell in his article on the "quirky sensibility" published in an online movie journal. According to him, the movies that have this sensibility are bound together by the tone that ensures the oscillation between an ironic detachment and a sincere engagement with the characters. (Macdowell, 2010: 2) He then elaborates the concept more in the aforementioned book edited by Vermeulen, van den Akker and Gibbons in which he emphasizes the term can also be applied to other fictional forms, yet, due to the lack of research on film studies, he focuses on how it is observed in movies. (Macdowell, 2017) He searches for and outlines the common elements belonging to this sensibility by going over several movies. He also attaches this sensibility to metamodernism; what makes it metamodern is the dual mechanism "that requires we view the fiction as simultaneously absurd and moving, the characters as pathetic and likeable, the world as manifestly artificial and believable." (MacDowell, 2010: 4) As for what is of importance to the present part of this study, I will turn to how in quirky works the comical effect is achieved. This outcome is reached with a tone that does not invite the recipient to laugh at the character's misery; instead the audience is likely to find the naivety of the character entertaining or to be caught by a sudden awkward moment which pushes the audience to empathize with the character. MacDowell explains that the ironic detachment is achieved by ensuring a somehow condescending view towards the characters because of their incapability in several aspects; yet, they also arouse affection in the recipient with their "utter commitment and dedication" (2017: 29).

The story "The Sister" can be an example for the use of metamodern irony that now seems familiar through the explanations provided by MacDowell and Konstantinou. Throughout the story, the reader can sense an uncanny and uncomfortable undertone as opposed to the main character's credulousness, childishness and lack of required skills for decoding messages. The main character is

in his sixties and a single man desiring very young girls as the reader finds out when a co-worker of his –Victor – promises to fix him up with his sister –Blanca. The feeling of uncanniness is ensured with the protagonist's disturbing thoughts and comments: "A teenager in a white dress. New little breasts. I did want to meet her." (July, 2007: 41) The irony in the situation is what the character believes about not meeting her seems obvious to the reader from the very start; yet, July's character is in denial for a really long period of time:

> Blanca came in and out of my life over the next few weeks, but she never came in far enough for me to see her. I failed to meet her in so many different ways that I began to know her anyway. (July, 2007: 42)

His denial is so big, his explanations for going on believing her existence looks ridiculous:

> Some may say that such a girl is not ready for a relationship with a man, especially a man in his late sixties. But to that I say: We don't know anything. We don't know how to cure a cold or what dogs are thinking. We do terrible things, we make wars, we kill people out of greed. So who are we to say how to love. I wouldn't force her. I wouldn't have to. She would want me. We would be in love. What do you know. You don't know anything. (**Ibid.**, p. 43)

Victor even takes him to have dinner with his parents in the old people's home; they start spending so much time together, yet, the character needs to believe in this made-up story so much that he becomes more and more agitated in time. The tension peaks when Victor finally invites him to his flat, again leading him to believe he would meet the sister. Anyone reading the story will have understood by that point Victor is up to something; the protagonist's reaction to waiting for hours in vain is:

> Blanca, of course, was late. Victor and I laughed about this, and I really laughed because now it was really funny in a way it had not been before. Goddamn that girl! She knew how to tease a guy. (**Ibid.**, p. 45)

When Victor offers him ecstasy, he rejects it until getting the answer yes to his question if Blanca is "a wild, out-of-control teenager". With the drugs, everything gets a different shape; first Victor holds his hand, then he rubs Victor's arm and he thinks:

> It was like a humping thing. I was thinking of eagles humping each other and then I remembered they don't hump, they lay eggs. I pushed him away. What if Blanca walked in? You're her brother (**Ibid.**, p. 48).

Victor suggests taking their shirts off, but keeping the pants on not to scare him away. Only then the protagonist asks if Victor was gay; Victor asks him to let that happen and finally confesses Blanca does not exist. They then decide to wait for the drug to lose its effect: "When the drugs were over, I suddenly knew he was right. It was as if I had been on the drug for the last three months (…)" (**Ibid.**, p. 48)

When he is ready to face the reality, he talks to Victor:

> He said, Tell me about the girls.
> What girls?
> You like little girls.
> No, teenagers.
> Where do you meet them?
> What? I don't do that, I just think about it.
> That's good.
> Yeah. I wouldn't do that.
> Not even with Blanca? Yeah, I guess with Blanca, but she's—that's different (**Ibid**., p. 49).

