LIVING IN THE TIMES OF AUGMENTED REALITY: A METAMODERNIST AND PSEUDO-MODERNIST CRITIQUE OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Living in the Times of Augmented Reality: A Metamodernist and Pseudo-modernist Critique of Selected Contemporary British Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Living in the Times of Augmented Reality: A Metamodernist and Pseudo-modernist Critique of Selected Contemporary British Fiction

The present research is an attempt to focus on the fictional representation of not only the impact on the human sensibility of the excessive interaction with the internet or social media to receive information and news in the contemporary age, but also of the way one's frequent engagement with the cyberspace impacts one's emotional state, allowing that person to both escape the physical world and create some imaginative information, which is based on possibilities. Firstly, the shifts triggered in the psychic patterns of Olivia Laing's protagonist due to her excessive interaction with the internet or social media in *Crudo* are explored to explain her intriguing oscillation between the opposing poles of contentment and discontentment. Secondly, the representative pseudo-modern emotional condition that takes in Nikesh Shukla's hero in *Meatspace* because of his own act of frequently engaging with the internet is studied. The research is qualitative in its approach and carries out a textual analysis of the two novels by using the critical notions proposed by the prominent contemporary scholars, Vermeulen and Akker, and Kirby with reference to metamodernism and pseudo-modernism respectively. This critical enquiry adds some insightful literary consciousness into the contemporary scholarship concerning an individual's life in the age of internet.

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DEDICATION

To my parents',
My only sibling's,
And my people's
Dreams
That became my reality.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Post-postmodernism can be understood as a blanket term denoting the advent of a new epoch. The necessity of this label is connected with the emergence of the feeling of the demise of postmodernism, or it being no longer a flavor in fashion in the late 1990s and onwards. The feeling is/was mutual, shared both by the academic world and the pop culture. Post-postmodernism encompasses in its parameter a number of terms, such as pseudo-modernism, digimodernism, metamodernism, performatism, hypermodernism, automodernism, and others. Each of these conceptualities pinpoints, argues, and analyzes some certain markers of this paradigm shift, or the burgeoning contemporary cultural logic. Moreover, Alison Gibbons contends that there exist "convergences and divergences between these conceptualizations (Gibbons). As per Gibbons, these theories, with all their similarities and dissimilarities, add to one another as much as they challenge.

Coming back to some key terms brought and discussed under the vague label of Post-postmodernism, I will like to begin with digimodernism. Digimodernism is a term coined by Alan Kirby, a British intellectual, who is quite pre-eminent for his take on the appearance of a new sort of textuality in the post-postmodern era. Proposing digimodernism as the "new cultural paradigm" of the twenty-first century, he mentions the fact of "the computerization of text" as the cornerstone of its significant inception, the fact which also renders birth to an unprecedented sort of textuality distinguished by such distinctive features as "onwardness, haphazardness, evanescence, and anonymous, social and multiple authorship" (*Digimodernism* 1). Contending digimodernism as "the successor to postmodernism", Kirby posits that digimodernism clashes with postmodernism stating that "certain of its traits (earnestness, the apparently real) resemble a repudiation of typical postmodern characteristics" (*Digimodernism* 2). To say precisely, digimodernism, in the light of Kirby's argument, while deviating from pre-existing textuality, also introduces new textual horizons in connection with the subject matter, pattern, and value, as well as, a distinct perception of the culture and cultural systems.

Virtually synonymous with, or congruent to digimodernism is the term pseudo-modernism, a term that Alan Kirby deploys in his 2006 article, "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond", in *Philosophy Now* (before his coming up with the term digimodernism) to open up the discussion about the new variations and strands in the cultural and social landscape of the twenty-first century. The article, as its title suggests, propounds the ultimate evanescence of the postmodern condition, and its gap being infused by a new cultural pattern with digital technology and internet at its nucleus. Pseudo-modernism is a "technologically motivated shift to the cultural centre" which has "re-structured, violently and forever, the nature of the author, the reader and the text, and the relationships between them" (Kirby, "The Death"). Distinguishing pseudo-modernism from postmodernism, Kirby writes that postmodernism considered "contemporary culture as a spectacle before which the individual sat powerless, and within which questions of the real were problematized", while pseudo-modernism "makes the individual's action the necessary condition of the cultural product" ("The Death"). This necessary condition applies on the internet as well, which is a "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence*" in Kirby's view ("The Death"). Furthermore, he inscribes: "In postmodernism, one read, watched, listened, as before. In pseudo-modernism one phones, clicks, presses, surfs, chooses, moves, downloads. There is a generation gap here . . ." ("The Death"). Kirby, writing in the same progression, further states that the characteristic traits of postmodernism are irony and playfulness, while "pseudo-modernism's typical intellectual states are ignorance, fanaticism and anxiety" ("The Death"). A pseudo-modernist needs to be informed that vegetables must be the part of his/her diet as they are good for his/her health. But he/she knows very well how to use social media in order to communicate with someone living in a remote continent. Fanaticism finds its reflection in the acts, such as the uploading of videos containing vicious and torturous scenes, and other audio and video elements on the internet. Anxiety, in the pseudo-modern world, ranges from a "general fear of social breakdown and identity loss" to a "deep unease about diet and health", etc. ("The Death"). Kirby concludes his article arguing about the representative pseudo-modern emotional condition of "*trance*" ("The Death"). It is the emotional state in which one's own actions, for instance, clicking, typing, browsing the internet, etc., engulf that person, removing him/her from the actual physical world.

Metamodernism is grounded profoundly by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their quite innovative essay, “Notes on metamodernism”. They define it in the chapter, “Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism”, of the book, *Metamodernism: History, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* as “a structure of feeling” materializing during the 2000s and becoming “the dominant cultural logic of Western capitalist societies” (Akker, et al.). In “Notes on metamodernism”, they argue that metamodernism is “characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment” (“Notes” 5677). Commenting on the metamodern attitude, they opine that it is of “informed naivety”, therefore, conforming neither to the modern fanaticism or naivety nor to the postmodern apathy or skepticism, rather transforming into a sort of “pragmatic idealism” (“Notes” 5677). Whenever metamodern approach becomes too idealistic under the influence of modernism, it is confronted by the postmodern skepticism to keep it pragmatic, and whenever metamodernism attempts to be radically pragmatic following the postmodern tradition, it is kept in check by the modern enthusiasm to keep it idealistic. Vermeulen and Akker, in epistemological terms, situate metamodernism with “Kant’s “negative” idealism” that can be felicitously “summarized as “as-if” thinking”, in contrast to modernism and postmodernism that are associated with “Hegel’s “positive” idealism” (“Notes” 5677). This positive idealism by Hegel is a certain view of history that can be best summarized in the following words: the worldwide implementation of the Western liberal democracy. Modernism agrees with Hegel’s view of history while postmodernism, on the basis of Hegel’s this view, announces its (history) end as the global implementation of Western liberal democracy has already been achieved. In addition to this, postmodernism claims that history has met its conclusion because “its purpose could never be fulfilled—indeed, because it does not exist” (“Notes” 5677). Nevertheless, metamodernism accepts the notion of negative idealism by Kant which views human history as if it is the depiction of humankind’s moral as well as political progress, and therefore, metamodernism, while confessing the non-existence of history, wilfully goes for “*as if* it does exist”, hence, committing “itself to an impossible possibility” (“Notes” 5677). Exploring metamodernism in terms of ontology, both theorists express that it “oscillates between the modern and the postmodern . . . One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles.”

("Notes" 5677). Each time the metamodern pendulum tries to radically reach one side of the conflicting extremes, e.g. modern enthusiasm, the other side of the conflicting extremes, e.g. postmodern irony, gravitates it back and vice versa.

Now I must throw some light on the term augmented reality used in the title of my research. Augmented reality can be understood as "an enhanced version of the real physical world that is achieved through the use of digital visual elements, sound, or other sensory stimuli and delivered through technology" (Hayes). In simple words, augmented reality merges the content that is generated via computer with the actual world to provide an improved interactive experience to the user. Augmented reality can be best understood through the example of Snapchat—an app designed for instant multimedia messaging. When a person shoots his/her video using Snapchat, they can choose one filter or lens among the available lot of filters and lenses. The person remains in his/her real world surroundings. Nothing about it changes. However, the lens, for instance, a bunny face, appears on the person's real face. This is how the reality through the application of computer-generated visual elements gets augmented. Now I must express myself on how I view augmented reality in the context of metamodernism. Modernism and postmodernism are the divergent positions between which metamodernism oscillates. Using Snapchat, when a person applies a lens, it appears when the person's face is at the right angle and disappears when it is not. Therefore, the person, just like metamodernism oscillates between the divergent positions, keeps on oscillating between the conflicting extremes of the real (without lens) and the unreal (with lens). After that, I must discuss my comprehension of the connection between the term augmented reality and the pseudo-modernism. Augmented reality for its presence relies mainly on the internet. Snapchat, which incorporates the technology of augmented reality as one of its features, is also heavily dependent on the internet for its proper functioning. Alan Kirby describes the internet as the "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence*", which makes its user's participation a compulsory condition for its existence (Kirby, "The Death"). In other words, Snapchat—obliquely augmented reality as well—also makes a person's participation—opening the app, choosing a desired lens or filter, and shooting a video or capturing a picture—a compulsory condition for its existence. What happens during one's activity of engaging with the pseudo-modern cultural product (internet, or for example, Snapchat) is that they enter the representative pseudo-modern

emotional state of "*trance*", which is "the state of being swallowed up by [one's own] activity". (Kirby, "The Death"). In simple words, the enhanced interactive experience that augmented reality provides to the users cannot be provided by the augmented reality unless the users engage themselves with it, a characteristic which is very particular to that of pseudo-modern cultural product. This discussion explains my understanding of augmented reality as well as its utilization in the title of my thesis in the light of both metamodernism and pseudo-modernism.

In the present research, I, while critiquing Laing's fiction, *Crudo*, attempt to foreground the manner in which the novel's protagonist, Kathy—resembling the pendular metamodern swinging between the opposing poles of modern and postmodern—also oscillates between the conflicting psychic extremes due to her regular contact with the internet or social media. Furthermore, the research also highlights how this customary contact is triggering her perpetual perplexity, her agony, her pessimism, and her cynicism. For the execution of the analysis of *Crudo*, this critique utilizes the theoretical postulations proposed by Vermeulen and Akker with respect to metamodernism. The other work of fiction, *Meatspace*, by Nikesh Shukla included in this inquiry is examined from the perspective of the manner in which Kitab's (Shukla's protagonist) own doing of interacting excessively with the internet or social media engulfs him, and therefore, takes the tangible world away from him that leads to his creative portrayal of the current possible personality of another individual. However, to study *Meatspace*, the research makes use of Alan Kirby's theoretical notions regarding pseudo-modernism. These postulations, as put forth by Vermeulen and Akker as well as Kirby in their respective works, are further elucidated in the theoretical framework of this critical study.

The work of fiction, *Crudo*—"100th James Tait Black Memorial Prize" winning novel—that has been targeted in this critical investigation now demands to be touched upon ("Olivia Laing"). Talking briefly of the author, Olivia Laing is a British cultural critic and novelist, who, besides *Crudo*, has also authored four non-fiction works, *To the River*, *The Trip to Echo Spring, The Lonely City* and *Funny Weather*. Coming back to the selected novel, the book's protagonist named Kathy, who is a writer, is going to get married in her 40s, while the summer of 2017 has already dispersed its colours around. She is, throughout the novel, frequently in touch with the digital devices and internet, imbibing news and information. Kathy is observing the

world undergoing drastic shifts, including the radical climatic changes, leading it towards annihilation. Burgeoning animosity between Donald Trump of America and Kim Jong-un of North Korea is bringing the globe on the brink of a nuclear war. In the midst of all this evolving disruptiveness, she questions the meaning, purpose and pleasures of life as well as that of art, when the world is subsequently going to end.

The second text selected for this critical study is *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla, a British author and screenwriter. He covers the topics, such as "race, racism, identity, and immigration" in his writing ("Nikesh Shukla"). In addition to *Meatspace*, his literary corpus includes two other novels, *Coconut Unlimited* and *The One Who Wrote Destiny*. He presents Kitab Balasubramanyam as the protagonist of his novel, *Meatspace*, and focuses noticeably on the modern life from the point of view of its bifurcation into the online representation of one's life and one's actual reality. With a humour that is laced with satire, the book contrasts how much time and effort an individual gives to maintain and update his online persona with that he gives to improve his real life and relations. *Meatspace* is the story of an individual who is having a bad time from the past few months. He loses his job, his girlfriend, and the novel that he has written has failed to achieve any remarkable reputation in the market. He lives in a flat in east London that he barely leaves and lives on his mother's life insurance money. He shares the flat with his brother Aziz, who has also decided to leave him for his own adventure of searching for his duplicate in New York. His routine chiefly comprises of his online activity on Facebook and Twitter as well as going through the emails that his father sends him to get his piece of advice for dating women online and otherwise. The twist, however, comes in the plot when out of nowhere Kitab's lookalike and namesake steps in his physical life and starts interfering in his matters, "forcing Kitab to re-enter the meatspace to reclaim his identity" (""Meatspace"").

Returning to the current inquiry, the research while confining itself within the limits of the theories of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism aims to analyse two contemporary works of fiction: *Crudo* by Olivia Laing and *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla. It attempts to examine *Crudo* from the perspective of how the protagonist's more than normal interaction with the internet or social media—fraught with information and news—presses her to sway, resembling metamodern pendulum, between several conflicting extremes; and furthermore, how it coerces the protagonist

to develop a particular worldview—chiefly pessimistic and hopeless. Besides *Crudo*, the research also explores *Meatspace* from the standpoint of how the protagonist's own doing of engaging with the cyberspace swallows him up and allows him to creatively decide another man's probable present self by removing the protagonist from the meatspace—the physical world. In simple words, the present research studies two individuals, Kathy and Kitab, who are living in the age of internet, in terms of how their frequent or more than normal engagement with the internet is impacting their psychological/emotional states.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The contemporary world is characterized by the widespread presence of the internet and social media that excessively provide not just the access to every kind of information and news—ranging from the mounting political tensions giving way to a probable nuclear war to the severe climatic shifts looming over the globe—but also the permission to creatively produce the imaginary details of things or persons on blogs or other online platforms. Laing's *Crudo* is the intriguing fictionalization of the issue of how the excessive engagement with the internet or social media, always providing some sort of information or news, causes unfixity or instability in one individual's life, forcing her to sway in-between the divergent psychic positions and to develop a negative worldview, while Shukla's *Meatspace* fictionalizes how one's frequent interaction with the internet relieves him from the tangible world by engulfing him completely in his own action of interaction and making him decide the imaginative possibilities.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does the protagonist in *Crudo* negotiate between the different psychic polarities?
2. In what particular manner does the protagonist's interaction with the internet or social media in *Crudo* coerce her to view the world?
3. What makes the protagonist an embodiment of the representative pseudo-modern emotional condition in *Meatspace*?
4. How does the protagonist's own action of engagement with the cyberspace take him away from the meatspace in *Meatspace*?

1.4 Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

To corroborate the argument, I have utilized the theoretical notions presented by Vermeulen and Akker in their 2010 essay, "Notes on metamodernism", and in the book, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism* (2017) with regards to metamodernism. Along with that, the research also includes the critical conceptions offered by Alan Kirby regarding pseudo-modernism in his 2006 article, "The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond".

Exploring metamodernism in ontological terms, both Vermeulen and Akker articulate that it "oscillates between the modern and the postmodern . . . One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles." ("Notes" 5677). Each time the metamodernism tries to radically approach one side of the conflicting extremes, e.g. "modern enthusiasm", "unity", etc., the other side of the conflicting extremes, e.g. "postmodern irony", "plurality", etc., gravitates it back and vice versa; and this is how the metamodern pendulum keeps oscillating between the opposing poles ("Notes" 5677).

Moreover, Vermeulen and Akker, in the chapter, "Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism" in the book, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, refer to the "Internet as a means to discuss, cultivate and rally around shared frustrations (however disparate)", and pinpoint the fact that social media culture has become an almost ubiquitous presence in the society (Akker, et al.).

This critical investigation combines the idea of metamodern oscillation between conflicting extremes and the idea of the internet as well as the social media as being the means of cultivating frustrations together to examine the way Kathy's excessive interaction with the internet or social media causes her to oscillate between differing psychic positions, and also to notice how this interaction forces her to view the world in *Crudo*.

Alan Kirby claims that the internet is the "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence*" which makes the individual's participation a "necessary condition" for its existence ("The Death"). Additionally, he writes that the "typical emotional state" in "[t]his pseudo-modern world" is that of the "*trance*–the state of being swallowed up by your activity" ("The Death"). Explicating this pseudo-modern

emotional condition further, he argues that it "*takes the* [real] *world away* . . . You click, you punch the keys, you are . . . engulfed, deciding" ("The Death").

I utilize Kirby's abovementioned conceptual notions to illustrate the way Kitab's own "activity" of frequently engaging with the internet or cyberspace to create the information is engulfing him completely in a manner that removes him from his real world surroundings, providing him the chance to imaginatively decide the possible adventures of his late brother, Aziz, in the cyberspace in Nikesh Shukla's novel (Kirby, "The Death").

Also, in order to critically examine the selected works of literature, *Crudo* by Olivia Laing and *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla, this study remains purely qualitative. For the sake of analysis of the both texts, the research has been restricted only to the technique of textual analysis. To carry out the textual analysis, this critical study makes use of some of Catherine Belsey's notions provided in "Textual Analysis as a Research Method". These notions, acting as a bridge, connect the defined theoretical conceptions to the selected texts, providing, therefore, a roadmap for my critical inquiry. Using textual analysis as a technique, the current investigation aims to find how Liang's fiction delineates the aspect of the leading character being compelled by her frequent interaction with the internet or social media—absorbing some information or news—to view the world and the human condition in it in a specific manner, laced with anxiety and negativity. Within *Crudo*, the critique also focuses on making evident the way this repeated contact with the internet or social media is causing Liang's heroine to oscillate in a manner similar to the metamodern oscillation between the opposing extremes. What the research concentrates on in Shukla's text is how the major character's own activity of his recurring interaction with the internet or social media for creating the information, though imaginative, is occupying him, removing him, thus, from the actual world, making it possible for him to decide the possible present personality of another human being.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

With the aim to aptly and meticulously deal with the issues under consideration, the current investigation concentrates merely on two contemporary works of fiction: *Crudo* by Olivia Liang and *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla. However, it is important to mention that the selection of these two British novels has nothing to

do with their being British. The ambit of my research is not confined only to the British society, rather it concerns a vast majority of human beings living in the age of internet. I have selected these novels because of their inscription and publication in and about the contemporary world and due to the reason that they provide sufficient allusions, making possible a creative critical construal of the selected texts with reference to the defined theoretical framework—incorporating the conceptions from metamodernism and pseudo-modernism individually—and the posed research questions. To simply put, both Liang and Shukla in their respective works, *Crudo* and *Meatspace*, depict the effects of internet/cyberspace on the human psyche from different perspectives, which makes both the authors as well as their literary pieces quite relevant, keeping in view the aims of the present research.

1.6 Organization of the Study

CHAPTER 1–INTRODUCTION:

This chapter opens with a general discussion of post-postmodernism and narrows this discussion down to the precise delineation of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism. Besides this, it briefly sets the backdrop for the current study as well as includes thesis statement, research questions, theoretical framework, research methodology, delimitation of the study, chapter breakdown, and significance of the study.

CHAPTER 2–REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

This section provides the critical review of the previous investigations conducted with reference to the internet and social media, and the cyberspace in order to study their mental and emotional impacts on human beings, including the topic of the real and the virtual as well. It also incorporates the critical research in association with metamodernism, especially for the better understanding of the metamodern pendular oscillation between differing positions. Last but not least, it includes the critical discussion of the reviews and the studies that have already attempted to explore the selected texts.

CHAPTER 3–THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This chapter is divided in two sections. At the first place, it discusses in detail the critical theories of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism with respect to the theoretical conceptions that have been selected from them in order to clearly project the way the theoretical framework has been formulated for the critical study of *Crudo* and *Meatspace*. Besides this, the chapter also provides a thorough discussion of the textual analysis technique employed in this research in the light of Catherine Belsey's selected notions.

CHAPTER 4–THE METAMODERN DIMENSION IN OLIVIA LAING'S *CRUDO*:

This portion of the thesis encompasses the critical analysis of Laing's book, *Crudo*, using the conceptual lens of metamodernism as put forth by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker.

CHAPTER 5–THE PSEUDO-MODERN DIMENSION IN NIKESH SHUKLA'S *MEATSPACE*:

In this chapter, Shukla's novel, *Meatspace* is examined from the perspective of the representative pseudo-modern emotional state, a notion presented by Alan Kirby in his ground-breaking theoretical essay.

CHAPTER 6–CONCLUSION:

The chapter wrapping up this research, together with reflecting on the conceptual notions and the research aims, connects the overall discussion in the analyses parts of the thesis with the thesis statement, and also precisely states the findings of the study in the light of the posed research questions.

1.7 Significance and Rationale of the Study

The current critique earns its significance for three reasons. Firstly, because of the contemporary relevance, since it critically engages with the aforementioned theoretical concepts of the metamodern oscillation as well as the pseudo-modern emotional state of trance within metamodernism and pseudo-modernism separately—the two theories that make efforts to theorize the textural, personal, social, and cultural spaces of the still nascent epoch. Both these theories have not been utilized to their enough potential by both the local and international researchers to study some

certain research gap(s). Secondly, with the assistance of the critical perspectives of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism, it attempts to foreground a profound, innovative insight of Olivia Laing's *Crudo* and Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace*, highlighting particularly the psychological state, or the emotional condition of an individual living in the age of internet. The impact of internet and social media on humans is an undeniable fact. However, what makes my study unique is its attempt to foreground an individual's oscillation—psychological in its nature—between the offline commitments and the online commitments triggered by the internet and a person's excessive interaction with it. Moreover, my research is unique as it studies an individual's emotional state also from the standpoint of pseudo-modern emotional state of trance in which one's own excessive engagement with the cyberspace swallows him/her up, taking him/her away from the meatspace and permitting him/her to create information based on imaginative possibilities. Thirdly, the present research finds its significance from the very fact that it makes efforts to study the two literary texts which still require a substantial amount of critical endeavours to unearth the concealed meaning between their lines.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The hierarchy that I have followed in order to organize the bulk of literature that is reviewed in this section is largely thematic instead of temporal. This review of literature brings in its spectrum three key topics: 1) the effects of the internet and social media on the human psyche, 2) understanding the metamodern oscillation and the metamodernism, and 3) cyberspace and the context of the real. These topics explore a number of sub-topics. The first topic brings to focus the issues like the information overload, the social overload, and others, which are the results of the advent of the internet and social media. It also discusses the resultant mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress, which are brought about due to these issues. The second topic chiefly explores the oscillation of metamodernism between opposing poles, however, it also makes the metamodern literary techniques, metamodernism in the context of metaphysics, etc. the part of its discussion. The third topic, finally, explores the cyberspace with respect to the well-known debate of the real and the virtual. By doing so, this literature review aims to provide a general backdrop of the concerns that have been concentrated upon in this critical study. Additionally, the literature review also incorporates different reviews and critical studies with reference to the selected texts, *Crudo* and *Meatspace*, in order to make clear the distinctions that distinguish the present research from the perspectives which have already been presented in connection to the novels under consideration.

2.2 The Psychological Impacts of Internet and Social Media

Internet, without an ounce of uncertainty, is at the nucleus of the contemporary world in association with its technological, and more precisely, its digital advancements. It is, with all the zeros and ones at its bedrock, is the endless and the depthless ocean of data and information. Quite significantly, one of its core characteristics is to make easy the accessibility of all sorts of information from academic to political, from personal to social, from medical to technological, from artistic to scientific, and, in short, from human to non-human. Himma (2007) opens

the essay, “The concept of information overload: A preliminary step in understanding the nature of a harmful information-related condition”, with the acknowledgement of the fact that, since the dawn of 3Ws (World Wide Web), loads of information are available online to be processed and consumed. Comparably, the introduction of *On the Internet* (2008) in an attempt to explicate the internet aptly puts:

> . . . the Net is too gigantic and protean for us to think of it as a device for satisfying any specific need, and each new use it affords is a surprise. If the essence of technology is to make everything accessible and optimizable, then the Internet is the perfect technological device . . . What the Web will allow us to do is literally unlimited . . . Internet will . . . lead to the development of intelligent search engines that will deliver to us just the information we desire . . . put us in touch with all of actual reality . . . and thereby add new dimensions of meaning to our lives. (Dreyfus 1-2)

Dreyfus states several other “outrageous predictions” as well from a new age of “economic” boom to the exploration of “virtual worlds” that the internet will bring to the human experience (2). It can hardly be overlooked that Dreyfus’s explanation of the internet also points at its infinitude.

What grabs my attention, however, is how the internet, or better say, humans’ engagement with the internet and the unlimited online content—news and information—is affecting the human psyche. In other words, how this easy accessibility to the information available on the internet is impacting the psychic patterns of people. Dreyfus, right after his comment on the internet as a technology, in company with its concomitant potentialities, shares the unfortunate findings of “researchers at Carnegie-Mellon University”, which surprisingly revealed that peoples’ “access to the World Wide Web” in reality led them to “feeling isolated and depressed” (2). He, while admitting the marvelous “freedom” in terms of the disembodiment of humans, made virtually possible by the internet, brings to the fore the loss of some of the essential abilities the moment humans cross the threshold intersecting the “cyberspace” and the meatspace (6). In his opinion, as

> . . . “human beings, we might . . . necessarily lose . . . our ability to make sense of things so as to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant, our sense of the seriousness of success and failure that is necessary for learning . . . our need to

> get a maximum grip on the world that gives us our sense of the reality of things . . . our sense of what gives meaning to our lives . . . our ability to make maximally meaningful commitments, and the embodied moods that give life serious meaning. (6-7)

To me the sense of genuineness, the potential to perceive and interpret reality, the conscience, the sense of learning, the idea of living life purposefully, and the capacity to have disparate moods are all linked to human psychology in terms of their existence, expressions and executions in and from the human mind. So, if the human interaction with the internet is negatively impacting all these abilities, it is, undoubtedly, badly influencing the human psyche.

Himma, similarly, after acknowledging the fact of the abundant presence of the information online, since the invention of the World Wide Web, shifts the gaze to the topic of information overload that he approaches philosophically using the technique of conceptual analysis. A lucid way to put what information overload can be is that it is an "access to more information than is conducive for human wellbeing" (266). Another term "technostress", though it has an obvious connection with the usage of technology, also finds a link with the issue of information overload because technology in the digital age is largely associated with the provision of too much information that is well beyond human capacity to process (268). The essay mentions the deleterious mental impacts—"depression, anxiety, a sense of being overwhelmed, and . . . panic"—of the information/content overload, which connects Himma's research with one of my research aims that is to bring to light the frustrations and the anxieties provoked by an individual's interaction with the internet or social media for getting news and information (268). Probing deeper into the issue of information overload, the author highlights that the real problem is of "content overload" which rises from people's failure to discriminate the true content from the false one due to the excessive availability of content (271). Quoting Levy (2005), Himma writes that what one forgets amidst the multitude of multifarious information is "time – to think, to reflect, to absorb, to muse" on the principal matters of one's life (268). In the author's point of view, seeking refuge from this content superhighway, while giving greater time to "reflect", is the only way out of this content overload problem (272).

Memmi (2012) approaches the issue of information overload from the facet of the rise of “virtual institutions”, their nature and role of administering the online inundation of information (75). The article asserts that in order to deal with the issue of the management, evaluation and production of loads of information as well as knowledge, internet has generated virtual institutions, for instance Wikipedia, which by means of “distributed, collaborative and voluntary model”, their agile and inexpensive nature, and their constantly developing assessment, alignment and compartmentalization systems, are presently proving themselves to be “very flexible and socially useful” as well as “better qualified to deal with information overload (83). The critical piece even proposes that the most suitable ambiance should be provided to this modern social advancement—virtual institutions—for its longevity (83). But the issue of information overload in the times of the internet and its psychological impact, specifically, remain my concern. Reflecting Wilson (1996), Bawden et al. (1999), Edmunds and Morris (2000), and Eppler and Mengis (2004), Memmi states that matter is not the newness of “cognitive overload”, rather, he adds, it is the unnerving outpouring of information, available because of cyber mediums, that has made this overload problem more problematic (75). Agreeing with Eppler and Mengis, I affirm that when the amount of information excels a person’s potential to process it, the “overload leads to stress and poor decisions” (76).

Schmitt, et al. (2018), in like manner, articulate that the plethora of information and the difficulty of selecting and processing the pertinent news/information out of such an enormous bulk projects the familiar dilemma of information overload (IO) (1151). The authors adding, yet, another perspective of “online news exposure” to the discussion apropos IO, study extensively the probable markers of IO (1152). The study indicates that the young ones, with a lack of experience in dealing with online news, are very much susceptible to IO (1160). The investigation ranks the civic sources of motivation—a desire to keep an up-to-date grasp of political developments and conditions in order to engage successfully in political interactions, and a similar desire in order to make use of this (political) information in mundane life—at the top (1161). The “four information retrieval strategies that imply IO”, include “news alerts”, the use of “search function . . . to look up specific key words”, visiting every time the “same sites as news sources”, and using “no specific information retrieval strategy” with reference to IO (1161-1162).

The results in terms of these strategies show that all of them demonstrate a positive relationship with IO, with fourth one being the highest in degree because the people who hold this strategy lack extra, yet necessary, resources required to successfully deal with the information encountered online (1162). Nevertheless, the article illustrates that individuals possessing the confidence to effectively and sufficiently search for the information available online are far less prone to cognitive overload (1163). Therefore, including "[i]nformation-seeking self-efficacy", this critical inquiry gives "first important indications as to which aspects help to keep psychological stress during information usage low and therefore foster a less stressful handling of online information retrieval" (1163). In the context of stress and anxiety, it is noteworthy to state that, likewise Bawden and Robinson (2009), Chen and Lee (2013), Misra and Stokols (2012), and Reinke and Chamorro-Premuzic (2014), Schmitt, et al. believe that IO harmfully effects an "individual's wellbeing", and pinpoint the "feelings of being overwhelmed" as well as "psychological stress" as the outcome of IO (1152). This particular context, especially makes this study relevant to one of the goals of my own study which concentrates on how an individual's frequent interaction with the internet for news/information disturbs that person's psychological state.

Groes (2016) explores the way in which the novel can be of assistance in making sense of the "changing state of human cognition, memory and social behaviour in the twenty-first century" (1481). Sharing his "reading of modern literature"—that is seriously helpful in throwing light on the negative effects of the information overload due to digital advancements on human psyche and also the nature of an individual in this digital era—Groes writes,

> On the one hand, the digital age has subjected us to an increasing cognitive overstimulation whose exhaustion causes our defences against external mental impact to weaken. On the other hand, technologies have become integrated into our bodies, brains and minds to create an immersive, extended experience, which has major implications for our individual identity and society. Despite new social benefits, access to information and the feeling of bliss generated by new technologies and social media, we are seeing the emergence of a new human being whose nature is paradoxical, contested and controversial. (1483)

Groes, in his historicized account of “literary responses to cognitive overstimulation” (1481), while talking of current “mainstream novels” expresses that the issue of “overload is often overtly expressed” is many of them (1503). Referring to writers such as Foster Wallace, Self, Naomi Alderman, Tash Aw, James Smythe, McCarthy and Egan, he observes that their novels, establishing “a new symbiosis in which the subject matter is expressed through form, and vice versa”, refrain from “transparent messaging” and depend on “unpredictable informational patternings” to give the idea that “probability is changing dramatically, and that sense-making processes are conditional” (1504). These writers, instead of using their literary works as a tool to “create order”, recognize “noise”, and use the “innovative” constructions and expressions that communicate “chaos” (1504).

According to Voinea, et al. (2020), the most salient features of internet—an immediate approach to information of nearly all sorts, a promise of making it available for other people with the options of posting or reposting, and a remarkable facility of linking-up an individual with the world—render it the most influential technology in connection with the development of the human cognition. The authors, while asserting the view of a negative correlation between the improvement of cognitive capacities and an unrestricted multitude of information, attempt to examine the “enhancement potential of the Internet” (2345). In addition, the critical ambit of research paper covers the analysis of facts, such as, “information overload, misinformation and persuasive design [to arrest user’s attention]”, illustrating, thereby, the destructive ramifications—anxiety as well as misuse of prejudices—of internet on cognitive abilities (2347). The paper puts forth three techniques—“individual empowerment” with reference to educating one about how to reach, gather and use the most relevant information, advance “collaborative” methods to organize and classify the information, and progressive “artificial intelligence” systems—to abate the adverse effects of internet on cognition (2345). The authors conclude their study with the denouncement of the notion that an easy and ample availability of information can be the sole cause of bettering the human cognitive performance (2359).

Using a multidisciplinary approach to address the subject matter—new media— of their book, Lister, et al. (2009) throw light on a number of critical concepts, discussions and issues that have crowded the contemporary culture and

society as a result of new media and its accompanying advancements (1). The book gives the following description of the new media: "[T]hose methods and social practices of communication, representation, and expression that have developed using the digital, multimedia, networked computer and the ways that this machine is held to have transformed work in other media: from books to movies, from telephones to television" (2). Expressing the complexity of confining the rise of new media to one precise period, the authors, for their own understanding, link it with the appearance of the personal computer— somewhere in the middle of 1980s— with the concomitant developments of memory system, software and "computer-mediated communications networks" (2). One of the characteristics that define the new media and its related technologies is "'upgrade culture'"—the practice of incessant experimentation and innovation for new developments (2). Focusing on the topic of new media together with technology from the critical as well as the standpoint of history, the volume, balancing both newness and history, presents "the history of newness itself" (3). The book, encompassing the broader discussions of culture and technology, explores not only the impacts these fast progressing new media technologies have on the cultures in which they bloom, but also the cultural forces that define the individuals' usage as well as exposure of these technologies (4). Generally, the work in its broad bulk covers a diversity of topics with reference to the new media ranging from visual reality to digital cinema, from internet to YouTube and post television, from economics and networked media culture to globalization, neo-liberalism and the internet, and from everyday cyberculture to overall cyberculture and the history of automata. Significantly, the authors in the chapter, "Cyberculture: Technology, Nature and Culture", during their discussion on "New media" in relation with "cyberculture", also bring in the point that humans are "suffering new physical . . . and psychological disorders (in-tray anxiety, information sickness) as a consequence of the ubiquity of computation", which brings this investigation in alignment with my research in terms of its study of the distressed state of mind in the era of World Wide Web due to the internet or social media (317).

Using Charles Taylor's idea of the "social imaginary", Robin Mansell (2012), in *Imagining the Internet*, attempts to explore the two paradoxes—of "information scarcity" and "complexity"—of the age of internet (5, 3). She also explores the harmful consequences when these paradoxes are ignored, such as 1) the dwindling

human authority over digital technologies, 2) the "excesses" of a) the "market" in terms of digital information production and directing technological developments, and of b) "unrestrained experimentation" by computer and software engineers and developers, 3) "unaccountable developments" before and "behind the screen", and 4) the "unwanted intrusions" into the lives of people (3, 191, 194). The book mentions the two conflicting visions—the ones denying the paradoxes—of topical information society, i.e. the "market-led" one, and the one of extending "information commons" (3). These visions can also be translated as the two eminent social imaginaries of the internet age: one is concerning the association between "economic growth" and "technological change", and the other is about the connection between "technological change" and "human agency" (176). Every society has a set of certain practices and, according to Mansell, what permits people to logically construe these practices are social imaginaries (176). Mansell notes the paradoxes of the internet age. Following claims constitute the information scarcity paradox: 1) the best stimuli for "creativity, diversity, and growth" are created by "intellectual property rights" and the production of information is "initially costly"; 2) the best stimuli for "creativity, diversity, and growth" are produced by the free distribution of information and the reproduction of information is "virtually costless" (179). The description of complexity paradox is as follows: 1) what is steering towards "loss of control" are the inherent advantages originating from the "emergent complexity" within the "technological system behind the screen"; 2) what is driving towards "greater control" obtained with the help of "programming" are the inherent advantages out of "emergent complexity" within the "technological system . . . " (179). What concerns the author is whether people and their choices about their lives are empowered by the "evolution" of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) or whether the "power relationships", adding to patient "poverty" and occasionally "fear", are fortified by it, and also, the necessary "interventions" needed in the age of internet to encourage a society where more "empowerment", emancipation, and liability can be achieved by people (3). In the light of the author's argument, the solution lies in "Adaptive action" which works towards disturbing "dysfunctional patterns of communication" that ignore the paradoxes, doing which allows the recognition of not only the paradoxes but also their implications (183). In fact, it generates a "new social imaginary" that provides a number of possible alternatives for the reconciliation of different stakeholders' conflicting visions and claims, and prevents both the "excesses" of dominant power of

the market “from above”, and the “naive trust” in the experimental and developmental abilities of “dispersed online communities” of “hardware developers and software programmers” as a way of authority “from below” (184, 181). By doing so, this new social imaginary demonstrates the capacity of fostering individuals for online engagements, along with aligning itself well with the principles of economic expansion, the safety measures of the country, and people’s wellbeing (187). Mansell’s study of the paradoxes and social imaginaries of the present era of information and communication technology, although it has no direct link with my research, is important to understand the different perceptions and narratives about the internet and other technologies and their developments as well as how the internet and these other technologies function in the social scenario. But what is directly related to my concern is Mansell’s view of the psychological impact of the Internet, which he foregrounds by quoting Kraut et al., according to whom, “‘the Internet is a social technology used for communication with individuals and groups, but . . . it is associated with declines in social involvement and the psychological well-being that goes with social involvement’” (84). Mansell, in a similar vein, mentions Sinclair’s words which say that “‘surfing the web can make you depressed’” (85).

The social media sites are influencing users’ ingestion of news in the topical times, along with giving birth to the problems like misinformation. Hermida et al., in their 2012 paper, investigate the interconnection between users, news and social networking platforms (815). According to the paper, the information that is “crowd-based” and the utilization of such information by “professional” news corporations yields “comfort”, and to this sense of comfort is the “familiarity” with social network sites is linked (Hermida et al. 821). Moreover, the study illustrates that the people’s belief in social media recommendations is due to the fact that they provide them with greater exposure to vast diversity of news (Hermida et al. 822). Dealing with the misinformation quandary, Vraga and Tully (2019), study the association among the education about the mindful consumption and diffusion of news, behaviours concerning social media—“seeing and posting” information related to politics and news—and “skepticism” in connection with the reception and dissemination of information encountered on social media forums (150). The article defines “news literacy” (NL) as the “knowledge of news systems and effects” (Vraga and Tully 151). Delimiting to YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, the research demonstrates that

the people with greater knowledge of media and news systems see (except Twitter) and post less political and news related stuff as compared to those having little "news knowledge" (Vraga and Tully 160). The better informed individuals can have more reliable references for getting news, however, their lack of trust of social media generates in them a hesitation to participate in politics and news, and hence shows an increased level of skepticism to social media information (Vraga and Tully 161). But, my concern still remains the same, i.e. the effects of the social media, or the social media interaction on human psyche.

This certain concern of mine is examined by Bashir and Bhat (2017) through their critical investigation of the correlated literature at hand. The virtual social life that is the outcome of both the internet and the social media is causing greater distancing of the contemporary man from his actual physical world, and, hence, is influencing "his health (mental & physical) and overall balance" (125). The investigators' study spotlights the social media as the "basic agent" that is liable for both the intensification and the nourishment of the psychological issues (127). The consequent problems due to one's, especially someone who is young, engagement with the social media that are pinned down in the article include "online harassment, depression, sexting/texting, stress, fatigue, loneliness, decline in intellectual abilities, cyber bullying, emotion suppression and lack of concentration" (129). The measures such as "information and counselling sessions", making people aware of the impacts of social media use on psychological wellbeing, and the restriction of "social networking sites" to a specific "age limit" are also put forth by Bashir and Bhat (129).

Dhir, et al. in their 2018 research find that in case of the "social media fatigue", resulting due to the social media use in adolescents, the "compulsive social media" use becomes an important explanatory variable (148). In agreement with Hirschman (1992), the researchers put that "compulsive use behaviour" points to an aberration in "controlling behavioural consumptions" where a person fails to logically handle his/her mundane activities (143). The research further shows that the compulsive use of social media can take the role of a negotiating factor "between FoMO and social media fatigue", which means that FoMO obliquely causes social media fatigue "via compulsive social media use" (148). Mirroring Pollard (2012) and Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013), Dhir, et al. describe "[f]ear of missing out (FoMO)" as an anxiety of being not connected, not present or "missing an

experience which others (i.e., peers, friends, family) might receive or enjoy" (143). Commenting on the association between "fatigue and depression", the investigators articulate that it is of a "reciprocal" nature (148). Moreover, the study demonstrates a positive relationship between social media fatigue and "anxiety" (149). The study, hence, brings to the fore the negative effects of social media fatigue on the users' "psychological wellbeing" (150).

Fu, et al. (2020), in the light of "social media overload", attempt to delineate "social media discontinuance behaviours" (102307). The three types of overloads which constitute this particular overload include "system feature overload, information overload, and social overload" (102307). The inquiry illustrates that system feature overload (for instance, new system updates) also results in users' feeling overloaded by "all the information" diffused via social media due to the feeling of not being able to digest it as well as by the excessive "social interaction and social information" that can both be given and accessed through social media (102307). Moreover, this study, besides showing the positive association of system feature overload with not just information overload, but also with social overload, demonstrates the positive association of these three types of overloads with "social media exhaustion", which is further associated with "users' discontinuous usage behaviours" (102307). This inquiry authenticates that "negative psychological strain" can cause "negative behavioral" consequences (102307).

The study, "Linking Excessive SNS Use, Technological Friction, Strain, and Discontinuance: The Moderating Role of Guilt", by Luqman, et al. (2020), confirms that "the problematic social, hedonic and cognitive use of SNSs [social networking sites] via smartphones creates three major types of friction: technology vs. family, technology vs. work, and technology vs. personal health" (106). Moreover, the research shows that people whose SNS usage makes them "feel guilty" are more likely to suspend their social networking sites usage (107). The feelings of guilt are the consequence of the clash between SNS "users' use patterns" and "their value systems" (105). The critical examination also highlights that the greater intensity of "guilt feelings" results in the "higher levels of strain" (107), which in itself, according to the study, is a "strong predictor of discontinuance intentions" (105).

Yet, another research, “A systematic review: the influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents”, explores “depression, anxiety and psychological distress” by critically observing the impact of social media on these factors, dividing the findings into these social media spheres: “time spent, activity, investment and addiction” (Keles, et al, 79). Keles, et al (2020), providing an objective account of the relationship that exists between the usage of social media and the psychological problems, put forth that as compared to the “frequency” of the use of social media and the “number of online friends”, the certain attitudinal or behavioural aspects such as “social comparison, active or passive use of social media, motives for social media use” may have “a greater influence on the symptoms of depression, anxiety and psychological distress” (88-89). The investigators also bring in the impact of “age” and “sex” in the overall discussion, stating that, in the light of previous investigations, there are greater chances of susceptibility to “depression and anxiety” in “girls and younger adolescents” (89). This critical review, one more time, throws light on the adverse effects of social media interaction on the human psyche.