Here, the reader is left alone with a very uncomfortable confession and things get more and more awkward as the two men start getting intimate. The protagonist's account of the events has this childish effect to it, which is the central element in this story that creates the effect MacDowell mentions: the balance between the ironic distance and the engaging affective sense. He is narrating his sexual intercourse with Victor and in the middle of such an unexpected and intimate development, he thinks about the harms of sperm:

> When I came, I came on the couch; I didn't want to come inside him because of what sperm can do. But he ate it off the couch and then he kissed me with a deep tongue, so whatever sperm can do, it was doing it to me. (**Ibid.**, p. 50)

They then sleep together and when they wake up, everything seems normal to this old man who was heterosexual and was desiring young girls all his life until that moment. At that still moment, when the characters seem to be surprised at themselves

for being able to continue acting naturally – talking about their job, a fly disrupts the peace causing the protagonist to break the lamp and growl because he was about to say a business term starting with "g". At the end of the story, the character growls and Victor leans his face against the protagonist's neck, which starts a "new life" in the narrator's own words. Although this was the basic narration of events, the main character chooses to go beyond that and turn it into an ecstatic experience. Akker and Vermeulen explain metamodern irony by saying metamodern works try to show us what a work cannot represent by "turning the commonplace into a site of ambiguity, of mystery, and unfamiliarity, to us as much as to its characters" (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010: 10).

> It broke more than was fitting, crashing and shattering as if it were a lamp twelve times its size. In a final gesture, the bulb exploded in fireworks that fell quietly, extinguishing themselves. (**Ibid**., p. 50)

This way the ordinary is considered to be something bigger than itself. It is not the ordinary readers have known, which makes it unfamiliar to them as well as the characters and that serves in the end to the purpose of making the reader aware of this distance between them and the author that is impossible to ignore.

As for the trait of the quirky sensibility in July's movie *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), there might be a need to go into a scene from the movie where an ironic detachment is first built and then undermined. Richard and Christine have a smooth start; they leave the store together and play a game in which they pretend they are in a relationship and the way to their cars is their relationship, the spot where they will say goodbye to each other is the point this imaginary relationship ends. When they reach the final spot, Richard insists a bit to go on walking with her, upon which Christine reminds him the rules of the game, and they say goodbye. A few minutes later Christine stops his car suddenly and jumps in and at that point the audience is likely to feel this is just too fairytale-like. However, this magical start to a new relationship end up being life-like; the audience finds herself in the middle of the reality again. Richard tells Christine: "You are acting like I am just this regular man, like a man in a book that a woman in the book meets." Before the audience says the

characters are too naïve and what is happening on the screen is a cliché romance story where the protagonists start getting on very well from the very start and the most awkward acts by them are considered normal to make the love story magical. That is the ironic detachment that warns the audience that the character is highly self-conscious and not that naïve to get blinded by such romance stories.

MacDowell also mention a childlike aesthetic as an example to the elements ensuring the quirky tone (2017: 38). *Me and You* carries more of these traits. Czudaj in her analysis of the movie refers to the goldfish scene, discussed in the previous chapter of this study, and highlights the childishness it entails:

> When Christine points out the goldfish to Michael, the audience might expect him to answer: 'Well, it's just a goldfish. Why are you making a fuss about it?' But he takes her seriously; he feels the same as her. He backs her up instead of laughing at her for her exaggerated emotions. The two adults do not react to the situation in a normal manner. They react, rather, like children, displaying childlike emotionality. (2016: 78)

In the second movie *The Future,* the focus on childlike aesthetics and postirony leave its place to unnaturalistic, supernatural elements. This time the estrangement tool to keep the detachment for the recipient possible is the existence of the supernatural in the movie. The movie opens with a monologue by a cat, Paw Paw, and the main characters Jason and Sophie are introduced to the audience with this monologue:

> Have you ever been outside? I mean not temporarily. I mean born outside, never been inside, never been petted, not even once. Yes? Then you know about the darkness that is not appropriate to talk about. I had a bloody paw when they found me and carried me in a towel to the cageatorium. It was not cool there, but they said "we will come back for you Paw Paw." That's what they called me. And they called each other Sophie and Jason. (July, 2005)

After this scene, the audience watches Sophie and Jason as they are lying down on the same couch, each busy on their own laptops. After the opening scene, the audience is ready to embrace the fact that the movie has supernatural elements and that is why July plays around with that readiness when Jason tells Sophie his super power is stopping time. Both of them stay still for a couple of minutes and the normal reaction expected of the audience is to take this seriously considering the first scene was

narrated by a talking cat. However, Jason makes a joke about how bad Sophie is at pretending and it is revealed stopping the time was just a game they both played. The audience's suspension of disbelief is thus subverted; yet, it turns out later that Jason can actually stop time when Sophie decides to leave him. When Jason stops time after Sophie confesses her affair, it is rather confusing for the audience to decide if he really has that capability or if it is only his imagination as Sophie's and his scenes are shown separately and whereas in his scenes he is seen as the only person moving, Sophie, goes on with her new life as a suburban housewife despite being frozen in Jason's scenes. This kind of an obscurity is reminiscent of the postmodern playfulness, which again distorts the possibility of an immersion in fiction and draws the audience's attention to the artificiality involved and the idea that they should be attentive.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I aimed to trace the traits that cause Miranda July's works to be called metamodern, at the same time benefiting from them to exemplify the basic tenets of metamodernism. This study has no intention of declaring itself the only one associating July's works with metamodernism; her work has already been mentioned by researchers working on metamodernism; for example – on the website metamodernism.com, created by the most-cited theorists in this work, namely van den Akker and Vermeulen – Emma Sullivan as early as 2014 already set the connection between the metamodern sensibility and the strategies of July:

> She is sincere but she is also ironical; her work both consoles and abrades. The oscillation between opposites that is central to Vermeulen and van den Akker's conception of metamodern practice is fundamental to her work (Sullivan, 2014).