Pentina and Tarafdar (2014), examining the process of present-day news ingestion from the perspectives of “information overload and sense making”, highlight the “paradox in contemporary news consumption” (211, 212). From one point of view, social media usage “fuels” the problem of information overload by making an individual encounter the never-ceasing flood of news (212). From other point of view, the capability of social media to make the process of dealing with information overload—the “negative” consequence of rapidly extending online information means—easy for the consumers of news through “socially-mediated information selection and organization” cannot be denied (211, 212). The social media offers unmatched access to not just certain and exact “sought-after information”, but also to “unsolicited content (including news . . .)” (213). The investigators mention two separate strands of sense making that characterize the present-time news consumption: “*Screening News Stimuli”*—which incorporates the decision by the consumer of news of the means and channels of news as well as the news content of his/her choice—and “*Processing and Interpreting News Information*”—which encompasses “path-dependent and socially-mediated negotiation of meaning of the acquired news and its conversion into knowledge” (215). Discussing the “*nuanced* role” of social media in the matter of consuming news

online, the research shows an advantage and a disadvantage (221). The advantage is that when the people acquire news from their social networks, they are capable of extending “a structure of meaning through the socialization process that provides a framework for sense making about civic life” (221). The disadvantage is that when the people acquire news from their strongly tethered to social networks, “the information tends to be filtered through the attitudinal preferences of this network and may not provide an encompassing, balanced or diverse knowledge about civic society” (221).

Along with certain addictions, including that of internet and playing games online, “cybertechnology” is reframing the acknowledged mental illnesses and psychic experiences, and is, thus, steering towards both usual and unusual “symptoms and manifestations” (Starcevic and Aboujaoude 97). Starcevic and Aboujaoude (2015) in their paper concentrate upon the cyber-phenomena that are exerting drastically detrimental influences on humans, like “cyberchondria”, “cyberbullying”, “cyberstalking”, “cybersuicide”, and “cybersex” (97). The authors agree with the definition of cyberchondria rendered by Starcevic and Berle, who note that it is an overmuch or recurrent online search that is associated with one’s health, spurred by “distress or anxiety” concerning health, which does no relief, rather exacerbates such feeling or state (Starcevic and Berle 206). The paper echoes Tokunaga’s description of cyberbullying which states that it is any individual or group conduct against others by means of “electronic” or “digital media” that involves frequent “hostile” or “aggressive” communications with a deleterious and distressing intention (Tokunaga 278). A 1999 report by the U.S. Department of Justice defines cyberstalking as a persistent use of the “Internet, e-mail, or other electronic communications devices” to harass or threaten other individuals (*"1999 Report"* 2). Cybersuicide, in simple terms, can be referred to as an online search for finding procedures to execute self-killing, with its most precarious form an online deal between/among individuals to take their own lives (Starcevic and Aboujaoude 98). The paper, providing a vague picture of cybersex, states that it signifies a number of different sexual pursuits acting through the internet, and some of them, for instance, those involving children, have been classed as obsessive and unhealthy (98). Although these terms have no direct link to my research, I have stated them with the aim of generally mentioning some other

online phenomena that are adversely affecting humans with reference to their psychological and emotional wellbeing.

2.3 Understanding the Metamodern Oscillation and the Metamodernism

Yousef (2017) draws a critical sketch of key characteristics of three prominent patterns of critical thought of the 20th and 21st centuries, namely modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism, including the study of their associations with one another ("Modernism" 33). The article gives more margin to the notion of metamodernism. The paper throws light on the formal features of modernism—dominating the initial half of the 20th century—such as, a regular utilization of "indirect speech", "stream of consciousness", incoherent plots, several "narrative points of view", "classical allusions", and the juxtaposition of the "prosaic" and the "poetic" ("Modernism" 35). Thematic concerns of the modernist mode of writing include, the "alienation" of/from society, "spiritual loneliness", "disillusionment", and the collapse of societal conventions ("Modernism" 35). Finally, the modernist thought pattern begins to shift its gaze from universal truth to "relative truth" ("Modernism" 35). However, modernism laments, or considers as "tragic", this incoherence, multiplicity, and chaos (Klages). Discussing postmodernism—starting after WWII and achieving its eminence in 1960s-70s—Yousef writes that its salient principles are the elimination of the discrimination between elite and popular culture, "incongruence", "fragmentation", unsatisfying closure, "irony", "pastiche", blurring of the margins between distinct genres, and rendering voice to the peripheral ("Modernism" 35). The works with postmodern inclinations manifest the incapacity of art, history, and language to produce meaning, bare truth, and impart reality respectively ("Modernism" 35). The paper equally touches on the significant postmodernist techniques in terms of style such as, "intertextuality", "metafiction", "temporal distortion", "magical realism", reader engagement, and minimalism ("Modernism" 35). Nonetheless, unlike modernism, postmodernism "celebrates" the incoherence, meaninglessness, and chaos (Klages). Historically, metamodernism follows postmodernism in succession. According to its chief belief, "faith, trust, dialogue and sincerity" can supersede "irony and detachment" which characterize postmodernism (Yousef, "Modernism" 37). The study states that metamodernism

challenges the totality and the notion of absolute truth of classical modernism as well as the fragmented and skeptic disposition of postmodernism ("Modernism" 37). Drawing on Vermeulen and Akker's theorization of the term metamodernism, the paper explicates that it exists between modernism and postmodernism; however, this existence is not marked by fixity, but a perpetual oscillation between the conflicting modern and postmodern extremes ("Modernism" 38). Therefore, "oscillation", "movement" and "engagement" can be called the "keywords" regarding metamodernism ("Modernism" 38). Furthermore, the study articulates the propensity of metamodernism of going beyond the modern and the postmodern as well, since it is simultaneously both and neither of the two ("Modernism" 38). The paper highlights that pluralism and irony in order to deal with modernist fanaticism are used by postmodernism, and also, metamodernism, nevertheless, with separate aims ("Modernism" 38). Vermeulen and Akker, likewise, assert that "in metamodernism this pluralism and irony are utilized to counter the modern aspiration, while in postmodernism they are employed to cancel it out" ("Notes" 5677). The article reveals that in the topical cultural space the flight from postmodern irony, pastiche, fragmentation as well as "simulacra" to "real", "sincere" and "authentic" is visible; and this return to real and authentic has caused the revival of traditional literary forms such as, the "historical" novel, the "realist" novel" and the "family saga" (Yousef, "Modernism" 39-40). Yousef closes his study with the realization that it is impossible to draw clear lines of demarcation between the three aforementioned cultural and critical moments, and that these concepts are not mutually incompatible and excluding, instead they elucidate and complete one another, with metamodernism synthesizing what modernism and postmodernism hold the most valuable ("Modernism" 41).

Vermeulen and Akker (2015) bring into discussion the fact of the re-emergence of the "figure of utopia" in topical art by focusing on the artistic tendencies of David Thorpe, Ragnar Kjartannson and Paula Doepfner ("Utopia" 55). According to their argument in their critical essay, "Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study in Metamodernism", this reappearance is essentially the outcome of the "shift" that occurred at the turn of the millennium, i.e. the switch from postmodernism to metamodernism (55). Expressing their perception of metamodernism in general terms, the authors put that it is marked by the coming back of such debates as "History, the

grand narrative, *Bildung* and the agent" ("Utopia" 55). Discussing Thorpe, they note that the distinguishing properties of Thorpe's artistic work include its "eclectic reappropriation", "generic hybridity" and "intertextuality" ("Utopia" 58). In authors' view, however, unlike postmodernism, Thorpe's "intertextual eclecticism" gives rise to a fresh art form that possesses "affect, historicity, depth and . . . authenticity" ("Utopia" 59). The essay explicates that Thorpe's act of harmonizing diverse range of materials, genres, techniques and traditions can be interpreted in terms of his desire to hit on a fresh field of unmapped "possibilities"—utopia ("Utopia" 59). What Thorpe does, in short, is the "reappropriation of postmodern conventions of intertextuality", reorienting and resignifying them towards "new horizons" ("Utopia" 55, 60). The essay approaches Kjartannson's art—his utopic imaginations—from the perspective of "irony", which is another characteristically postmodern practice, and which, in the bygone postmodern days, has, to a great extent, become closely associated with "sarcasm, cynicism and . . . nihilism" ("Utopia" 60). Vermeulen and Akker mention that Kjartannson's artistic pieces use irony to keep "utopianism" in check, instead of doing away with it ("Utopia" 61). The enquiry states that his work perpetually swings between "sincerity and irony" as well as "melancholy, or even apathy, and hope" ("Utopia" 61, 62). Central to his re-envision of utopia is the technique of "repetition" that allows him to stretch the limits of one extreme to that of its opposite extreme, for instance, the "beauty" to the "ugly", and vice versa, and thus, revealing the "transcendent within the immanent" ("Utopia" 61). The essay asserts that by yoking a diverse range of polarities, Thorpe and Kjartansson exhibit the belief that their works can simultaneously manifest the both propensities ("Utopia" 62). This critical study explores Doepfner's art from the angle of its usage of "postmodern melancholy" to kindle "hope" ("Utopia" 55). The authors express that Doepfner's utopia is an "unthinkable" place, a "promise" that is "messy"—that is, it lacks any proper "future", yet it promises one—and that is precisely due to her own "ambivalent" position regarding utopia ("Utopia" 63). They tell that Doepfner suggests a constant readjustment between strands and among stages in order to prevent "utopian aspirations" from evanescence, or coming to a halt ("Utopia" 64). Vermeulen and Akker conclude the essay arguing that the metamodern utopian figure illustrates following two "metamodern structure of feeling": first, these utopian re-imaginations by the artists, and overall, are a means to look for "alternative possibilities", or solutions to the political, economic and ecological issues of contemporary times,

instead of the “escape mechanism”; second, this utopian figure itself shows that this utopianism lacks any unclouded horizons, making hope a “rare good” for the reinvention of utopianism (“Utopia” 64-65). It is in the vein of this second aspect, i.e. the lack of clear horizons, that the oscillation of the three artists’ works between “decay and transcendence, the permanent and the transitory, melancholy and hope, enthusiasm and despair” can be understood (“Utopia” 65). Finally, the essay leaves the question of the “end” of the “Grand Narratives” for the forthcoming research (Vermeulen and Akker, “Utopia” 66).

If metamodernism is characterized by the perpetual swaying in-between as well as beyond the modern and the postmodern for Vermeulen and Akker, it stands for the progression and the innovation of modernism for James and Seshagiri. According to James and Seshagiri, in the burgeoning landscape of topical literature, when the prominence of postmodernism has already faded away, the key cultural discussions and experiments of 20th century modernism are obtaining a new pertinence (87-88). What makes their outlook, in their essay, distinctive is “its defense of returning to the logic of periodization”, which provides both with the practice to study the connection of topical literature to modernism, and also with the backdated comprehension of modernism as a “moment” and also as a “movement” (88). The authors note that for metamodernism modernism is an “era”, an “aesthetic”, and an “archive” that emerged in the later half and the first half of the 19th and 20th centuries respectively (88). From the perspective of transnationalism, James and Seshagiri note that the “imperial-era modernism” has been reframed, thus, giving rise to its various present embodiments which are “a collocation of cosmopolitan, transatlantic, diasporic, regional, and planetary modernisms” (89). Arguing in terms of periodization, they emphasize the necessity of recognizing modernism from its prime period (1890-1940), stating that even the scholars who try to emancipate modernism from being one historical moment (in favour of modernisms) on the basis of “elitism, bad faith, and historical myopia”, refer back to this prime period while commenting on the modernist art and literature (91). Moreover, “periodicity” is essential to constitute a “literary-cultural” cornerstone for mapping the numerous ways in which a large bulk of 21st century fiction intentionally involves modernism “through the inheritance of formal principles and ethicopolitical imperatives” that are carefully readjusted according to the current “social or philosophical” issues (92). Hence, the

metamodernist literary fiction incorporates modernism both as a global "aesthetic venture"—the transnational aspect—and as a "temporally localizable moment" (92-93). "Metamodernist practice," the essay asserts, "pays attribute to modernist style", "inhabits the consciousness of individual modernist writers", and "details modernism's sociopolitical, historical, and philosophical contexts" (93). However, the authors prohibit from considering that the most significant developments of current fiction rely on modernism; rather, they assert that "modernism's presence" for topical writers should be interpreted both as a moment—"an era with which they imaginatively reconnent"— and as a movement—"an ethos that they formally refine" (93). "Metamodernist narratives", utilizing the modernist creative capabilities of "self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarisation", discriminate themselves from a more primitive postmodernism (93). James and Seshagiri conclude with the claim that as modernist norms perpetuate to transcend "literary-historical and cultural" boundaries, debates about the 20th century "genesis" of modernism will add important insights to the debates apropos its 21st century "regenerations" (97).

Gibbons (2015), providing a metamodern portrayal of contemporary culture in ""Take that you intellectuals!" and "kaPOW!": Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style", makes a groundbreaking attempt to spotlight, the "textual devices" with which the metamodernist writers embellish their works, especially delimiting her study to a "stylistic analysis" of *Kapow!*, a 2012 novella by Adam Thirwell (30). Voicing her views on metamodernist writing, the author puts that it challenges the corruptions of "global capitalism", shows its concern for the excessive "digitalization and hyper-reality" of human community, displays the realization of "shifting social relationships" in this global/izing world, and in addition, it manifests the hope for a "shared sustainable future, however untenable that may be" (31). She writes that metamodernism exhibits its interest in "global ethics", and what both metamodernist writers and "global ethicists" have as a common line of action is their "commitment to justice" (31). She further adds that while the latter make endeavours to frame and form contemporary discussions and come up with solutions, these writers/authors, using their writing/fiction as a "vehicle", which possess the power to stir up the people both in terms of their 'consciousness" and "conscience", try to increase their knowledge of "contemporary insecurities – environmental, social, political" (31). Connected with this "humanist aspiration" are the issues of

"relationality" and "complicity" (31). In today's globalizing planet, in Gibbons' opinion, relationality denotes the "human connectedness" and the "ethical obligation" of humans to each other, and that, in terms of metamodernist writing, stands for conceding the complicity of human beings in present globalist circumstances and matters—that is, "from intersubjective memories" to consciousness of their contribution in several "political, economic, and environmental networks: for instance, of capital in the purchase of commercial goods" (31). Furthermore, this "humanist commitment" can be traced in the works of fiction penned by metamodernist writers in their utilization of "perceptual deixis, free indirect discourse, and modes of address, particularly in their play with the possibilities of pronominal positioning" (31-32). The article mentions that the concurrent and contradictory perception/feeling of "hope and future failure" fuels metamodernism (32). Metamodern irony is completely sincere to both the meanings, the superficial and the intentional, instead of being a sarcastic "apolitical performance" (32). The metamodern integration of elite and popular cultural allusions serves to demonstrate "juxtapositions" that incite an impression of current cultural conditions, and not just to "create eclectic textuality" (32). In addition, a shrouded acceptance and "criticism of commercialized culture" is noticeable through the presence of mundane allusions, for instance, the not implicit usage of "brand names", in metamodernist writing (32). Calling attention to metamodern propensities of "[p]lacelessness and timelessness", Gibbons explains that metamodernism, during its oscillation, "emphasizes the specificity of time and place, while also denying it" (32). Metamodernism does so, the author corroborates her argument by quoting Bourriaud, through ""the aesthetics of heterochrony" in which "delay (analogous to the 'pre-recorded') coexists with the immediate (or 'live') and with the anticipated"" (qtd. in Gibbons, "Take" 32). The metamodernist writing achieves "heterochrony" by means of recurrent "temporal deictic shifts (e.g. changes in tense)", and as far as "specificity" is concerned, it is illustrated through the employment of "proper nouns" denoting certain territorial sites (33). Besides this, the metamodernist writing fuses "lexis" from distinct languages to manifest another phenomenon of this globalizing world, that is, the collapse of "national" and "geographical" frontiers, and it utilizes "dialectical variants" to include in itself the notion of simultaneity of global and local (33). Gibbons' analysis of *Kapow!* can be best encapsulated in the following lines:

> . . . in *Kapow!* Thirlwell offers a metamodernist vision of the present and future of literature, both in theory and practice, as a poetics of multimodal form that engages with the social, ethical, political, and economic circumstances of the twenty-first century and the globalizing world. *Kapow!* is metamodernist in its use of stylistic devices – namely heterochronic spatio-temporal deixis, second person address, intermixing of high and low register and code-switching – to express its aesth-ethical commitment: a refusal to accept the current state of the world, asking readers instead to think critically and defiantly about the ways in which world events are connected and how their own involvement figures in such a world. (40-41)

After presenting her views on metamodernist writing and her analysis of *Kapow!*, Gibbons wraps up her article stating that the metamodernist writing does not ignore "issues of global ethics", instead it provokes "awareness and consideration" by making one think of the present human conditions; and "metamodernism offers a literature that is accountable", in the same way people themselves are answerable ("Take" 41).

Gibbons, et al. (2019) build their investigation on the fact that in the metamodern times, the literary/artistic devices that were typical to postmodernism have been "reterritorialised" (173). They particularly examine the postmodernist techniques of "metatextuality" and "ontological slippage", studying their function in the genres of "autofiction" and "true crime documentary" (172). In the genres of autofiction and true crime documentary, they critically engage with *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki, and the "Netflix mini-series" *The Keepers* respectively (176). The authors refer to metatextuality and "ontological indecipherability" as "supposedly panfictional techniques", because these strategies, under the label of metamodernism, have been "recycled or upcycled" for a new purpose, i.e. "to reengage with the possibilities of representing reality" (175, 174). A literary scholar defines the "doctrine of panfictionality" as the "destabilization" of the boundaries between real and fictional that results because of "the expansion of fiction at the expense of nonfiction" (Ryan 165). Gibbons, et al. claim that a metamodernist "repurposing" of the aforementioned postmodernist techniques produces "depthiness by means of reality effects" (183-184). The authors insist in their article that under the spell of this flight from the postmodernist "depthlessness" to metamodernist

"depthiness", the literary autofiction "phenomenologically makes readers *empathise with* a reality", and the true crime documentary "makes viewers *suspect* that there is another more plausible reality – a reality exposed by the fiction rather than the reality of actual historical events" (184). The article confirms that the postmodernist "textual or filmic" strategies under discussion "do not panfictionalise" in *A Tale for the Time Being* and *The Keepers*, rather create "reality-effects"; and, therefore, these metamodernist texts, just like their respective genres, attempt to reconfigure an association between "the real and the fictional" (184, 185). The authors conclude commenting that this depthiness, however, does not mean a "wholesale return to depth-models", instead it stands for the "panrealistic intimations of depth – performances of depthiness – dressed up as truth-claims that are, by necessity, fictional or fictionalized", and expressing that this is the way "fiction beckons for reality" (Gibbons, et al. 185).

Gibbons (2020) in another article, "Metamodernism, the Anthropocene, and the Resurgence of Historicity: Ben Lerner's *10:04* and "The Utopian Glimmer of Fiction"", using mainly Lerner's novel *10:04* (2014) as her case study, together with two other recent texts, namely Thirlwell's *Kapow!* (novella) and Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (novel), critically enquires the "metamodern temporality" marked, interrelatedly, by the "aesthetics of heterochrony, sideshadowing" as well as the "anticipation of retrospection" (137). Speaking of *10:04* as a metamodernist novel, she notes that the manner in which the text epitomizes the allegorical representation of "time" relating to "life" in the metamodern precarious climatic conditions—"Anthropocene"—and culture, more generally, highlights its importance (138). "Anthropocene" is pointed at in the article as the "present geological epoch" that acknowledges the devastating part and effect of humanity "on the environment" (139). Moreover, since "anthropocenic narratives" require "collective imagination", they become "grand narratives" (139). Gibbons mentions "historicity" in relation with Anthropocene (139). In this regard, Baucom observes that the "crisis of climate change" creates the necessity to "periodize in relation not only to capital but to carbon", creating, in Gibbons' words, "a new world order" that is "measured both in dates and in degrees, in times and temperatures" (Baucom 125, 142; Gibbons, "Metamodernism" 139). Gibbons' critique of *10:04* in the article under discussion reveals a metamodernist temporal version that is both "heterochronic" and

"anticipatory", not only "bringing back the future", but also "rebooting historicity" (139). The author elsewhere, quoting Bourriaud, delineates ""the aesthetics of heterochrony" in which "delay (analogous to the 'pre-recorded') coexists with the immediate (or 'live') and with the anticipated"" (qtd. in Gibbons, "Take" 32). The reason Gibbons compares the "anticipation of retrospection" with "sideshadowing" with reference to their resemblance is that, "rather than the future being predestined and channeling back to the present, the anticipated future is imagined and provisional as is the retrospective impression of the present that it creates" ("Metamodernism" 144). Gibbons borrows the description of sideshadowing from Morson, who expresses that it is "a concept of time as a *field of possibilities*" or "an open universe" (119, 118). *10:04*, Gibbons puts, provides a "heterochronic model of time and temporality" (140). This "heterochronic restructuring" is the outcome of a "greater and more volatile world-historical moment" (140). However, as the author winds up her argument, "[g]rand narratives of the Anthropocene" are the key "catalyst" in the blooming of the "metamodern temporality" that is evident in "contemporary fiction", such as *10:04* (Gibbons, "Metamodernism" 139, 147).