As has been noted before, there is more than one reference to July's works in the most recent book on metamodernism – see "Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism" and "Four Faces of Postirony" in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*. (Vermeulen, van den Akker, Gibbons, 2017) Therefore, in this dissertation, the main purpose is not to identify the chosen works of art metamodern for the first time; I hope the main contribution of this study will be the detailed reading of July's works through the metamodern approach. While outlining the chapters, what has been of utmost significance was to cluster July's stories and scenes from the movies around the themes that were determined based on their relevance to the most popular subjects in metamodernism. Since metamodernism is a relatively recent term, the first chapter is allocated to its development through some stages, to have an idea about the most current usage of it. The developments after the decline of postmodernism were summarized in the introductory chapter while the alternatives offered to replace the dominant position in cultural theory were discussed in the first one. These developments and the focus of the alternatives point to an emphasis on affects, which is argued in a more structured way by theorists of

metamodernism. Hence, one of the chapters is a discussion on how positive and negative affects interact in July's works, inspired by ordinary affect theorists. Another chapter follows the metamodern perspective on characters in fictional works based on the changing position of subjects.

To be more specific about the content of the chapters, the first one starts with the point the introduction briefly touches upon, which is what comes after the demise of postmodernism. By the time metamodernism emerged in the cultural theory scene, there had been several alternatives to postmodernism to take over the central place; three of them – the most popular ones – are discussed with their basic arguments in the first chapter: Performatism, Digimodernism and Post-postmodernism. Reading the works by the theorists of these approaches is not irrelevant to the discussions about metamodernism in that their points about the contemporary help us determine the current structure of feeling; their comments and some insights coincide with those of metamodernism. To elaborate, the theorist of performatism, Raoul Eshelman, later wrote an article for the compilation by van den Akker, Vermeulen and Gibbons, the well-known theorists of metamodernism and affect theory. The rest of the chapter aims to introduce the main arguments of metamodernism to be developed later in the following chapters, the most noteworthy of which is the oscillation between two ends such as irony and sincerity, connection and disconnection and so on.

One of the most basic differences between postmodernism and metamodernism lies in their views on subjectivity. The second chapter traces the new perception of self by briefly looking into relationality and recent analyses by theorists writing on the current shift in the sense of self. In this chapter, how July's characters manage to establish themselves as a whole in contrast with the postmodern fragmented subjects is analyzed. It is pointed out that July is very successful in creating spaces where communication, either with the other or the self, is temporarily possible and surprisingly transformative.

What set the mood of postmodernism was the lack of faith, in truth, grand narratives, humanism etc., which can be associated with the deconstructionist movement rooted in the emergence of postmodernism. The postmodern setting woven with playfulness, irony, cynicism and lack of belief in grand narratives all boil down

to this lack of faith; that is the most noticeable quality that differentiates it from its successors. The third chapter is built around the hopeful tone that can be discerned in metamodern works, hence the focus on affects, and the new relation between the recipient and the characters that tone leads to. This chapter demonstrates how the oscillation between the more positive end of this new relation interact with the other, the less positive one. While the recipients are urged to feel for the characters, they also have to keep their distance from them due to the estrangement tools at play. The positive end is constructed with characters who lack some social skills; they are in the middle of an "ordinary crisis" built through good life promises in Lauren Berlant's terms and mostly manage to save themselves from "cruel optimism" and learn how to tackle this crisis. The other end that requires the recipient to notice the artifice in fictional works and this way stay alert and critical is rendered possible through irony and other tools to draw attention to the distance between the reader/audience and the characters. July's strategies that keep the pendulum swinging vary; the most striking ones that recur in her work are discussed in this study. An affective reading of her work that was tried in the third chapter is suggested as an example of how contemporary works can be read through metamodern traits; July usually resorts to arousing several affects in the recipient at the same time, which makes her eligible for being referred to as a metamodern artist.

Through these three chapters, some of July's works are discussed in accordance with the metamodern approach; nevertheless, it should be remembered that metamodernism has started to offer means for critical analysis very recently, therefore the sources elaborating on its methods are still very limited. As for the future path awaiting metamodernism, it will be reasonable to expect its expansion to such an extent that its capacity to explain contemporary works of art will be theorized in a more detailed and specific way; considering the relatively short time since the emergence of the term as it has been discussed here. Metamodernism may fall short of being applied to make sense of works of older times owing to its definition as "a structure of feeling", which means it reflects the sentiments pervading the contemporary cultural criticism scene whose appearance can be perceived, but whose specific results and effects cannot be articulated clearly. This approach strives to

analyze the artworks of today in terms of the oscillation that is caused by getting produced in times affected by both modernism and postmodernism.

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