Claiming modernity as well as postmodernity as the critiques of metaphysics, Stein (2018) pinpoints that this postmodern "vacuum of meaning", that projected itself as "exhaustion" and "alienation", has spurred a "metamodern "return" to metaphysical speculation" (187). As per Stein's argument, "metamodern metaphysical characterizations of the human" constructed on a perception of love as a universal energy that is "transpersonal", as is "gravity", should be embraced (187). Mentioning Charles Sanders Peirce, the author informs that he not only signals the dawn of a fresh procedure for performing metaphysics, but also provides, simultaneously, a very deep understanding of the extraterrestrial properties of "evolutionary love, or Eros" (187). Concentrating on "computer technologies" and "hyper-capitalist dynamics", the article investigates how they have prompted "dark transhumanist" postulations, as presented by such philosophers as Nick Land (187). Stein advances a "form of cosmo-erotic humanism" along with the discussion of its consequences through his study of a 2017 book, *A Return to Eros*, by Gafni and Kincaid, as a means to confront the negative and "dystopian possibilities" triggered by a ""return" to metaphysics" (187). This book, the article affirms, consists of bits of a "new psycho-sexual-spiritual critical theory" that concerns "self and society" (214). This theory belongs to a large-

scale conception of “cosmo-erotic humanism”, which then further belongs to a broader going back to metaphysics that formulates a “metamodern worldview” (214). The book, Stein reveals, also criticizes capitalism as well as commodification for their rationale of “externalization”, according to which, the impulse to better the “quality of local short-term experiences” deprives people of understanding the enduring and remote results (215). In the light of the argument put forth by *A Return to Eros*, the “forms of intimacy”, that rise above the “ideal of the soul mate”, yet contain it, are the ones that enable a culture of new sort and new patterns of “emotion, thought, and action” (215). The author puts that the book mentions the possibility of approaching a “universal evolutionary love (i.e., the cosmo-erotic qualities of human emotion)” that allows love to transcend “sexuality” as well as permits the properties of “Eros” to pervade life in all its facets (215). The article, while exploring the book, also illustrates the comparison it makes between “evolutionary love” and “romantic love” (215). To lead a life that is the epitome of “evolutionary love”, rather than “romantic love”, is nothing but “total subversiveness” in the perspective of a life full of “externalities” (215). Individuals can be briefly emancipated from the miseries of this world by romantic love, but it cannot emancipate this world from miseries (215). However, under the shade of evolutionary love, it is possible that “no one is ever placed outside the circle of concern, tolerance, and compassion” (215). Stein, outstandingly, renders his opinions about what needs to be done in future as well as some of the most significant consequences of a “metamodern return to a metaphysics of Eros” in these closing lines:

> The only future possible is one in which . . . global educational systems . . . *demonstrate* love and justice in their total support for the free development of children and families, up to and including basic income guarantees and health care. This will mean that the priority for global futures is *love*, not profit and growth or sustainability . . . Cosmo-erotic humanism argues for a planetary prioritization of love and for securing the necessary and sufficient conditions for the possibility of love. (217)

A successor to postmodernism, metamodernism, that has started defining the topical social, cultural, theoretical, and literary domains, is looked upon as a new horizon by Yousef (2018) in another article (“Metamodernism Poetics” 54). Additionally, the article illustrates that in what manner metamodernism supplements

to the scholarships concerning literature and culture (“Metamodernism Poetics” 54). The study approaches metamodernism with the aim to identify its “basic poetics” that are, afterwards, used to analyze Billy Collins’ poem, “My Hero” (“Metamodernism Poetics” 54). This study employs Vermeulen and Akker’s elucidation of metamodernism, as put forth in their 2010 groundbreaking essay “Notes on metamodernism”, as its “primary model” for the purpose of discussion and analysis (“Metamodernism Poetics” 54). While discussing metamodern poetics, Yousef notes some aspects of it as posited by Vermeulen and Akker and Abramson. Those advanced by Vermeulen and Akker include, “oscillation” between modernism and postmodernism, “neoromanticism”, “[n]ew [s]incerity”, “informed naivety”, “pragmatic idealism”, and checked “fanaticism” (“Notes” 5677). Abramson, deviating from Vermeulen and Akker’s perception, gives a distinct aspect of metamodernism, advancing that instead of construing the tenets of modernism and postmodernism as contradictory to one another, metamodernism sees them as simultaneously “operative” (Abramson). Yousef, quoting Abramson, writes that he “criticizes oscillation stating that “metamodernism has moved from a philosophy of oscillation to one of simultaneity”” (qtd. in “Metamodernism Poetics” 58). Commenting generally on Collins’ anthology of poetry, *Horoscopes for the Dead*, from which he selects “My Hero”, Yousef asserts that it demonstrates a complex blend of conflicting ideas and a perpetual swinging between polarities, for instance, “death and love, the fantastic and the real, the past and the present, etc.”; therefore, it becomes at once “simple and mysterious, humorous and wise, modern and postmodern” (“Metamodernism Poetics” 58). The examination of the poem by the article reveals it as steering a “middle course”, or, in other words, oscillating between modernism and postmodernism, that also signifies the “transformed return of sincerity” as well as the rise of “post-irony”—the salient metamodern features (“Metamodernism Poetics” 62). The shift from the postmodern “cold irony” and “skepticism” to the metamodern “hopeful yet deliberately delusional post-irony” is also noticed (“Metamodernism Poetics” 62). The movement of “My Hero” in-between postmodern “indecisiveness” and modern “trust” signals a “journey of discovery” that possesses the promise for a “transformative experience” (“Metamodernism Poetics” 62). The article closes after stating the amalgamation of the best properties of modernism and postmodernism as the chief “achievement” of metamodernism (Yousef, “Metamodernism Poetics” 62).

Brunton (2018) asks, in fact, bases his study on a quite insightful question, that is, "*"Whose metamodernism are we theorizing?"*" (60). Brunton's this question incorporates the contemporary political and racial concerns as well as a pejorative commentary on that metamodernist perspective which pinpoints the "acceptance of "failure"" as a pivotal temperament of metamodern aesthetics—a perspective questioned by contemporary black American women poets, such as Harryette Mullen and Evie Shockley (60). These mentioned poets, instead of surrendering to the notion of—inescapable or even "desirable"—"political and aesthetic failure", provide, using the "politics of form" that distinguishes "avant-garde modernism", critical accounts of "state-sanctioned racism and heterosexism" (60). The author regards these poets as "builders of a new aesthetic political space", while labelling metamodernism as "political/politicized nostalgia", since it re-engages the modernist "aesthetic toolbox" to build a "home in the present . . . for dissent as it relates to marginalized subjectivities" (73, 74). He, therefore, repudiates those metamodernist aesthetic practices that encourage a utopic (that is, future) search for a "home" (73). Brunton concludes, expressing that Mullen and Shockley, while condemning those "institutions" that subjugate and suppress the "people of color", go for "new possibilities, for the necessity of livable lives" in the present (74).

Stavris (2012), in his thesis, *Going Beyond the Postmodern in Contemporary Literature*, investigates metamodernism, and attempts to read McCarthy's *Remainder* (recent) and Rhineheart's *The Dice Man* (1971) in the light of it, with the aim to address the complex shift from the postmodern period to a period that has apparently supplanted it (5). Establishing his understanding on Vermeulen and Akker's exposition of metamodernism (oscillation between modernism and postmodernism), Stavris believes that an aspiration for advancement caused by "anxiety", an aspiration for going back to "modern ideals of authenticity", and also, a consciousness of the certain inability to reach "truth" operate simultaneously at the heart of metamodernism (5). It detaches itself from the "nihilistic" tendency that typically distinguishes postmodernism, and continues its search—beyond postmodernism—for countless "possible *truths*", however, with "hope" and "engagement" (84). The researcher also foregrounds a distinct interpretation of metamodernism claiming that Lyotard's suggestion of postmodernism as "a rupture within modernity" allows the description of metamodernism as "a sealing up of that rupture", which then projects

metamodernism as another extension of modernism like postmodernism (85). The research mentions that the aforementioned novelists in their respective works, on the one hand, explore the subjects of "identity, agency and volition" from the postmodern perspective, and simultaneously, on the other hand, relay the cultural longing for determining a "central happiness in the modern world that is substantial and authentic", which they realize, additionally, as impossible, yet indispensable (4). The selected novels, therefore, swing between "success and failure" that is similar to metamodern swinging, and portray the perplexity of "overcoming inauthenticity" (86). Following the metamodern utopian urge, these texts envisage a world, yet to be reached, that promises emancipation, while acknowledging the current unreachability of this emancipation as well (87). The author culminates his argument reporting that both novels illustrate an inclination to "comprehend the impossible" as well as to "overcome it" at once (Stavris (87).

Dumitrescu's doctoral thesis (2014) investigates the metamodern features through the lens of William Blake's theory of "the self" in order to form the conceptual basis of metamodernism in the field of literature, and also, to observe its broader relevance with respect to society and arts, while delimiting its study to the textual analysis of Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* (5). The researcher asserts that metamodernism is not merely interested in a growing recognition of the significance of the interrelatedness among "reason, imagination, and emotions", but also in an equilibrium between reason and imagination and emotions, with reason holding one side and imagination and emotions holding the other side of this equilibrium (5). Blake calls this equilibrium/balance, as the researcher puts it, the "transformative" awareness/development of the self (5, 22). The ideas of these philosophers, namely Stephen Toulmin and Luce Irigaray, are employed to develop the conceptual framework of Dumitrescu's research. While arguing about these philosophers, the study presents the binary of "masculine subjectivity"—"logical", "hierarchial, linear and object-oriented"—and "feminine subjectivity"—"emotion-based, non-linear, and people-oriented" (5). What distinguishes the metamodern sensibility is its incorporation of both the "rational" and the "emotional", and this integration is visible in the selected texts (5). Dumitrescu articulates that the realization of this integration by Tournier's Robinson Crusoe, ultimately, leads him to a sense of peace, which he

otherwise failed to achieve solely with logic, or with emotions (6). Similarly, while accentuating the "role of feminine" for the retrieval of "unity", the researcher highlights that Rahel and Estha's story fluctuates between the "self-transformation", acceptance of the past, and re-assessment of norms and the catastrophes accompanying "separation of self" and "self-justifying reasoning" (6). Dumitrescu contends that these novels transcend the modern and the postmodern to land at the metamodern (6). What distinguishes metamodernism is the fusion of "reason" and "sensibility", and the "transformation of the self"; and the metamodern literature allows the interaction of the well acknowledged modern and postmodern bifurcations, becoming the space "where interconnections, the feminine, and innocence are valued" (Dumitrescu 6).

Hemelaar's thesis (2018) adds, yet, further insights to the still emerging corpus of critical metamodernist studies through the reconciliation of Vermeulen and Akker's description of metamodernism with that of James and Seshagiri (72). For the former, metamodernism is marked by the perpetual pendular swaying between "pre-postmodernist and postmodernist sentiments", while the latter see it as a phenomenon that clearly engages with modernist norms, "particularly in formal and stylistic experimental features" (72). Hemelaar, however, focuses on the significance of "modernist themes" in her study of the selected 2010s British novels, instead of "formal and stylistic" modernist trends (72). The researcher identifies the contemporary crises brought on humanity by, particularly, the anxieties concerning "digital technology" and "climate change" in *A Tale for the Time Being*, *Satin Island* and *Winter* by Ruth Ozeki, Tom McCarthy and Ali Smith respectively as well as the "ethical commitments" shown by the authors in their dealing with these anxieties (4-5). The interaction between "modernism and the contemporary"—that is, the engagement of these topical concerns with the certain modernist elements, for instance, "the experience of time and subjectivity" and, in return, the assistance provided by the modernist themes and elements to address aforementioned anxieties—informs Hemelaar's sense of metamodernism and metamodernist fiction (5). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the examination does not focus on the climatic issues from the perspective of ecocriticism, but from the perspective of "the ethics of human involvement with nature" and its concomitant implications (5). The critical enquiry observes that the influences of crisis on characters' "individual

subjectivities" cause them to oscillate between "being and non-being, reality and fantasy, awareness and dreams", and that they subsequently illustrate "sentiments of hope and connectivity" (74, 76). The digital ambiance of these novels spotlights the blurring of boundaries between the real and the factual. The themes highlighted include, "suicide", "a return to matter", "numbness", "a desire for an integral centre", "hope for a better future", "connectivity", and offering meaning to "empty surfaces" (75, 76). The research pinpoints the presence of "utopian desires for grand narratives", and also, of the elements of "chronological play" and "nonlinearity" in these novels, where "belief and desire" is countered by the consciousness of their "constructed" essence and pointlessness (75, 76). Hemelaar's notes that metamodernism "returns meaning and direction to the decentred world by building on postmodernist theories, as it attempts to re-centre the already decentred" (75). The researcher culminates her argument articulating that her perception of metamodernism "represents a modernism informed by postmodernism" (Hemelaar 76).

DeToy, in his doctoral dissertation, adds a unique aspect to the already existing spectrum of metamodernist studies, i.e. the reframed "role of family and familial participation" in the middle of the cultural outlook of 21st century, while critically exploring these novels: Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, Zadie Smith's *NW*, A. M. Homes' *May We Be Forgiven* and Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow* (ii). DeToy encapsulates the oppositional association of the "family and the political" — represented by their vying frameworks of "futurity"—in the context of 20th century "American consciousness" as a "zero-sum game" in connection with an "individual's life-energy" (ii). He claims that metamodernism advocates a "new form of anti-politics: a fully gratified impulse to depoliticize" (ii). Therefore, in the light of DeToy's argument the family, to an increasing extent, is portrayed in the current aesthetic depictions as a permitting medium for "conciliation with the social totality: as a space of personal development, readying one for life in the wider social field" (ii).

Kraft (2020), in his review of *Metamodernism: History, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* edited by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, asserts that the "concept of inbetweenness", as the book maintains, is crucial for the understanding of metamodern sensibility, which has introduced, as a distinct phenomenon, "new forms of sincerity, depth, a sense of the importance of

history, aesthetics, authenticity, and other sensibilities" (1). The volume, he writes, defines "'meta'" in the Greek context, in which it means "*with* or *among*, *between*, and *after*" at once (1). This fact further illustrates that metamodernism, as a paradigm shift, not merely engages with "postmodern sensibilities", but also transcends as well as confronts them concurrently (1-2). The authors write from the position, Kraft paraphrases, that exists within a "fourth cultural turn, one of" differing and dividing "paths of ecosocialism, neoliberal capitalism and austerity politics" that declared the closure of the postmodern age (2). *Metamodernism* consists of three sections, namely Historicity, Affect, and Depth, and, in Kraft's view, maps the realities of 21st century (2). Similarly, Vermeulen and Akker, describing the aim of this book, write that it tries to "grasp today's perplexing reality and changing cultural landscape" (van den Akker, et al.). Kraft notes that the Historicity part, in order to mark the shift from pre-metamodern to post-postmodern times, compares the past postmodern views and norms—employing "postmodern senses of apathy and ironic detachment, neoliberal economic and social weight", and other major matters—with the new, scarier sense of the intensification of every aspect of our lives in a post-internet, post-apocalyptic age" (2). Speaking of the sentiments prevailing in metamodern times, in the light of contributors' opinions, the reviewer notes that they are "deeper forms of irony that reach a surreal and meaningful sincerity, stronger senses of nationalism and other communal ties (both good and bad), and intensified nihilism and economic disparity" (2). The reason of the significance of Affect section of the book with respect to metamodernism, both as theory and literary criticism, lies in its focus on the way in which, Kraft puts, one can observe the flight of the "neoliberal capitalist and postmodern subject to one of a more engaged and interested subjectivity (art that seeks political activism)" (2). However, repudiating the engagement as always utopian, the authors of Affect, Kraft mentions, foreground that the metamodern "new sincerity" is, overall, more alarming than the postmodern "nihilistic sensibilities", the example of which is the reemergence of the "White Nationalism and rampant far-right ideologies" (2). The Depth section, as per the author of this review, underscores the way(s) in which the pivotal switches in several cultural feelings are depicted "after post-structuralism" by "new movements in art, art history, literature (especially short fiction), political television and satire, and writing itself" (3). This section, Kraft states, introduces some important terms, for instance, "'depthiness'" (3). Vermeulen in the chapter, "Metamodern Depth, or 'Depthiness', of the book, *Metamodernism:*

History, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism, defines metamodern depthiness as "the establishment of depth not as a shared epistemological reality but as one among many personally performed (im)possibilities" (Akker, et al.). Description of other terms is as follows: "'reconstruction'" is "the attempt to see beyond the surface even if" reaching beyond it is impossible; and "'curated authenticity'" is "the political and social construction of a 'post-truth' that is directly in reaction to the postmodern nihilistic political ontology" (Kraft 3). Kraft says that James Elkins, one of the contributors, in the epilogue, points at the theoretical drawbacks of "writing and responding to art" in the context of a transforming and sharpening "political world" (3). The epilogue of *Metamodernism* declares, as does Kraft, that a "place", where fresh methods and ways of conducting research and "being a community of thinkers and writers" can be imagined, has been reached now (3). Kraft pinpoints the absence of an important perspective from *Metamodernism*, that is, its lack of attention to a "condition" that needs a review of "globalism" as the principal means of interpreting life—both subjectively and objectively—and "relationships" with the aim to establish "economies", where community is the prime preference and which can accommodate "diversity and inclusion", against "neoliberal capitalist" hopes of "gig and extraction economies" that lead to the destruction of societies through "greed and accumulation" (3-4). Christian Moraru, in *Reading for the Planet*, labels this condition as the "condition of planetarity" (61-62). Other drawbacks of this volume include "a lack of focus on social media, streaming services for consumption of art, video games, or deeper recognition and discussion of the realities of 2016 (Brexit, French revolts, Donald Trump, etc.)" (Kraft 4). No matter what the shortcomings are, the reviewer agrees that *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* wins its respect as a "position piece" on, what the book calls, the "clusterfuck of world-historical proportions" that "awaits [humans] if [they] do not radically re-envision [their] lives on this planet" (van den Akker, et al.; Kraft 4).

All the critical studies discussed under this heading help in developing the understanding of metamodernism in general in the light of different arguments and opinions, and the metamodern oscillation in particular. In my research, I am, however, enthusiastic in noticing how an individual, just like the metamodern pendular swinging between divergent positions, oscillates between the conflicting psychic extremes. In addition to this, my thesis also aims to explore the role of the internet and

social media in the formulation of such extremes, and in triggering a person's oscillation between them.

2.4 Cyberspace and the Context of the Real

Dr. Mary Aiken (2019) in her detailed essay discusses what cyberspace is, its disposition, the effects of human interaction with the internet and the topical technology on human psyche and life, the current issues that have manifested themselves in the physical world due to the incessant advancements in the domain of digital technology, the potential drawbacks and harms of the cyberspace as well as the suggestions to prevent or minimize the risks. Her response to the question whether the cyberspace is an "actual place" or not is clearly "yes" (7). However, it is noteworthy to understand on what grounds Aiken's answer is based. Cyberspace is not "actual" in the tangible or physical sense of the real or actual place; rather, in Aiken's point of view, it is actual in the sense that the moment one enters the "online" world, he/she "travel[s] to a different location in terms of awareness, emotions, responses and behaviour", which may differ relying on one's "age, physical and mental development, and personality traits" (7). The author acknowledges the difference in the manner people act and conduct themselves while "interacting" with the "real world" and the "technology" (7). My research explores Aiken's idea of a person being virtually transported from emotional and behavioural viewpoint to a different place due to his/her interaction with the cyberspace from the perspective of pseudo-modernism. Pseudo-modernism puts an individual in an emotional state that removes him/her from the physical world and envelops that individual in a manner that permits him/her to decide things virtually.

Gonchar and Adams in their article, published in 2000, while putting forward the importance of cyberspace in the "*assessment of client functioning*", and exploring the role of "online communication" in individuals' lives in the development of "*healthy, as well as potentially dangerous, relationships*" (587), bring to attention the aspect of individuals' constructing their "new personalities and social roles for themselves", a possibility that is enabled by the cyberspace (588). The investigators express the possibility of "liv[ing] in two worlds", the tangible one, and the virtual one at the same time (588). In other words, one can be virtually present in the cyberspace, while being physically present in the meatspace simultaneously. It

collides with Dr. Mary Aiken's opinion, according to which, one can approach the online world "from a familiar environment, like the comfort of . . . home or office", but the moment one crosses the threshold of the world of internet, he/she is in a different space in emotional terms or with reference to one's consciousness (7). What seems to be missing in Gonchar and Adams' argument is the fading element of the cyberspace, i.e. how it dulls the meatspace by creating the emotional ambiance where one can be indifferent of one's actual surroundings, something that I intend to explore in my present inquiry.

Adams (1997) provides another intriguing explanation about the cyberspace that helps in discriminating it from the physical world. The author states that what is "consumed" in the cyberspace is "oneself", as "machines convert identity and ideas into information to be stored or transported at the speed of light and reconstituted in one or many distant locations" (164). It, on the one hand, implies that in the real world, where people are flesh and blood, not just in terms of their existence, but also their interactions and dealings, become their digital simulacra, their online avatars, their virtual-social identities, and meet other online members in their computerized, converted-into-information, disembodied forms. On the other hand, it also highlights that the cyberspace is characterized by one's transportation to "one or many distant locations" instantaneously, a phenomenon that is easy to believe in the virtual world of the internet (164). In the cyber world, Adams claims, "[g]eographical distance is irrelevant" (165). Describing the virtual version of self, Adams, quoting Olalquiaga (1992), writes: "In cyberspace the self "becomes a ship that can sail fluidly through different times and places, always moving and changing, adapting to each port of call but anchoring nowhere"" (166). This, too, pinpoints at the fact that the moment one steps into the realm of net, he/she is mentally and emotionally taken away by the online world from the world where body matters.

Jennifer J. Cobb (1999), stating precisely the cyberspace as a "disembodied medium"—since the human body is bereft of its participation here, and the "thoughts, ideas, and information" are presented and relayed through "words and images"—points at the ability of cyberspace to "further split . . . minds from . . . bodies" (393). Talking of the cyberspace, Cobb pinpoints a paradox of the digital human society that is based on a "hope" and a "fear" (399). As per the paradox, the humans entertain the wish to break free from the "messy and mortal sphere of the body" while,

simultaneously, they are “afraid that the alternate realities offered by cyberspace” will engulf them simply, disentangling them slowly and gradually from “the organic world that gave . . . [them] birth” (399). Although Cobb admits that the cyberspace offers the human mind the opportunity to wander freely through the “universe of information at will”, however, this roaming is turning the humans into “hungry ghosts”, who are thirsty for “connection, depth, and spiritual meaning” in their lives (399). In her view, it is in this “thirst” that people “discover a need for the wisdom that only . . . [their] bodies and a deep experience of the natural world can bring” (399). Providing a contrasting opinion, the author writes that it is, nevertheless, in the domain of virtual reality, along with its technological equipment—“the headset, data gloves, and motion-tracking sensors”—that “an embodied experience in cyberspace” is possible (405). Interestingly, this mind-body division in the cyberspace underscores the fact that the cyberspace takes the meatspace away from an individual, enabling him/her to be his/her online persona, that may vary, lesser or greater, from his/her real personality. Moreover, this possibility of a kind of union of mind and body in cyberspace through virtual reality itself hints at the fact that it occurs in virtual and not in actual reality.

Walmsley (2000), presenting the point of view of the critics according to whom the major shifts in the social context are happening as the outcome of swift technological developments, writes that the cyberspace is believed to be weakening or altering the “urban fabric and urban lifestyle for three main reasons: cyberspace is altering the space–time continuum; cyberspace is changing the basis for communication; and cyberspace is blurring the distinction between ‘the real’ and ‘the virtual’” (7). Furthermore, the investigator notes that the cyberspace, under the light of such a viewpoint, can be seen as a medium that allows “people to move from ‘the here and now’ into a world” with much lesser confinements (7). In simple words, according to this perspective, cyberspace becomes a central force in reframing the working order of the society. The third reason, i.e. cyberspace is obscuring the margins of the virtual and the physical, is of special interest to me. My research studies the certain emotional state—created as the result of human interaction with the cyberspace or internet—the spell of which engulfs a human being in a manner that it takes the actual, physical world away from him or her. Walmsley’s research paper, nonetheless, offers a divergent angle from the one mentioned above. Grounding his

argument on the reasons such as "*IT* [Information Technology] *does not annihilate markets and many location-fixed phenomena*", "*access to cyberspace is unequal*" (9), "*cybercommunities can be very transitory*" (10), "*the risk of superficiality*", "the global reach of *cyberspace creates a reciprocal need for a firm link to locality*" (11), "*an unacceptable lack of human contact*", "*a lack of privacy*" (12), Walmsley concludes the paper with its crux that the "place and local community are, and will continue to be, fundamental to the functioning of society" (17).

Providing, yet, another mind-boggling and mind-blowing explication—laced with Saidean outlook—of the non-physical online world, Akkach (2001) states,

> Like the Orient, the imaginative geography of cyberspace allures by its magical, mysterious and exotic qualities; it distinguishes between us and them, the producers and users, our land, the virtual, and their land, the real; it introduces boundaries and marks differences that are often arbitrary; it includes and excludes according to level of expertise; it does not require all parties concerned to understand and participate at the same level; and it legitimates a distinctive vocabulary and a universe of representative discourses. (29)

Suggesting how the virtual should exist with the real, the researcher articulates,

> If we are to believe that we *really* live, construct and dwell in the *real*, then our imaginative engagements with geography at all levels remain vital for a sustainable and meaningful presence. No one modality of the real can ever take over or subsume the others, and to a considerable extent these modalities will have to maintain their autonomy in order to provide us with the possibility of different engagements, so that we may continue to dream of disembodiment, immortality and eternal pleasure. (29)

Bringing to the fore the ironical truth of the digital world, the author puts,

> Yet, the ultimate irony of digital reality is that when the virtual Utopia is eventually realised, and we are wired up and indulging in the eternal pleasure, harmony and serenity of cyber-world, those computer specialists, together with a host of innocent engineers, will be doomed to the ultimate misery of

> having to live in the physical world in order to make sure that there are no glitches, breakdowns or blackouts! (29)

Employing Alfred Schutz's theoretical notions, Zhao (2004) approaches and interprets the cyberspace from a different position. The attributes of human associations, as per Schutz, are shaped by the structure of "human interaction", which is determined by the "condition of human contact" that is constituted by "[s]patial-temporal co-location of two or more individuals"; and, in addition, what forms a "given social realm in the lifeworld" is a "given combination of these elements" (92). Schutz, therefore, bifurcates the "contemporaneous lifeworld into two major realms: the realm of consociates made up of individuals sharing a community of space and . . . of time", and the "realm of contemporaries made up of individuals sharing neither a community of space nor . . . of time" (91). The former is the realm "where the individual interacts with others face-to-face in conditions of copresence", while the latter is the realm "where the individual interacts with others non-face-to-face in conditions of noncopresence" (92). However, due to the emergence of internet and cyberspace, what Zhao observes is the "rise of a third realm – the realm of consociated contemporaries, where people interact face-to-device with each other in conditions of telecopresence" (92). Telecopresence is marked by the following conditions: individuals' lack of mutual presence in the "same physical" place (98), individuals' "electronic" closeness, and the ability to maintain "simultaneous contact with one another" with the help of the "mediation of an electronic communications network (99). The author puts that "telecopresent individuals" can be best defined as "*consociated contemporaries*" since they share with one another a "community of time", but fail to share with one another a "community of (physical) space" (99). Talking of "computer-simulated-environment", which includes the internet as well, the investigator mentions its "virtual" nature, a point that captivates my attention (103). The reason is that one's engagement with the cyberspace requires one's metaphorical flight from the non-virtual to the virtual world. Quite appealingly, all the conditions of telecopresence equally point at this fact. In contrast, talking of "electronically mediated communication", Zhao expresses that it is "real and thus is not virtual" (103). I feel that the investigator fails to notice the irony here. Such communication is a real interaction in the virtual space. In other words, it is a virtually real communication, which first needs a person to be virtually present in the

cyberspace. The researcher, nonetheless, is right that the "[t]elecopresent contacts, though mediated, produce" real life upshots for those who participate in them (103).

Marla Harris's critical inquiry, published in 2005, examines a "*genre of popular fiction*" written for children as well as adolescents, the plots of which encompass "*computers*", "*internet*", "*e-mail*", and "*chat rooms*" (111). It is true, she observes, that these fictitious stories concentrate upon the technology, the "*supernatural*", i.e. "*ghosts*" (111), and the probability that the "e-mail pen pal or the person in the chat room is somehow not fully real or at least not who he or she claims to be (125), nevertheless, haunt this fiction. As in other critical references provided above, Harris brings attention to the particular friction between the "*liberating possibilities of disembodiment*" and the "*desire for embodied relationships*" that can be identified in these works of fiction (111). This friction or "*tension*" that characterizes the cyberspace is symbolized in these novels, in researcher's view, in the "*figure of the ghost*" (111). This friction also implies the friction between the online world, where human beings are minds, and the physical world, where they are both minds and bodies. In the cyberspace, people can be what they are not in reality. In the virtual world, they can be their smartest versions, or anonymously, can fulfill their darkest fantasies. They can develop and maintain the relationships which in the real world are impossible for them to have. This can also be expressed, saying that the cyberspace takes an individual in in a manner that it almost detaches him/her from the physical world, allowing him/her to respond, behave, and decide differently.

2.5 *Crudo*: Reviews and Studies

Crudo by Olivia Liang is a gripping narrative portraying through its plot the issue of how an individual's (Kathy in this case) more than normal interaction with the internet or social media, which most of the time is the source of some sort of negative information or news in *Crudo*, causes disturbance in her life, pressing her to oscillate in-between the conflicting psychic extremes, resembling in her oscillation with the oscillation of metamodern pendulum between the opposing poles of modernism and postmodernism. Since this work of fiction has been published in recent times, it seriously lacks proper academic research to unfold the hidden layers of meaning that lie buried between its pages. Nonetheless, in order to present some

already existing views and studies on Liang's book, I have discussed some reviews as well as a few research articles below.

I would like to begin with the Amal Alshamsi's research article. She in her critical study examines Liang's *Crudo* and Lerner's *10:04* in the light of the idea of "overstimulation", a phenomenon that evidently exists in the contemporary age of information and ever-evolving digital technologies (Alshamsi 1). In her view, both the texts portray the continuous "interruption of the personal by global concerns and politics", and therefore, depict the dilemma of deciding "between the personal and the global selves" (Alshamsi 1). Alshamsi's observation that the bombardment of the "impending social, environmental, or political crises cloud the narrators' minds" is quite intriguing to me, since this is the point where I find ourselves on the same page (1). I, too, am of the view—only with reference to *Crudo*—that Kathy's excessive engagement with the internet to receive news and information, mostly negative, lead her to the psychological discontentment and a pessimistic worldview. The distinction, however, exists in the fact that the article under review examines the "physical markers of her anxiety" along with the "psychological stress" (Alshamsi 8). It is important to note here for the sake of clarity that my investigation purely remains psychological in the sense that it studies Kathy's oscillation between divergent psychic positions. There exists another point of difference between Alshamsi's and my critical examination of *Crudo*. As per her study, the "barrier between the personal and [the] global collapses" in Liang's novel, especially in the context of the personal and the political (Alshamsi 1). The reason it happens is that to Kathy, basically, "separating her real life and the political is not just irresponsible, but impossible as the political is deeply interwoven into her personal life (Alshamsi 10). Now, the personal and the political formulate two opposing poles. According to Alshamsi, the blurring of the personal and the political occurs in *Crudo*. In other words, the boundaries between the opposing poles get blurred in Liang's fiction. This is the point from which my critical study deviates, since it foregrounds the existence of definite divergent positions, though psychological, between which Kathy oscillates. Moreover, it attempts to underscore Kathy's frequent interaction with the internet as the factor which triggers her oscillation between polarities, a point which further asserts the presence of opposing poles, instead of their borders getting blurred.

Characterizing the text as an "autofiction about global anxiety", Hadley (2018), in her review published in *The Guardian*, comments that *Crudo* is a "sweeter, kinder book", and Laing's success in this book is "rendering on the page the texture of a very contemporary sensibility" from "endless internet trawling" to "contemporary news events – Trump's election [and] the rise of the populist right". Interestingly, Hadley, just like Amal Alshamsi, is of the view that *Crudo* illustrates the mingling of the "personal-parochial" and the "political-global" in the lives of people. This view of the blending of the personal and the political, the parochial and the global is what my research does not agree with. In fact, it, using metamodernism as its critical lens, highlights the polarities between which Liang's protagonist oscillates.

In her 2018 review, published in *The New Yorker*, Schwartz, along with the discussion of Kathy's character, who is trying to find happiness in "the most hostile of environments", identifies the contrast between the real life, with its proximate serenity of "trees and birds and street noise", and the reel/screen life, with its transmission of "manifold terrors", as highlighted in Laing's *Crudo*. However, the review, since it lacks the use of any critical/theoretical perspective, simply mentions this contrast without going deep into the text to study it more profoundly. But I, with metamodernism my critical lens, study this contrast more deeply in the light of Kathy's oscillation, just like metamodernism, between contrasting psychic positions. In addition, I also attempt to illustrate how the frequent interaction with the internet results in Kathy's emotional instability and her negative opinion of the life and the world. Schwartz also points at Kathy's negative worldview by mentioning "her terror" of the cataclysmic conclusion of "all life on Earth".

Overton (2019), in his article, focuses on the use of the genre of biography and how Olivia Laing has experimented with this literary form by "intertwining her own biography with that of Acker" (154). He discusses the approach of the novel, *Crudo*, towards "technology" concerning what it could have "changed for life-writerly perspectives" (155). Overton also touches on Laing's uneasiness with the term "autofiction", who, in an interview with Kraus, expresses that this label makes her feel "a bit sick" (Overton 155; Kraus). Commenting on the function of *Crudo* in connection with its autobiographical propensities, Overton writes that it shifts Laing from one status to another, i.e. from that of a "non-fiction writer" to that of a "novelist" (155). One of Overton's remarks about *Crudo* is that it is "a novel with a

complex biographical relationship . . . to the broader genealogy of life writing in English", and the plot of which is "structured by Laing and Patterson's marriage" (156). To mention the last but not least point, generally, Overton discusses the frequent portrayal of real life characters in the novel and also how the novelist has provided references to many literary works. Firstly, the purpose of adding Overton's article here is the lack of availability of critical research on *Crudo*. Secondly, the reason of doing so is that it still provides some different ways through which Liang's fiction has been looked at, though Overton's focus of study remains completely different from mine.

Though, there are other reviews, but they, by and large, revolve around the aforementioned point of views. However, it is important to note that all the discussion done so far has helped me greatly to develop significant distinctions which allow me to clearly express the research gaps with respect to *Crudo* which the present research attempts to deal with.

2.6 *Meatspace*: Reviews and Studies

Meatspace delineates the story of Kitab, Shukla's protagonist, who inhabits the pseudo-modern world, where the internet plays a major part in defining the mundane of people. The novel, in its fictional world, throws light on how cyberspace can create creative imaginative possibilities even when a bit of them is not possible in the meatspace, the actual world. Due to the publication of the book in contemporary times, much academic research is not available on it. However, I have provided some reviews on Meatspace in order to present what different critics have to say about the novel. Moreover, I have also brought under discussion a thesis by Shagufta Iqbal and a research article by Piotr Czerwiński to add a touch of academic research regarding Nikesh Shukla's book.

Mahvesh Murad's review, published in *Dawn* newspaper, highlights the novelist's inspiration for writing this piece of fiction. She states,

> I spoke to Shukla earlier this year when he visited Karachi for the Karachi Literature Festival, and again more recently about where Meatspace came from. "The book started in three places," he said. "The first was being asked to write a short story about social media for BBC Radio 4. I wrote something

> about deleting my mum's Facebook account when she died and how that digital footprint seemed more indelible than her soul, which saddened me. … The second was, when joking with my mate Rob about getting a tattoo to make him look smarter (he has full-sleeve tattoos), we Googled bow-tie tattoos. The first person in Google image search was a scary doppelgänger for Rob. Really, really scarily Rob alike. Within seconds, we'd found his website, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn … and was surprised by how easy all that was to find. The third inciting incident … was in 2010, when the second Nikesh Shukla in the world signed up for a Facebook account … I sent him a questionnaire to see how alike we were. He never replied." (Murad)

So it can be appropriately said that Shukla derives the inspiration for this book from his own life. In addition to this, Mahvesh Murad's review spotlights the key question which appears to be the driving force for the author in connection with the writing of *Meatspace*. She writes,

> " …The question I [Nikesh Shukla] wanted to ask myself was, in the social media age, when we spend more time saying who we are than we do living our lives, who are we? Am I the person I say I am online, the person who presents the best possible version of themselves online or the person who has to readjust their offline persona to reflect the best possible version of themselves. It's scary." (Murad)

The 2014 edition of Nikesh Shukla's novel contains Kerry Hudson's review of it, which says, "As a fellow writer/internet addict/human being, *Meatspace* really touched (and chilled) me. It is not just a brilliant story in itself but really a front-runner in terms of examining how our relationship with the internet is impacting our real lives". Not just that, the edition also includes the review by James Smythe on Shukla's book, "Meatspace is…one of the finest novels I have ever read about modern life and modern living, terrifying, beautiful, hilarious and powerful; about how loose we are with ourselves and our personas when we step online …"

Shagufta Iqbal in her thesis, *The Loss of the 'Real' in Nikesh Shukla's Meatspace: A Study of Constructed Hallucinations*, attempts to call attention to the "issue of reality and its representation in postmodern literature as well as culture". The research studies cyberspace, in the context of the postmodern concept of

hyperreality, foregrounding the probable "construction of hallucination" and the resultant "loss of the real" (Iqbal). Moreover, it examines the "socio-technological cultural factors" that appear to be effective in the "construction of reality and its representation" in the postmodern culture characterised by its hyperreality (Iqbal). To put simply, while interpreting the cyberspace under the lens of hyperreality, the researcher's key focus remains the "issue of reality and its representation", i.e. the way hallucinations are constructed and the reality is lost in the virtual world of internet (Iqbal). The first distinction of my study of *Meatspace*, however, comes from my understanding of the internet which is not postmodern in its nature. To me, internet is, as Alan Kirby states, the "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence*" ("The Death"). To comprehend the internet as the phenomenon which belongs to the pseudo-modern culture, it is important to understand this one dividing line between postmodernism and pseudo-modernism. According to Kirby, postmodernism thought of "contemporary culture as a spectacle before which the individual sat powerless, and within which questions of the real were problematized", while pseudo-modernism "makes the individual's action the necessary condition of the cultural product" ("The Death"). So when it comes to the internet, an individual is no more sitting "powerless", instead the very "central act" with respect to the internet is that of "the individual clicking on his/her mouse to move through pages in a way which cannot be duplicated, inventing a pathway through cultural products which has never existed before and never will again" (Kirby, "The Death"). In fact, this "engagement with the cultural process" is "intense" to a much greater degree, and "gives the undeniable sense (or illusion) of the individual controlling, managing, running, making up his/her involvement with the cultural product" (Kirby, "The Death"). The second point that segregates my critical research with reference to Shukla's text from that of Shagufta Iqbal's is the focus of attention. She, in her study, concentrates on "the issue of reality and its representation in the postmodern literature as well as culture", exploring "hallucinations constructed by postmodern characters of the novel in digital realms of cyberspace" and the "loss of the real" (Iqbal). I, on the other hand, specifically focus on the psychological/emotional state of a person (the protagonist of the novel) in the pseudo-modern world. I study that characteristic pseudo-modern emotional state which Kirby labels as "the *trance* – the state of being swallowed up" by one's own "activity" ("The Death"). Additionally, I highlight the "activity" that swallows up the protagonist in *Meatspace* as well as how after being

"engulfed" in that state of "*trance*", he is "deciding" by typing the possible adventures of his late brother, Aziz, as blogs (Kirby, "The Death").

Czerwiński (2017) employs the theoretical notions of "the extended mind" and "the technological unconsciousness" in his research paper to examine the way in which the narrative of Shukla's novel demonstrates "the contemporary mind" that can be understood as a result of "interaction between the individuals and their technological environments", embodied by the "technology of ubiquitous computing" (54). As per Czerwiński, Shukla's protagonist epitomises "the posthuman condition" of the individuals living in the present times, the condition in which "the physical world interweaves with the virtual reality" (54). In fact, the virtual world supersedes the real world in priority for Shukla's main character in *Meatspace*. Nevertheless, my critical investigation does not concern the abovementioned theoretical notions. I am not interested to study the human consciousness in terms of how it, or the human reality, is formulated in the posthuman world not just by the physical world, but also by the virtual world. I do not study the frequent interaction between Shukla's protagonist and the internet to explore the posthuman condition, but I do so with the inclination to foreground how this interaction (this activity) swallows him up, putting him in that characteristic pseudo-modern emotional state of "*trance*" that takes him away from the real world to the virtual world permitting him to imagine and write as blogs the possible present adventures of Aziz, his brother, who has already encountered the manifestation of his mortality (Kirby, "The Death").

Kitab, the protagonist of *Meatspace*, therefore, appears to be the exemplar of the typical pseudo-modern emotional state. I admit that all the works reviewed here clear ground for me to address the concerns of the present research with reference to *Meatspace* in the light of pseudo-modernism with more clarity.

2.7 Conclusion

By providing this critical corpus as the background to understand the subtleties of the cyberspace and the plethora of information and news that inundates the internet and social media in connection with their impacts on and their capacity to define the real human world, I have equally attempted to pave my way to provide my interpretation of how the excessive interaction with the internet or social media for the

absorption of news/information coerces an individual to oscillate between conflicting psychic extremes, how it presses an individual to develop a certain worldview, and how it removes an individual from the actual world by putting him in a particular emotional state. This interpretation will be provided through the metamodernist analysis of Olivia Liang's *Crudo* in the light of Vermeulen and Akker's theoretical notions, and the pseudo-modernist inquiry of Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace* in the light of Kirby's theoretical postulations in the coming pages.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In the present research, I have utilized the theoretical conceptions propounded by Vermeulen and Akker with respect to metamodernism (in their 2010 essay, "Notes on metamodernism", published in *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, and *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, 2017). Besides this, my critical study also includes the theoretical notions proposed by Alan Kirby with regards to pseudo-modernism (in his 2006 article, "The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond", published in *Philosophy Now*). In their joint critical adventure, Vermeulen and Akker, while describing metamodernism as a "structure of feeling", place metamodernism, as well as, metamodern discourse—in the ontological terms—at the interstitial space between modern and postmodern ("Notes" 5677). Nevertheless, this interstitial space is not marked by rest or "a balance", rather, by a "pendulum swinging" between numerous, but incongruous poles ("Notes" 5677). Interestingly, there is an incessant tussle or tug of war between these extremes. Whenever this metamodern pendulum attempts to approach one extreme radically, it is gravitated back to the opposite extreme, and vice versa. To bolster the argument further about the disposition of this oscillation, it is quite felicitous to mention the comment of Kim Levin, an American writer and art critic. She writes in her article, "How PoMo Can You Go?", that this "oscillation between Modernism and Postmodernism . . . must embrace doubt, as well as hope and melancholy, sincerity and irony, affect and apathy, [and] the personal and the political . . . (Levin). Vermeulen and Akker argue in this regard:

> Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. . . One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable

> poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm. ("Notes" 5677)

Furthermore, along with the discursive cartography of the "contemporary metamodern condition" in the chapter, "Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism" in the book, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, Vermeulen and Akker mention the "Internet as a means to discuss, cultivate and rally around shared frustrations (however disparate)", and refer to the "network (or social media) culture" and its "spill over into society at large" (Akker, et al.).

Viewing the idea of metamodern oscillation between opposing poles together with the fact of the almost ubiquity of internet and social media and they being the source of cultivating frustrations, I have attempted to investigate how the excessive engagement with the internet or social media—for receiving news and information—can cause the protagonist to oscillate between differing positions in *Crudo*. This engagement with the internet or social media has also been explored with the aim of observing the specific manner in which it presses the protagonist to view the world in the fictional realm of Laing's novel.

According to Alan Kirby, the "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence* is the internet", which makes the individual's participation a "necessary condition" for its existence ("The Death"). Moreover, he argues that the "typical emotional state" in "[t]his pseudo-modern world" is that of the "*trance*–the state of being swallowed up by your activity" ("The Death"). Kirby further delineates this pseudo-modern emotional condition by putting that it "*takes the* [real] *world away* . . . You click, you punch the keys, you are . . . engulfed, deciding" ("The Death").

Kirby's notions about the internet as being the finest example of the pseudo-modern phenomenon and the "typical emotional state" in "[t]his pseudo-modern world" are used collectively in the research ("The Death"). The purpose of this is to demonstrate how protagonist's own "activity" of excessive engagement with the internet or social media in order to produce the information is enveloping him completely in a way that it takes the real world surrounding him away from him, giving him the opportunity to decide creatively someone else's present in the cyberspace in *Meatspace* (Kirby, "The Death").

3.2 Research Methodology

To carry out the research, the present critical study remains qualitative in its approach. Qualitative research can be defined as a "process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting" ("What"). This research aims to highlight the issue of the psychological/emotional condition of an individual in the age of internet, and it does so through the profound examination of the protagonists of the following works of fiction: *Crudo* by Olivia Liang and *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla. With this certain aim as its focus, the study performs the textual analysis of the two aforementioned texts. Textual analysis is an umbrella term that embraces several research methods in its sphere employed in order to "describe, interpret and understand texts" (Caulfield). As per Jack Caulfield, one of its key focuses is to link the text under consideration to a wider context, may it be social, political or any other. This is precisely what my research endeavors to do. By studying the act of the excessive engagement of Kathy and Kitab with the internet from the viewpoint of the already discussed theoretical concepts of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism respectively, my research connects Laing's and Shukla's texts to a wider social context, i.e. the issue of the psychological/emotional condition of an individual in the age of internet, which is, in fact, the issue of the contemporary world, not of just one certain society.

In order to perform the textual analysis, this critical study incorporates Catherine Belsey's notions presented in "Textual Analysis as a Research Method". Offering her "methodological account", she expresses her view of the essential nature of the textual analysis with reference to "research in cultural criticism", whether in the discipline of "English" or "any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts" (160). Following the practice of textual analysis, this critical inquiry involves a "close encounter" with *Crudo* and *Meatspace* (Belsey 160).

Talking about "interpretation", Belsey claims that it always includes "extra-textual knowledge" (163). In her view, some of this knowledge "is general, part of the repertoire of knowledges that constitutes a culture . . . and some is derived from secondary sources" (163-164). Expressing her opinion on what most of the researchers do when they come across a text to which they are not familiar, she says

that they search “on the Internet, in the library, in bibliographies provided for the purpose” about what has already been disclosed or delineated about it (164). Overall, these points hint towards the literature review section in the context of research. I have also developed the literature review chapter with the aim to cover a broader range of what has already been said about the topics under discussion, the theoretical lenses used to critically examine the texts, and the texts (*Crudo* and *Meatspace*) themselves. This review of literature has helped me, just as it can assist any other researcher, to highlight the research gap that my research tends to address, to understand what distinguishes my standpoint from the standpoints that have already been taken, and to recognize how my interpretation of the selected texts is going to differ from the other already explored interpretations of these texts. To cut short, the “extra-textual knowledge” has certainly played a key role in solidifying the interpretation that the present research attempts to foreground with reference to the selected novels in the light of metamodernism and pseudo-modernism (Belsey 163).

Arguing about how to view a text, Belsey asserts that a text does not have the capacity to force its reader to perceive that text in a certain manner (167). In the light of textual analysis, a researcher is a reader as well, since it demands from a researcher a close-reading of the text. To put clearly, a researcher, who is using the technique of textual analysis, might intentionally “refuse the position” provided by the text, and make a choice of viewing it from “somewhere else” (168). Moreover, Belsey encourages a researcher to “adopt” a “critical vocabulary” that will then make it possible for the text to give him/her the opportunity to read it from multiple perspectives and take “specific positions” (167). Keeping in view my research, this “somewhere else” can be best described as the metamodern and pseudo-modern approaches that I have employed to examine *Crudo* and *Meatspace* (168). Similarly, my “critical vocabulary” comes from metamodernism and pseudo-modernism (discussed in detail in the theoretical framework) —allowing me, therefore, to take certain stances in connection with the selected texts and interpret them accordingly (167).

Catherine Belsey writes, “The text . . . provides the material for analysis” (167). According to her, a researcher must not misunderstand that “material” as an “empty space”, a space that can be filled on the basis of whatever he/she likes (167). By contrast, the text itself takes part in the “process of signification” (167). What can

be the "process of signification" in the context of a research? (167). It is the process, by and large, of bridging a particular research gap, highlighting the issues raised in a research, addressing the posed research questions, and presenting the findings. In all these areas, the text definitely plays a major role. For instance, metamodernism and pseudo-modernism can be the theoretical lenses of my research, but the view that I look at through these lenses is certainly provided by the two texts to which my study has been delimited. This argument throws light at the significance of the text in a research. Furthermore, it develops, like other points discussed so far, a connection between the critical framework of the present study with *Crudo* and *Meatspace*.

Belsey is of the view that, though research involves uncovering information, what "poses the questions", which any particular research aims to answer, is the textual analysis (171). Moreover, she contends that it is, preferably, the text which "sets the agenda" (171). In the discussion so far, I have clearly attempted to position metamodernism and pseudo-modernism (my conceptual lenses) with that certain "somewhere else" from where comes the "critical vocabulary" which assists me as a researcher to critically analyze and interpret Olivia Laing's and Nikesh Shukla's texts by taking the already explained (in the theoretical framework) specific stances (163, 168, 167). However, what "sets the agenda" is *Crudo* and *Meatspace* (171). The research questions, which my study aims to address, are derived from the selected texts. For instance, Kathy's oscillation between psychic polarities, what is triggering this oscillation, and her negative worldview, all these points are coming from *Crudo*. Likewise, Kitab's specific emotional state, his frequent engagement with the internet to write the blogposts, and the impact of this engagement on him, all these points have been taken from *Meatspace*. This discussion not only highlights the particular roles of both the theoretical framework and the literary texts in the context of research, and in the present case my research, but also underscores the significance of the texts with regards to the technique of textual analysis.

Overall, the discussion made so far acts as a bridge between the critical framework of this research and the selected two novels. This discussion, in the light of Catherine Belsey's notions, provides a pattern, a particular pathway for my critical inquiry, which links the defined theoretical conceptions with the texts. In short, it provides a roadmap which not only validates the use of the technique of textual analysis for the present study, but also projects vividly the importance of both the

critical theories and the chosen novels in the context of it.

CHAPTER 4

THE METAMODERN DIMENSION IN OLIVIA LAING'S *CRUDO*

4.1 Introduction

When Vermeulen and Akker discuss the metamodernism from the standpoint of its ontological ground in "Notes on metamodernism", they describe it as oscillating between "the modern and the postmodern" ("Notes" 5677). Both "the modern and the postmodern" denote here the opposing poles between which "metamodernism oscillates" ("Notes" 5677). In fact, modern and postmodern emerge as two broader differing categories consisting of other sub-categories as well, which constitute further opposing extremes, such as "hope and melancholy . . . naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" in-between which the metamodern "pendulum" sways ("Notes" 5677). In this chapter, I specifically observe and illustrate the oscillation, akin to metamodern pendular swinging, between diverging positions through the investigation of Liang's protagonist, Kathy in her fictional world. Kathy represents the metamodern pendulum and oscillates between contentment and discontentment—the two terms that I utilize in my analysis in the similar sense as that of the broader categories of "the modern and the postmodern" between which swings the metamodernism ("Notes" 5677). I illustrate the sub-categories of the two broader categories—contentment and discontentment—in their various forms along my way of interpreting the selected contemporary work of fiction, *Crudo*. This chapter is equally meant to foreground what triggers Laing's protagonist's shift towards the divergent position labelled as discontentment, and therefore, allowing the overall oscillation between contentment and discontentment. I am shortly going to demonstrate that Kathy's frequent interaction with the internet, which in her case is the carrier of depressing news/information, pulls Kathy towards the psychological condition of discontentment—whether it be her frustration and anxiety with respect to Trump's administration, climatic conditions, like floods, and elevating human cruelty in general, or her dread of the potential atomic war. My aim is to underscore how this regular bombardment of distressing news/information conditions Kathy to think

"everything arse about tit" about 2017—the year in which the novel is temporally set— and "despair, not just for her own life but for all the lovely creatures, humans included" (Laing 94, 95).

4.2 Kathy: The Negotiator of the Polarities

The first instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears on quite initial pages of the book when Kathy is in Italy on her "pre-wedding" vacation trip with her husband—though, they are not married yet (Laing 2). Kathy's serenity can be visibly noticed in her own description of her routine as "good routine going" (2). She opens her day—the "brightest day imaginable" (3)—with swimming, then having mugs of coffee, with a "sunlounger" set underneath the "hornet tree" (2). In addition, comparing everything in her surrounding with everything at home, she explains that it is more elegant, rather "profoundly" elegant (3). These textual references help me to locate Kathy at one side of the extremes, which, according to the instance under observation, is Kathy's contentment and sense of enjoyment. Now, I will refer to those references that depict her shift towards the other side of the conflicting extremes, i.e. discontentment or mental/emotional disturbance. Kathy, via internet, receives the information/news of some person's dismissal by "the President", who was, the text shows, "hired . . . and fired in ten days. Like a fruit fly . . ." (3). Kathy's act of labelling the writer of this fruit fly comment as a "joker" (3), and additionally, the satirical mentioning by the text of "56,152 likes" (3) on that comment, intensifies more Kathy's discontentment or disturbance with this news, which is expressed in the next sentence: "None of it was funny, or maybe it all was" (3). Reading Kathy's this thought deeply, it seems that her dissatisfaction stems from the facetious cyber culture, where even the serious issues are treated as jokes. This last reference, clearly, signifies not just the protagonist's oscillation from one extreme to another, but also her perplexity represented in her concerned consideration of the situation reported by the news as, simultaneously, not laughable or totally laughable. However, shortly after this, the text mentions Kathy's thoughts as returning to her husband, whom she defines as an "indisputably nice" man, admired by "everyone" (4). She, then, articulates her feelings, saying that she and her husband "were friends" (4). These thoughts, cherishing her husband and her relationship with him, signal

Kathy's return to the emotional state of some sort of comfort. Moreover, it further strengthens my argument of Kathy's oscillation between conflicting extremes as well.

In the first instance of oscillation, Kathy's contentment is visible in her cheerfulness, the result of her "good routine", as is already discussed (Laing 2). Then jumps in "The internet" (3). Interestingly, the statement that shows her shift from contentment to discontentment, it opens with the words, "*The internet*", highlighting the fact of the involvement of the internet in introducing perturbation in Kathy's fictional life through the diffusion of information/news (3; emphasis added). Furthermore, Kathy's comment after the reception of news that "[n]one of it was funny, or maybe it all was" does not seem to be coming from a person who is engaged with the news casually, rather, it seems to be the opinion of a person who is concerned about "the President[ʻs]" act of firing someone (3). The word "all" in "maybe it all was" is equally appealing too (3). It looks to render a sense of objectivity to Kathy's worrisome view, as if she, in an implied manner, is mentioning the life (as a whole) as a senseless—sarcastically funny—phenomenon just like Trump's action.

The second instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears when the novel informs about Kathy and her husband's plan to travel to "Rome" and that her husband has bought the "train tickets" (Laing 22). Here, contentment derives its meaning from two reasons: first, from Kathy's happiness, especially when she is travelling, which the text also confirms, stating that she is "happiest on her travels" (5); and second, from her aesthetic observation of the "fourth" room to which they move, a room that is built like "a New York loft . . . placed under exposed Tuscan beams", and that is, but the "pinnacle of luxury" (22). Kathy, after her aesthetic observation, falls "asleep" (22). The act of sleeping, in the context developed here, renders the connotation of her mentally relaxed state too. Soon, her movement from contentment to discontentment is revealed by the novel through her using the "laptop" and "leaf[ing] through the internet" (22). Next, she feels "annoyed" (22). First cause of discontentment/annoyance is an "article"—a piece of information from internet—that discusses a "painter she like[s] by a critic she hate[s]" (22). What demands attention is that even this annoyance consists of intricate layers. It represents likeness and hatred at once. This ambivalence or intricacy, therefore, indicates the intense nature of Kathy's annoyance. What annoys Kathy at the second place is the presence of a novelist's "profile in an American magazine",

specifically the “comparison between the novelist’s latest book and an oral history of Chernobyl” (22-23). It is revealed through Kathy’s thoughts that Chernobyl’s “imaginary oral histories”, according to the comparison, are “exquisitely” adapted to the “ways in which humans victimise each other” (23). The word exquisite, together with its all other meanings, means beautiful. Reading “exquisite” (23) as beautiful and also Kathy’s comment regarding this word as her “least favourite word on earth” (23), reveals to me the severe irony, which is otherwise hidden, that is employed in the use of the word “exquisitely” in order to express the ways of human victimization by humans. In other words, the use of an adjective, conveying the meaning of beautiful, for something that is related to human victimization is quite painfully ironical. However, my purpose is not to merely comment on words or their ironical usage, but to expose the exalted state of Kathy’s annoyance with the help of all this. Moreover, her very next consideration of “nuclear war” (23) as a “more seemly subject” (23) resonates with the textual hint hinting at human victimization. It is important to note that Kathy’s discontentment/annoyance leading her to the consideration of not just war, but an atomic war, indicates her higher psychological disturbance in association with the rapidly disrupting state of political affairs of her world. Hence, these bits from the text denote her movement from contentment—happiness and relaxed emotional state—to discontentment—annoyance. Nevertheless, from this emotional disturbance, Kathy’s attention diverts towards her husband who has “begun a soliloquy about Oat Krunchies”, and the moment he starts “rambl[ing]”, “[s]he love[s] it” (23). She recalls when, at times, she finds him busy in self-talking “in a low confiding tone”, while “baking bread or making a sauce”, “offering exhortation and encouragement, like a small boy only not at all ridiculous” (23). Reading all these remarks, including Kathy’s remark that “[i]f this was love she’d take it” (23), clearly suggests the swinging back of her psychological state from discontentment/annoyance to that of contentment/relaxation, since these references refer to her personal moments of love and peace of mind.

In the second instance, Kathy’s pure pleasure of travelling as well as her excitement over her shift from the “third room” to the “fourth” one are clearly depicting her psychological/emotional state of contentment (Laing 22). However, the source that prompts Kathy to gravitate towards discontentment from contentment once again is the internet, and the particular action that is actively contributing to

make this movement happen is her "leaf[ing] through the internet" using the "laptop" (22). Laptop emerges as a symbol of the facilitator of Kathy's habitual business of browsing the internet for news/information. All these news/information, whether about the "painter she like[s] by a critic she hate[s]" or about the novelist whose "latest book" is compared with "an oral history of Chernobyl", kindle Kathy's discontentment causing her to think, ultimately, of a "nuclear war" (22, 23). This another time highlights the internet and Kathy's practice of regularly interacting with it, collectively, as the devil that results in Kathy's drift towards discontentment, hence, making the overall oscillation between the divergent extremes possible.

The third instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears when the text shares one of Kathy's past visits to "a village" in "New York" as well as the information of her seeing Sarah, Matt, David, Charlie, Paul, and Joseph (Laing 27). Her contentment can be understood in terms of her experience of that place, which she acknowledges as "truly great" (Laing 27). However, within the past (because Kathy is still in Italy), the novel shares her memory of a further past, unfolding "David and Kathy['s]" discussion, "in elaborate detail", to "kill themselves" (Laing 28). The grave and gloomy subject matter of their discussion, seemingly, marks the end of Kathy's contentment in the light of the way I am developing my argument. But, it is not so. A deep study of Kathy's suicidal thoughts as a matter of past, since she was "so unhappy *then*", together with her reality of being "here . . . still", generates a different meaning (Laing 28; emphasis added). In fact, the fact of the belonging of this self-killing thought from bygone days, and the fact of the continuity of her life symbolize hope, which is visible in her own realization that she can never "always be . . . hopeless" (Laing 6). Hope breeds contentment, as an author notes that "[i]f [there is] hope, that will ease . . . discontent, leading . . . toward contentment" (Lieto). Here, hope seems to be performing the function of energizing Kathy for life as, what Vermeulen and van den Akker call, "an impossible possibility", making her trust life and its purpose "*as if* it does exist", causing her to continue her struggle for living ("Notes" 5677). Moreover, the word "then" indicates that Kathy recalls her "unhappy" (Laing 28), suicidal temperament from the position in life, where one thinks of such actions and thoughts as silly and embraces the past pages, largely, of one's life—just as she does—as "mostly benevolent life" (Laing 89). Another point is that, reading Kathy's "then" (Laing 28) self-destructive thoughts

and her now “truly great” (Laing 27) experience of that village together, it tallies with the hope that is represented in the continuity of life, and it also hints at the happiness that surrounds her character. The shift (in the past stated in this particular instance) from contentment—in the style as shown in the abovementioned instances—occurs “when the [James] Comey news br[eaks]. 9 May 2017, early evening” (Laing 28). Kathy is informed by Carl that “Twitter’s ABLAZE gurl” (Laing 28). The textual markers, such as “ABLAZE”, “[e]veryone was saying it was a banana republic”, and Jim’s comment that “he’s [Trump] taking a giant shit on our nation”, indicate a restlessness the ambit of which is both personal—from Kathy’s point of view—and public (Laing 28). Besides, the expressions like “banana republic” and “taking a giant shit on . . . nation” express a desperateness that manifests itself when the things are getting out of control (Laing 28). The statement, “[t]hey ate Chicken Zsa Zsa and salad . . . they drank beer and Riesling, they laughed all night”, is superbly connected with the statement, “that was the night the President fired the Director of the FBI, they were scared and sick . . .” (Laing 28). This yoking together of complex opposite emotions of merriment and fearfulness actually makes the discontentment—the state of restlessness, desperateness and panic—more obvious. This act of “laugh[ing] all night” while “they [are] scared and sick” (Laing 28) seems more to be an instance of “nervous laughter”—which is defined as “a defense mechanism against emotions that may make [one] feel weak or vulnerable” (Jewell). What is equally significant to note is that the pronoun “they”, together with all other members of the “dinner”, includes Kathy as well, which then means that she, too, shares the same psychological condition of discontentment, arising from the nervousness and a sense of desperateness resulted by the news (Laing 28). All these references, thus, aptly demonstrate Kathy’s shift from one extreme—contentment—to the other extreme—discontentment. But, this phase of discontentment also zooms past in a time it takes one to scroll down the screen, and the plot presents Kathy, who had “earlier” enjoyed a “mint ice cream” (Laing 28), agreeing with “Marc lovely Marc” when he gives voice to his thoughts about the spring season as “the most beautiful spring he’d ever seen” (Laing 29). She shows her agreement in the following words: “it was so green and excessive, so floral and bosomy and bedecked” (Laing 29). This swift textual shift from disturbing subject matter to light subject matter also shows Kathy’s shift from discontentment to a relaxed mood, where she can express her reflections on the aesthetic beauty of nature.

In the third instance, what drifts Kathy to discontentment is “Comey news”, and to speak of the source of news, it is internet or social media—Twitter (Laing 28). I am fixing my attention on Kathy specifically, who feels—along with all other members of the “dinner”— “scared and sick” when she receives the news that the “Director of the FBI” has been shown the door by “the President” (28). Both the words, “scared and sick”, are the evidence of Kathy’s quite disturbed psychological or emotional state (28). Hence, this instance, too, authenticates the internet, in company with news/information, to be the mainspring of Kathy’s discontented state of mind.

The fourth instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears as a long breath, breathed out by the text, containing a series of news/information. Before the reception of news/information, the novel announces the fact that Kathy is “moving” to her husband’s house, and when she is finally there, she is feeling “ecstatic to be able to sleep alone again” (Laing 37, 40). The words, like “ecstatic”, and the statement, like “she loved travelling through dreams”, reveal Kathy’s quite joyful frame of mind (Laing 40). My focus is particularly on two words: “travelling” and “dreams” (Laing 40). I have already rendered the reference of Kathy’s love for travelling in the second instance above. Kathy talks of “dreams”—not nightmares—and the word “loved” proves the blissful nature of her dreams (Laing 40). In my understanding, the presence of these two words together points at the exalted disposition of her joyful frame of mind, caused by thinking of not just dreams, but also travelling through them. The novel states that the next day, in the morning, when the “senior sales negotiator of an estate agent . . . offers her a flat on the Golden Lane estate in London” (Laing 40), via email, Kathy “considers buying it” (Laing 41). Now, Kathy’s consideration of buying a flat is a point to consider because it indirectly indicates that Kathy, if not well heeled, is prosperous enough to let her mind consider such consideration. The reason I am thinking this way is the question—adjacent to the thought of such consideration—that pops up in mind: why would someone, who does not have enough resources, even consider of considering such consideration (of buying a flat) in the first place? Moreover, the manner in which Kathy “considers buying it” is equally important for me (Laing 41). The text does not display any sign of frustration, or it communicates complete calmness, while she is observing the pictures revealing “a single room . . . a double bed, a yellow chair . . . and . . . 30 square meters, terrazzo paneling and sliding doors” (Laing 40-41). Therefore, both her

consideration and the manner of this consideration uncover the peaceful or calm state of her mind, illustrating which is my concern in order to articulate well the oscillation between contentment and discontentment. The movement from contentment—overwhelming joy and calmness—to discontentment occurs when Kathy interacts with a "site" which informs her to "Enjoy August", because according to "conspiracy theorists", the website tells her, "it might be your last month on Earth" (Laing 41). What is noteworthy is the juxtaposition of contradictory emotions in the idea of enjoying her final month in this world. In other words, it is impossible for Kathy to enjoy her final month with the dread of approaching doom of the living orb. This ironical juxtaposition, which can be put in my words as enjoy the dread, thus, heightens the troubling effect of such information on Kathy's senses. Right "beneath" this piece of information on the same site, there is a "headline in red: Woman liveblogged her rape on Instagram" (Laing 41). The text then discloses that "Trump and North Korea" scenario is "more worrying" for Kathy (Laing 42). Taking a pause, I want to say that the words "more worrying" do not solely depict Kathy's deeper anxiety over the third scenario, rather, they also highlight her already worried mindset over the other two news/information (Laing 42). Kathy visits Trump's "Twitter" profile in order to update herself on the alarming friction between the two countries (Laing 42). For the disappointment of her expectations, the situation is "worse" (Laing 42). Kathy finds Trump "retweeting Fox News about jets in Guam that [can] fight tonight" (Laing 42). Trump is tweeting about his "first order" apropos the upgradation of the "nuclear arsenal" of America, which is "more powerful than ever before", reminding the world that American nation is "the most powerful nation in the world!" (Laing 42-43). Now, these tweets, with their mentions of "jets" (Laing 42) and "nuclear arsenal" (Laing 43), in the context of mounting friction between America and North Korea, undoubtedly, bespeak of a serious threat of an atomic war that seems so close. Kathy's remark about living, in this respect, as "living in the permanent present of the id", specifically, catches my attention (Laing 43). If I take id as "the set of uncoordinated instinctual desires" ("Id"), then it may mean, in the context under observation, chaos, i.e. if "Trump and North Korea" (Laing 42) decide to follow their "id[s]" (Laing 43), then the world, better say, Kathy's world is about to witness a ginormous, inevitable, human destruction. Moreover, living with the incessant fear of the happening of this ginormous destruction at any time shapes Kathy's view of "living in the permanent present of the id" (Laing 43). Furthermore,

her nostalgia for the bygone days, when "Obama" was the president, further adds into the intensity of this horror loaded situation, since it marks the loss of peaceful days as well as the loss of hope due to the dread of looming annihilation (Laing 43). Thus, Kathy's discontentment manifests itself in the form of her depressed, worried, hopeless and nostalgic psychological state which is the collective consequence of all the news accessed via internet, especially the first and the third ones. The return of Kathy's temper from discontentment to contentment demonstrates itself in the text when she attempts to answer the question of what "she should be doing" in the face of this hopelessness and stultifying fear of life's apocalypse (Laing 43). The things she mentions include "getting married", "doing a studio visit for an artist", "hav[ing] chicken for Lauren's birthday", "fil[ing] a review", and "continu[ing] with her small and cultivated life, pick[ing] the dahlias, stak[ing] the ones . . . fallen down" (Laing 43). What captures my attention is the fact that all these tasks possess certain meaning that—despite of all this hopelessness and constant dread—can provide some purpose to Kathy's life, which truly seems to be an "impossible possibility" (Vermeulen and van den Akker, "Notes" 5677), when her world is almost "shutting up [its] shop" (Laing 93). I am particularly interested in Kathy's allusion of marriage, because marriage may seem something ordinary in ordinary conditions, but here, it appears as a very strong symbol of Kathy's endeavor to encourage life continue its continuity. Additionally, her allusion of carrying on her "cultivated life" is, too, of great significance for me, because it symbolizes her will to not just continue her own life, but the life in its other forms as well (Laing 43). Kathy's attempt to think of the things that give her some hope to live, regardless of Earth's looming collapse, also throw light on her amazing mental tendency to find hope when confronted with "worse", utterly hopeless and horrific situations (Laing 42). Thus, Kathy's hopeful temperament at the point when hope itself looks to be an impossibility also indicates her capacity to achieve the sense of contentment when it is the hardest thing to achieve.

In the fourth instance, as is shown above, Kathy interacts with the internet to have her usual share of seriously troubling news/information. Firstly, she is informed by a "site" to "[e]njoy" her "last month on Earth"—what an irony! (Laing 41). Secondly, the same website brings to her the "headline in red" of a "[w]oman" who "liveblogged her rape on Instagram" (41). Thirdly, internet reveals to her the "more

worrying" news of the intensifying political–cum–nuclear tension between "Trump and North Korea" (42). The textual expression of "more worrying" denotes Kathy's worried mental condition—discontentment—on all the three news/information she gets via internet, especially and chiefly on the third one (42). In addition, to mention the kind of worldview that this contact with the internet with reference to the third news generates for Kathy, it is well expressed by her comment of "living in the permanent present of the id" (43). Id, to put briefly, symbolizes the imbecile attitude of the leaders of the two nations that is hauling their countries towards utter devastation. Therefore, what is forming such an outlook on life for Kathy is her constant dread of the cataclysm that can happen any time. Moreover, her missing "Obama" adds further into the fact of how much unsafe she feels in the "present" (43). In other words, her nostalgia contributes into her dreaded worldview as well. Thus, the trigger that is bringing about Kathy's fluctuation from the extreme of contentment to the extreme of discontentment and also determining her negative view of world or life is the internet as well as her periodic contact with it.

The fifth instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears "two days" (Liang 48) after "10 August 2017", the day Kathy pays visit to her "old house" (45). The text in an unobscured manner recounts Kathy's happiness articulating that she is "actually happy" and considers August to be the "best month of the best year of [her] life" (50). The plot labels her as "a drama queen", who is "sunk to the knees in her own moods" (50). Both this label and the emotional state of being immersed in "her own moods" may have a slightly negative connotation, nonetheless, keeping in mind her happiness, they sound more to be the indicators of Kathy's emotional freedom (50). The text also reveals that she is feeling "unphlegmatic" (50). This word, keeping in view the context of her approaching "[m]arriage in 5 days" (55), means not spiritless and not unemotional, which the fact of being immersed in "her own moods" (50) also confirms. Altogether, these allusions, together with her interest in "[p]aint[ing] [her] shed"—which does not only mean "*home* ownership" here, but is also the result of her pleasant attitude due to the happiness she is presently feeling in her life—refer to her psychological state of contentment (51; emphasis added). Then happens the "mistake", the mistake that Kathy makes "so often", that is, "to read the news immediately after waking" (51). The source of the news is again

internet, as the word “email” shows (51). This mistake also transports her from contentment to discontentment. The news she reads are as follows:

> A Nazi march in Charlottesville complete with flaming torches and armed militias, an email from the *Guardian* headline UK family found guilty of enslaving homeless and disabled people subhead Lincolnshire gang forced at least 18 victims to work for little or no pay and live in squalor for up to 26 years . . . Libyan coastguards firing on sinking refugee boats with machine guns, climbing aboard to pick the pockets of the drowning . . . (51)

Utterly disheartened, Kathy, the text illustrates, is feeling “displaced” and “sick of it all” (51). Kathy’s displacement, in a self-explanatory manner, tells that its nature is not physical, rather, psychological/emotional. It is a displacement from happiness to depression, from meaning to meaninglessness, and more generally, from contentment to discontentment, resulted, on the one hand, by the anguished human condition, and on the other hand, by humans’ “aptitude for cruelty” (51). To me, Kathy’s heartstruck statement, “how [can] you be happy when you [know] the [brutal] tendencies humans [have]”, is horrifying and has two different meanings (51). If I interpret this statement, considering Kathy an emotional being, then it projects Kathy’s devastated state of mind on the sufferings and torments of her fellow human beings, and her empathy makes her ask whether she can have happiness amidst all this brutality bruising the humanity. In contrast, if I approach it from the perspective of meaninglessness, then it, better say Kathy herself, appears to be questioning the very meaning of happiness in human life, its purpose and worth, when humans have such unbelievable “aptitude for cruelty” (51). The references, for instance, Kathy’s self-tag, “the eternal orphan”, and her description of the world as “an unshruggable burden”—after her allusion of “a child”, who “tried to get milk out of her dead mother’s breasts”—not only denote Kathy’s dispirited state of mind, but also depict humanity, in general, as stripped of all its fundamental values (51). Here, the lifeless mother, probably, symbolizes defunct humanity, while the child, plausibly (as she herself says), represents Kathy in fiction, and the humans like her in reality, who are still trying to suck “milk out of” (51) humanity after her demise, or may be, are trying to revive their deceased mother—humanity—through their mourning. Kathy’s expression, “I want . . . all-out war”, seems to be her most desperate cry for the end of this human torture in one way or another (52). This discussion, hence, fulfills my aim of portraying Kathy’s

discontented—disheartened and agonized—mental/emotional state, which displays her fictional switch from contentment to discontentment. Now, it is time to unfold her switching back from discontentment to contentment. The morning has passed, and the "midday" of "Saturday 12 August 2017" has come (52). The text mentions Kathy's taking "a bath", "fumbl[ing] a book", selecting "an extended essay by a New England novelist, a pornographer with good syntax, a lusty grammarian", "breez[ing] through words like tennis, suntan lotion and adultery", and reading novelist's "astounding statement", that "said that the only good novels were written by gay men and women", leading her to her own comment, that is "[w]hat's the novel about if not getting fucked" (52). The allusions of "homosexual community" and "adultery" including other sensual allusions (52), they demonstrate Kathy's soothed and also excited temperament, because the text discloses "[e]vil" as "a subject of interest" for her, and her being not "squeamish", since "she'd worked years in a strip joint in Times Square" (9). Moreover, her action of essay reading, or reading in particular, points at her changed, or to say, relaxed psychological state, because reading "reduces stress" and "fights depression symptoms" (Stanborough). Another source states more precisely that "Reading only helps reduce . . . stress if [one] pick[s] something [one] enjoy[s] . . ." ("Reading"). This criterion is also achieved by Kathy by selecting "an extended essay" (52) on her "subject of interest" (9). Thus, Kathy's switch to an excited-cum-soothed mental state also marks her return from discontentment to contentment.

In the fifth instance, the discontentment demonstrates itself (just like the other times) when the text mentions Kathy's habitual "mistake" of browsing the internet in order to "read the news immediately after waking" (Laing 51). The news about "[a] Nazi march", a "UK family found guilty of enslaving homeless and disabled people", and "Libyan coastguards firing on sinking refugee boats" make Kathy feel "displaced" and "sick" (51). My goal is not to bring to view Kathy's discontentment here (as it is already explicated in great length above), but to lay emphasis on the agent—that is, the internet and Kathy's customary contact with it—that is leading Kathy to such mental/emotional condition, and hence, making possible her drift from contentment to discontentment, eventually allowing the oscillation between conflicting extremes. Regarding her outlook on life, all these news are painting a pessimistic perception of world leading Kathy to question the very meaning or

purpose of happiness or finding happiness in life when one knows “the tendencies humans ha[ve], their aptitude for cruelty” (51).

The sixth instance of oscillation between contentment and discontentment appears on “18 August 2017”, when Laing, ultimately, ties Kathy—her narrator as well as protagonist—and her husband in a wedlock (67). The couple can be noticed as “ecstatic”, and soon they seal their “openish marriage” with their “sign[s]” (68). Celebrations begin. The drinking of “Le Mensil”, the keen “involve[ment] in the cake”, the eating of “melon and chicken”, and the assembling of “pink flowers and white flowers” can be witnessed through the text (69). All these textual allusions, in an unclouded manner, point at the moments and feelings of great glee. Nonetheless, the switch from these joyous moments to discontentment happens when amidst all this “danc[ing]” (68), eating and drinking, a news, rather, “the main news” is announced that “Steve Bannon’s resigned” and all of them look over “their phones” (69). Kathy’s worry is visible in this sentence: “it ha[s] literally just happened, no one quite kn[ows] why, great wedding present she mutter[s] to no one in particular” (69). This happening of things without the knowledge of public sounds perilous. The words “no one quite kn[ows] why” (69) denote a sort of uncertainty that signifies the fact that things are taking place underground and their given appearances betray the actual. A similar line of thought is presented at another place in *Crudo* by “Alex”, who is a “Russian”, and his “grandfather had been Stalin’s chief bodyguard” (29). When Kathy finds that “[e]veryone talk[s] about politics all the time but no one kn[ows] what [is] happening”, Alex tells her that [t]his is what it’s like in dictatorships . . . people only know what’s happening because of gossip” (29). The word “gossip” looks to be implying the absence of appropriate source and information here, which then seems to be the outcome of a situation when the provided appearances of an occurrence betray the actual (29). My next focal point is Kathy’s plain, naked irony conveyed through her consideration of this news as “*great* wedding present” (69; emphasis added). This irony is not just a matter of word play, rather, it also illustrates Kathy’s annoyed mental state resulted by the news. The word “mutter[s]” (69) is equally important to understand Kathy’s disturbed mood. *Cambridge Dictionary* defines mutter as this: “to speak quietly and in a low voice that is not easy to hear, often when you are worried or complaining about something” (“Mutter”). Kathy’s articulation of the uncertainty of “why” “Bannon” (69) has quit discloses her disturbed or worried state of mind, and

her ironical remark on the reception of this news at the time of her wedding tallies with the "complaining about something" ("Mutter") part of the definition. The word mutter, hence, also shows Kathy's upset mood. Moreover, her general observation that "[e]verything [is] hotting up, going faster and faster" (69-70), gives the account of her fictional world that appears to be at the brink of cataclysm—as the already discussed allusions to possible nuclear war also suggest—and the rate at which the undesired and unexpected events are happening, it denotes the chaos that has already begun to manifest itself in Laing's work. These textual evidences vividly mark Kathy's discontentment. Whereas, what heralds Kathy's going back to the state of contentment is Kathy's self-commitment before sleeping "[a]t 8:30", which asserts that she is "going to love and honour, everywhere, indiscriminately", and that "love" and "honour" are going to be her "watchwords from now on" (70). Kathy's propensity of making up her mind to practice two highly positive human values in the middle of all the chaotic as well as hope draining circumstances and unexpected happenings, and also when "[e]verything [is] hotting up" (69), throws light at her capacity to achieve a positive mental attitude even when she is experiencing emotional disturbance on the very day of her marriage. Moreover, making up such a mindset—that defines "love" and "honour" (70) to be its guiding principles—itself requires first a mindset that, while accepting all the negativity, foregrounds the will to stay positive. It collectively demonstrates that Kathy, after retiring to bed, is feeling positive and that positivity is the sign of her psychologically contented state, which is also revealed when the next morning the text depicts her feeling "more actual, more legitimate", and "all fresh" (70).

The sixth instance illustrates Kathy's drift towards discontentment when the plot states the announcement of "the main news" by "someone" asserting that "Steve Bannon's resigned", and this makes everyone check "their phones" (Laing 69). Now, it is a clichéd fact that smartphones receive notifications, by and large, of what is happening—politically or otherwise—all over the globe due to the incorporation of the internet as one of their core features. According to statistics, more than "50%" of the "internet web traffic is mobile" illustrating that the "online future is largely **mobile**" (Galov). Talking of Kathy's mental/emotional strain, it unfolds itself in her articulation of the uncertainty of the reason "Bannon" has quit, a strain that seems to stem from the very feeling that there are things happening in secret, without public's

knowledge (69). This happening of things in seclusion creates a gap in understanding the way things actually are, which then leads to anxiety. Moreover, Kathy's ironical muttering about this news, regarding it as a "great *wedding* present", also accentuates her discontentment (69; emphasis added). This news, in company with all the other mentioned troubling news/information, press Kathy to form such chaotic and close to catastrophe perception of world where "[e]verything [is] hotting up, going faster and faster" (69-70). Hence, the internet (with all the depressing news/information it uncovers) once more, however, not explicitly this time, presents itself as the reason for Kathy's discontentment and negative outlook of her world.

The seventh instance of oscillation, however, in the obverse order this time, between discontentment and contentment appears when Kathy finds Trump's "picture . . . by the floods" due to "HISTORIC rainfall in Houston and all over Texas"—as reported by Trump's tweet (Laing 88). Kathy's severe scrutiny of Trump's flaunt is carried through her superficial, satiric praise of "Melania['s] . . . serious spike heels" and her "blowdry", which is "flawless" (88). Trump's this "arm and arm" presence with her at the site of crisis implies his cosmetic democratic claims (88). This fact is also reinforced by Kathy's following bitter question: "Was everyone getting more democratic, now things were starting to bite?" (88). My purpose is not to comment on Trump and his democracy, but to foreground Kathy's discontentment. Kathy's grave and bitter ironical question–cum–comment about things "starting to bite" neither portray her in a humorous state nor do they generate laughter (88). Instead, they make one to ponder over the kind of democracy prevailing in America, and even worldwide. The coming of such question–cum–comment from Kathy's side, nonetheless, is a matter of great interest to me, since they project her in a dissatisfied mental state, presenting which is my actual intention here. Kathy's dissatisfaction can also be noticed when she metaphorically provides a glimpse of Trump's democracy through her narration of a "pastor['s]" action—who is the owner of "the megachurch"—during the time of crisis, since right after stating it, she asks the biting question mentioned above (88). In simple words, the "pastor['s]" action of "keeping his church closed" symbolizes the political practice of closing the door of public's own rights and opportunities on public, while the people's frustration "at the doors being locked on a potentially vast public sleeping space" corresponds with Kathy's own disaffection at the church owner's action, which obliquely points at her irritation

for the superficial nature of Trump's administration (88). However, the shift from discontentment to contentment happens when the text mentions Kathy's "some small hopes" (88). Kathy's hopefulness is the consequence of a "local mattress retailer['s]" generosity and humanity; and his act of "open[ing] up his stores to the wet hungry and otherwise dispossessed" as well as "offering free mattresses" can be easily contrasted with the "pastor['s]" inhumane indifference (88). Additionally, this contrast also underscores a positive shift in the protagonist's psychological state, for whom this humane act by "Mattress Matty" is a source of some soothing mental state, though little (88). Again, the movement from contentment to discontentment takes place with Kathy's coming to know of "Stephen Hawking['s] . . . letter to the *Telegraph* explaining that Jeremy Hunt was about to sell off the NHS to private corporations" (88). It is essential to mention at this place that the source of this information is again internet, since "*The Daily Telegraph*" is "known online as *The Telegraph*" ("The Daily Telegraph"). What Kathy thinks and feels after ingesting this piece of information explains vividly her deeply discomforted frame of mind over the selling of the public property as well as the services meant for the people:

> This was beginning to seem like the end game of Brexit, especially after the Japanese non-deal, to get the country into such a dead end, an abject hole that the only thing to do was sell the public silver. If there was any public silver left – yes, Kathy thought, schools, parks, swimming pools, possibly railway tracks, the Royal Mail, definitely the NHS. The gold had gone, also electric power and other utilities, there'd been a series of pieces in the London Review of Books that she'd read carefully but now could barely recall beyond . . . the sense of the ground being parcelled off beneath her. (88-89)

The expressions like "end game" (88), "dead end", "abject hole", and also her "sense of the ground being parceled off beneath her" reflect Kathy's unnerved psychological state, which is further reinforced by her nostalgic feelings of the "past" that is "gone" (89).

In the seventh (also the last) instance, Trump's "arm and arm" picture with Milania plays its part in making Kathy feel upset (Laing 88). The source of this information—picture—is as usual internet, or, more precisely, Twitter. What perturbs Kathy further is a "pastor['s]" action of "keeping his church closed" during the time

of calamity (88). Kathy's emotional disturbance finds its expression in her following grave and bitter ironical question–cum–comment: "Was everyone getting more democratic, now things were starting to bite?" (88). Kathy's such question–cum–remark vividly underscores her disaffection on the kind of democracy prevailing in America under Trump's regime. From this internet induced mental/emotional state of discontentment Kathy swings towards contentment when she comes to know of "Mattress Matty['s]" kind and generous act of humanity as it, contrary to the pastor's apathetic act, renders her a little hope (88). However, Kathy swings back to discontentment—presented through her "sense of the ground being parcelled off beneath her" (89)—when she interacts with "the *Telegraph*" (the online version of *The Daily Telegraph*) that tells her about "Stephen Hawking['s] . . . letter . . . explaining that Jeremy Hunt was about to sell off the NHS to private corporations" (88). Eventually, these news/information force Kathy to perceive the world as this: "The past [is] gone . . . there [are] definitely unpleasant changes up ahead, less money . . . one day for sure no water in the taps. Kathy hope[s] to be dead by then . . ." (89). Thus, internet, coupled with the news/information, and also Kathy's wont of regularly interacting with it become the reasons that cause her to experience discontentment and also to form a viewpoint about world that is full of despair.

Although, all the seven instances employed for the metamodern critique of the text plainly display the involvement of internet, or in other words, Kathy's wont of recurring contact with the news/information via web or social media in her switching—multiple times—from the psychological state of contentment to discontentment, there are some other moments in the text when this fact is clearly confirmed by Kathy. To give an example, Kathy can be noticed contemplating on internet in a manner that not only shows the reason of why the "problem with putting things together" has become worst, but also explains the why of her being often dragged towards discontentment as well as of her desperate worldview (Laing 36). The "problem" has worsened, Kathy finds, as the "blind spot" that previously "had been bigger" has "got very small" currently "because of the internet" (36-37). That is why, in Kathy's opinion, the "atrocities" that—"[t]en years ago, maybe even five"—could possibly be "ignore[d]" and "believe[d]" to have "happened somewhere else, in a different order of reality from your own" were impossible to overlook now, which consequently leads Kathy towards discontentment (36-37). Moreover, the kind of

extremely negative view of world that these distressing news/information (as mentioned in the seven instances) are nurturing in her mind can be well expressed through this line: “You could go on holiday but you knew corpses washed up there, if not now then then, or later” (37).

At another place, the same fact that Kathy’s psychological or emotional movement towards discontentment is caused by her regular absorption of news/information via internet or social media is clearly revealed in the novel. This is how the text states Kathy’s feeling: “If she walked away from her laptop what was there: a garden, birches . . . Walk back, Armageddon” (Laing 48). Keeping in mind Kathy’s habit of “examining the world by way of her scrying glass, Twitter” as well as “stalking the internet”, together with her feeling stated above, it becomes crystal clear that what makes Kathy experience discontentment is her time and again contact with the internet, exposing herself to the distressing news/information (35, 59). Furthermore, taking into account her routine of spending “so much time on the internet”, Kathy’s laptop, itself, looks to be a symbol of a facilitator of Kathy’s customary interaction with the internet, and hence, with the news/information, which results in her hopeless worldview (17).

Additionally, Kathy talks about “some internet-induced desire for destruction” while commenting on “Pepe the alt–right frog” (Laing 76)—“a symbol of the alt-right movement . . . by white supremacists” (“Pepe”). Compellingly, Kathy’s such belief about internet projects it as the actual culprit. It sounds as if she in her mind blames the internet for the devastation devouring and about to devour the world. Specifically, in the light of my argument, I note that the destructive influence of internet with respect to Kathy is already discernible since it both disrupts her mentally/emotionally and fuels her melancholic point of view of world. To back up my claim about Kathy’s periodic contact with the internet for news/information being the reason for her discontentment, I add Kathy’s another candid remark about the internet, according to which, internet “wasn’t the most constructive place to spend time” (Laing 76).

4.3 Conclusion

Overall, throughout Liang’s *Crudo*, there vividly emerge certain elements that seem to be constituting the differing extremes of contentment and discontentment in-

between which Kathy oscillates. She visibly shows signs of deriving the psychological/emotional state of contentment—whether it be her relaxed, joyous mood, or her hope and purpose of life—from her marriage (husband), travelling, and her "cultivated life" (Laing 43). In contrast, the elements that pull Kathy towards the other extreme, i.e. the psychological/emotional state of discontentment, include the internet, which is the source of almost all the upsetting news she receives in the novel, with the addition of her habit of spending "so much time on the internet" (17). Furthermore, this critical analysis has attempted to present through textual evidences that the internet and the frustrating news/information it brings for Kathy make possible the very existence of these psychic polarities, because if the internet is excluded from *Crudo*, Kathy's fictional life will become a flat story. To conclude, this study highlights the internet as the trigger to prompt the protagonist's oscillation—like the metamodern pendulum—between divergent positions and her habitual engagement with the internet as the reason for her pessimistic view of world.

CHAPTER 5

THE PSEUDO-MODERN DIMENSION IN NIKESH SHUKLA'S *MEATSPACE*

5.1 Introduction

With the aim to demonstrate Kitab as the fictional epitome of the representative pseudo-modern emotional condition—the state in which Shukla's protagonist is "swallowed up" or enveloped by his own "activity" of recursive engagement with the internet that provides him with the possibility of "deciding" and creating the information of the imaginative possibilities of another individual's present by taking *"the* [real] *world away*" from him—I follow the similar pattern of quoting instances one by one from the text as done in the analysis of *Crudo* (Kirby, "The Death"). Here, the point of focus, by and large, is the blogposts that are written under the online label/thread of "AZIZWILLKILLYOU" highlighted in the *Meatspace* as "episode[s]" (Shukla).

5.2 Kitab: An Embodiment of the Pseudo-modern Emotional Condition

I would like to begin with a conversation between Kitab and "Rachel" (Kitab's girlfriend who dumps him later) that he recalls when he gets a "Facebook event invite" from her (Shukla). In this conversation, she expresses her hatred to Kitab of how he is "never in the room" with her even when he is "*in* the room" and how he is indifferent to their "conversation" when they are together (Shukla; emphasis added). Kitab responds by stating that he enjoys the "big online conversation" and how "amazing" it is to connect with the "global audience" (Shukla). Interestingly, this conversation illustrates the fact of Kitab's being in that pseudo-modern state of "*trance*" during his "activity" of interacting with the internet or social media that engulfs him in such a way that it sort of obscures the physical world around him, and therefore, spotlighting the online/digital world (Kirby, "The Death").

However, with the episodes/chapters of blogposts in the text, Kitab's representation of pseudo-modern "*trance*" reaches the next level. Before moving

towards the first episode or blogpost, I, quite excitedly, expose that Aziz, Kitab's adventurous brother, is not alive to have and write about the adventures that through Kitab's imagination are made available for the digital world of the web. Although, the novel reveals the fact of Aziz's death—the result of his "accident" with a car—at the end, I disclose it at this point to simultaneously ruin the suspense and bring clarity to the analysis of the selected text (Shukla). Kitab confesses that he "wrote . . . [AZIZWILLKILLYOU] blog, as him . . . imagining who he would now be. What he would look like. What . . . [their] relationship would be" (Shukla). The story "of the missing baby, where super-heroic Aziz chases after a baby in the New York subway" that Kitab uses to develop the tension in the blogposts and as the climax of the overall blog about Aziz's probable adventures of the present is one of "all the stories . . . [they] wrote" (Shukla). These textual evidences vividly underscore the point that Kitab's "activity" of writing that online thread/blog, consisting of a number of blogposts that is also the proof of his repeated interaction with the internet, is putting him in that emotional condition of "*trance*" that is taking "*the* [real] *world away*" from him in a manner that it makes it possible for Kitab to write as Aziz and decide his possible adventurous present (Kirby, "The Death").

Before I start quoting the instances/blogposts, I must also admit that I will mostly be summarizing the blogposts. Nonetheless, I will not do so for the sake of summarizing, but to uncover the extent to which the protagonist's frequent engagement with the internet is relieving him from meatspace—the actual world—permitting him to creatively decide/write the possible present adventure of his late brother "as him" (Shukla).

In the first blogpost, "Aziz vs Tattoos", the reader is introduced with Aziz's new passion of "getting a tattoo", and more specifically, a "bow tie tattoo" (Shukla). Aziz, the narrator of these blogposts, opens the blog "AZIZWILLKILLYOU" with the conversation of the "3 rules that apply to all tattoos" and directs it to his discussion with Kitab about choosing the appropriate "words", until Aziz agrees to have "bow tie" as a tattoo and googles if "anyone has ever had a bow tie tattoo on their neck" (Shukla). The google search leads Aziz and Kitab to a "man who looked remarkably like Aziz" and had a "red bow tie" (Shukla). This "bloody odd" similarity, eventually, makes Aziz finalize his decision of "getting a bow tie tattoo" (Shukla).

In the second blogpost, “Aziz vs Ink”, Aziz informs the reader of how he and Kitab get their tattoos of “bow tie” and “‘Everyday I write the book’” respectively (Shukla). He walks the reader through the entire process: his getting Kitab “proper high so he don’t back out”, his argument with Kitab over why he “wanted to pay with a cheque”, his description of “Sick Charlie’s tattoo parlour” that is “too cool”, his action of drinking “3 bottles of beer” before getting the tattoo job done, his falling “asleep in the chair, his getting up “like a champion”, and his looking like “Teddy Baker”—Aziz’s lookalike from google search (Shukla).

In the third short blogpost, “Aziz vs Teddy”, Aziz announces his adventurous plan of visiting “New York” to “find the man who inspired this image [the particular tattoo that Aziz gets on his neck]” (Shukla). In addition to this, Aziz also mentions his decision to extend his plan to “go find . . . [his] doppelgangers. All of them” (Shukla). He shares the list of questions that “need answering” from Teddy in the same blogpost as well (Shukla).

In the fourth blogpost, “Aziz vs Stalking Prey”, Aziz talks enthusiastically about his only “mission” that is to “meet The Boy with the Bow Tie Tattoo” and about his arrival in New York—a city with “tall buildings, vulnerable girls trying to make it in show business, Spider-man” (Shukla). The blogpost then tells that Aziz is “going to some bar in the East Village at 7 p.m.”, since after checking into Teddy’s Twitter he comes to know that Teddy and another “Twitter user called @justiceforpigs . . . were going to meet up at 7 p.m. at a bar in the East Village” (Shukla).

In the fifth blogpost, “Aziz vs hipster girls in thrift stores”, Aziz gives the details of his preparation for his “spy mission”, that include his buying a “newspaper and cut[ting] 2 holes out of the cover for . . . [his] eyes” and his planning to get a “hat and a raincoat” from a “thrift store” where he is, later, ridiculed for his “British accent” by two girls (Shukla). After that, Aziz, the narrator, lets the online world know of his getting on the “subway”, arriving at the “bar”, noticing the meeting of “@justiceforpigs” and “Teddy Baker”, getting Teddy’s address using the “geo-positioning of his synced Twitter account”, and thinking to see him “tomorrow morning” (Shukla).

In the sixth blogpost, “Aziz vs Prey”, Aziz provides an elaborate description

of his meeting with Teddy, a “freelance graphic designer”, outside his “apartment building” in a “pose: hands on hips, shit-eating grin, sunglasses on” (Shukla). Even Teddy confuses him with some kind of “3-D painting” (Shukla). Teddy invites him on “breakfast” and there Aziz narrates the complete story to him from getting the tattoo to actually finding and meeting him. According to the blogpost, Teddy, before leaving Aziz “stuck with the bill”, asks him to “party” with him the same night at “‘8 o’clock’” at a place that he mentions on a piece of paper, the offer that Aziz accepts immediately (Shukla).

The seventh blogpost, “Aziz vs the Bad Guys” is mainly about “crazy cat” Aziz’s introduction with Bob, Teddy’s friend, and the way it happens (Shukla). Aziz visits Teddy at his place and together they go to a “bar”, the exact location of which Aziz refuses to tell because it is a “secret” (Shukla). However, just to provide “a thereabouts to set the scene”, he gives the readers “Sector 4 of the Brooklyn Quadrant in New York” (Shukla). Teddy and Aziz, blog says, play “darts” till the seemingly fight scene—schemed by Teddy and Bob—happens during which Teddy chokes Aziz using a “pool cue” and Bob pretends to “punch” him, but stops his “fist” at his “solar plexus”, and then both the schemers laugh (Shukla). Afterwards, Aziz and Bob are introduced to each other by Teddy.

In the eighth blogpost, “Aziz vs Guys Who Wanna Change Your Life”, Aziz joins Teddy and Bob—they are “crime-fighters”—in their “fight for justice”, and together they put on “3 long costumes”, which remind Aziz of “comics”, in a “flat” above the bar in which Teddy introduces Aziz to Bob (Shukla). This blogpost also uncovers Teddy’s hybrid origin, since Aziz’s Facebook search of Teddy’s family showed “Rupa” as his mother and “Tim” as his father (Shukla).

In the ninth blogpost, “Aziz vs the bad guys 2: reloaded”, Aziz states that together the three of them “headed out into the night, through the streets of Brooklyn” (Shukla). This blogpost also throws light on Bob’s professional background and how he got his ambition. It claims that “Bob used to be a security guard in a bank”, who “got obsessed with the idea of being a hero”, and no more willing to live an unfruitful life, one day he “called up his old college buddy Teddy Baker and together they decided to put the world to rights by making it a safe, crime-free environment” (Shukla). Next, Aziz narrates the happening of that night, of train coming to a “halt,

just outside the station", people becoming anxious about it, their (the three of them) going to "see the driver", the driver's pulling Aziz in his "cabin", and telling him about the accident—a "mother" jumps in front of the train with "her baby" (Shukla).

The tenth blogpost, "Aziz vs Electricity" is all about the "rescue mission" of the "baby" by Aziz, Teddy and Bob from under the train while keeping themselves safe from "600 volts of electricity" (Shukla). While the crowd is busy "applauding" for the successful rescue of the baby, Aziz notices "a man running down the platform with a gun" (Shukla). Hurriedly, all three jump back inside and start up the train. The blogpost is wrapped up at the point, to keep up the "tension", when the man with the gun begins "shooting at" them (Shukla).

Although the baby is saved from under the train, the "rescue mission" continues in the eleventh blogpost, "Aziz vs Guns". The blogpost mentions more gunshots, Bob's leaving Teddy and Aziz alone in the tense situation, the threat from the man with the gun to kill people in the train "one at a time" until the baby is handed over to him, the "sudden stop" of train on the station, Teddy and Aziz running, and "policemen" chasing them (Shukla). Aziz, by the end of this blogpost, has been "grabbed" by a "police pig" and is confirming if he is being arrested (Shukla).

Aziz and Teddy are taken to the "police station" in "2 separate cop cars" in the twelfth blogpost, "Aziz vs the Po-Po" (Shukla). Though, Aziz has not been "arrested" by the police, he is taken into the "Examination Room 2", where "'Detective Alverton'" interrogates him (Shukla). In response to his interrogation, Aziz starts "at the beginning" (Shukla). He tells Alverton about the "Google image search, the tattoo, the Facebook stalking, the first meeting, meeting Bob"—everything from the start till he is brought to the police station (Shukla).

Alverton shows Aziz the pictures of the "guys" who were "shooting" at him in the "train" and exposes to him the actual case or the baby kidnapping story in the thirteenth blogpost, "Aziz vs Teddy Baker" (Shukla). Next, Alverton tells Aziz that he can "go" and that he can be called "as witnesses when this case goes to trial" (Shukla). After "chatting for an hour" and "swapp[ing] emails", the detective permits him to leave with the instruction of "stay[ing] away from Teddy Baker" without giving him the reason (Shukla). Nevertheless, Aziz, despite of Alverton's instruction,

decides to discover “more” about Teddy (Shukla).

The fourteenth blogpost, “Aziz vs Bob” concludes the “AZIZWILLKILLYOU” blog. This blogpost demonstrates Aziz as getting disappointed by Teddy for being the “most boring anti-awesome person” and for doing nothing during the fight between Bob and him in which he even gets injured (Shukla). This is how Aziz and his “doppelganger” go their separate ways (Shukla). The blogpost ends with Aziz finding a girl using “Blendr” to get “some medical attention urgently” and eventually getting not just the “medical attention” (Shukla).

Keeping in mind the fact of Aziz’s death and Kitab’s writing/“deciding” the blog as Aziz, as has already been stated above in the beginning of this heading, these blogposts become the evidence of Kitab’s “activity” of interacting repeatedly/regularly with the internet (Kirby, “The Death”). Moreover, each of these blogposts becomes the individual instance of Kitab’s getting into that representative pseudo-modern “emotional state” of “*trance*” that “swallows [him] up” in the sense that it removes him from the tangible world, providing him the space and opportunity to imaginatively create/decide the possible adventurous present of Aziz, his late brother (Kirby, “The Death”). What further makes these blogposts as separate instances of Kitab’s being taken in by “*trance*” is the fact that each chapter consisting of these blogposts is separated by other chapters that present Kitab as doing a number of other activities, to briefly put, from “shaving” to having “dinner” with his father; from “making breakfast” to getting “‘Everyday I write the book’” tattooed on his arm; from meeting “Mitch”, who is “always at the same pub every night”, to “doing . . . book reading”; from meeting his “namesake” and “doppelganger” in the “meatspace” and understanding what he is doing in London to allowing his replica to “stay” at his flat for “one night only”; from “pay[ing] a surprise visit to Dad in . . . [his] childhood home” to going to “Queen Mary University” to “see if . . . [he] can get . . . [his duplicate] some accommodation for the rest of the week”; from finding a girl “reading” his novel in the train to letting “Kitab 2” sign his book for “the girl from the train” in his place; from walking “along the canal” to “having breakfast with Hayley” (she is another author) at his “local organic café”; from sharing intimate moments with Hayley to going to see his lookalike after he is admitted to a “hospital” as the “victim of a brutal beating”; from taking the “drunk” Hayley to his “home” to changing his “online passwords”; from chasing his duplicate to “Wilmington House”

and dealing with his lookalike's obsession for fornication, to all his struggle to get his cellphone and "wallet" back from "Kitab 2" and persuading his replica to "stop messing with . . . [his] life" as well as to go back to "Bangalore" and "be with . . . [his] dad"; from facing his dad, Rach, and Hayley in order to finally confront the truth that "'Aziz is dead" to "build[ing] a routine" to be more in the "meatspace" and seeing his "Dad regularly" (Shukla). It is equally important to note that the space which the pseudo-modern "*trance*" is providing Kitab in the novel by taking "*the* [real] *world away*" from him due to his repeated engagement with the internet is really required by him in order to imagine and write/decide the whole story of Aziz's possible adventure that he might have in his present with all the details that are creatively painted in the fourteen blogposts/instances (Kirby, "The Death").

5.3 Conclusion

This analysis is the critical examination of Nikesh Shukla's novel, *Meatspace*, from the perspective of the idea of the "typical [pseudo-modern] emotional state" as put forth by Alan Kirby in his theory of Pseudo-modernism ("The Death"). This critical study attempts to present Kitab Balasubramanyam, Shukla's protagonist, as the exemplar of the pseudo-modern "*trance*" that, according to Kirby, is the "state of being swallowed up by . . . [one's] activity" in the sense that it "*takes the* [real] *world away*" in the manner that one is "engulfed, deciding" ("The Death"). The inquiry, to wind up, illustrates that the "activity" that is "swallow[ing] up" Kitab is his periodic interaction with the internet with the purpose of writing the blogposts, and what this particular action is doing is that it is putting him in that state of "*trance*" that removes him from the physical world—the world in which his brother is dead—and provides him the space in which the protagonist is imaginatively "deciding" the most likely present personality of Aziz, his brother, and the possible adventures that he might have "as him" (Kirby, "The Death"; Shukla).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The significance of the internet and social media in contemporary times is an undeniable fact. The human mundane, for the most part, is incomplete without the interaction with cyberspace. Internet browsing as well as social media surfing has become all but indispensable. If the online world is a medium for developing and maintaining the social associations, it is also the storage house and the provider of data and information in abundance. For most of the people, worldwide, the day opens with their contact with some kind of information or news, formal or casual, which is carried to them through the net. The present study also revolves around the internet and social media, in short, the cyberspace. It studies the internet in terms of its psychological impact on an individual, and also in terms of the representative emotional state in the digital era.

Keeping in consideration the aims, this critical investigation, firstly, investigates how the excessive interaction with the internet or social media for the reception of news/information brings about instability in an individual's life. Talking specifically about the pattern of instability, it is like a constant to and fro motion between differing positions. To avoid any ambiguity, it is important to note that this investigation observes the unfixity merely with reference to the psychic patterns. Secondly, it attempts to concentrate on how the excessive engagement of an individual with the internet induces an emotional state that takes that person in, thus, taking the real world away from him. Additionally, it focuses on how that certain state, after engulfing the individual, allows him to decide things creatively in the online realm of the cyberspace. With these objectives, the thesis examines two contemporary literary works, *Crudo* by Olivia Liang, and *Meatspace* by Nikesh Shukla, respectively.

In order to separately explore the two selected novels, the current examination uses the conceptualizations advanced by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, and by Alan Kirby as its conceptual framework. Vermeulen and Akker are renowned for their theorization of what they call metamodernism, while Kirby is acclaimed for the theory, which he proposed, known as pseudo-modernism. Speaking

of metamodernism ontologically, Vermeulen and Akker in their theoretical essay, "Notes on metamodernism", write that it "oscillates between the modern and the postmodern", and that this oscillation is not characterized by "a balance", rather, by a "pendulum swinging" between "innumerable", but conflicting extremes ("Notes" 5677). They pinpoint the continuous tension that lies between these opposing poles. Whenever the metamodern pendulum tries to reach one extreme radically, the opposite extreme gravitates it back, and this process ceaselessly goes on and on. Moreover, while periodizing the advent of metamodernism in the chapter, "Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism", in the book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*, the two theorists refer to the extensive presence of the internet and social media in society as well as mention the internet "as a means to . . . cultivate . . . frustrations" (Akker, et al.). This critical study combines the two points, i.e. the metamodern pendular oscillation between divergent positions and the pervasiveness of internet and social media for the examination of *Crudo*. This combination allows me to study the oscillation of Kathy, the protagonist, between the conflicting psychic extremes, resembling the metamodern oscillation. Besides this, it permits me to explore the part played by the frequent interaction of Kathy with the internet or social media for news or information not only in the constitution of these extremes, but also in prompting the oscillation between them. In addition, taking internet as the source of cultivating frustrations raises another concern, that is, of what sort of worldview this interaction with the internet creates in the life of the protagonist.

Alan Kirby's theory identifies the internet as the pivotal component of the pseudo-modern phenomenon. He puts forward in his article, "The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond", that the "pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon *par excellence* is the internet" ("The Death"). In the same critical work, Kirby brings in the discussion of the representative pseudo-modern emotional state. Putting that particular emotional state in words, he articulates that it is that of the "*trance*–the state of [one] being swallowed up by . . . [one's] activity"; and further expresses that this emotional condition "*takes the* [real] *world away*" ("The Death"). In Kirby's opinion, in this certain state one is "engulfed, deciding" ("The Death"). As in the case of metamodernism, the current research collectively uses Kirby's theoretical postulations about the internet and the representative pseudo-modern emotional state for the

critical investigation of *Meatspace*. This blend provides me the opportunity to illustrate how Kitab's (the protagonist) own doing of time after time engagement with the internet or the cyberspace is engulfing him, and therefore, relieving him from the actual, physical world, making it possible for him to decide the probable present adventures of his late brother, Aziz, using the power of his imagination in the novel.

Together with the previously explained conceptual framework, this critical inquiry employs the textual analysis technique to find the appropriate answers of the posed research questions. In response to the research questions concerning Laing's *Crudo*, the critical analysis finds some specific elements that appear to be formulating the opposing poles of contentment and discontentment in the text. The seven instances quoted from the novel show that Kathy oscillates between these contradictory psychic positions in a manner that bears resemblance to the metamodern pendulum, i.e. when she inclines towards contentment, discontentment pulls her towards itself, and when she shifts towards the discontented state of mind, contentment gravitates her back towards itself. It is very important to note here that according to the expectations set before the analysis of Laing's book, I believed that both positions, i.e. contentment and discontentment, will be formed by Kathy's engagement with the internet or social media. But, the critical analysis of the text demonstrates that the specific elements that look to be constituting the psychic polarities belong to both the offline and the online worlds. It is not wrong to state that it in itself constructs another polarity. Kathy clearly demonstrates signs of extracting her contentment from her marriage (husband), friends, travelling, and her "cultivated life" (Laing 43). On the contrary, what formulates the psychic extreme of discontentment is Kathy's habitual interaction with the internet, which is the means of nearly all the disturbing news. Therefore, this particular finding differs slightly from what was expected. Nevertheless, it is also absolutely necessary to acknowledge, as is also proved through the analysis, that the internet and the frustrating news/information it brings is crucial for the very presence of the conflicting extremes, because, supposedly, if the internet is absent from the book, Kathy's fictional life will be devoid of the oscillation that the present inquiry highlights. This research, in the light of the analysis of *Crudo*, demonstrates that it is inevitable to oscillate between the offline and the online worlds in the contemporary times. Moreover, another interesting finding that the analysis foregrounds is that the

internet, by bringing her the upsetting news/information, also becomes the reason for her negative or hopeless view of the world.

The findings that are laid bare by the textual analysis of the *Meatspace* are, however, in parallel with the expectation that were set before the critical examination of the text. The evidence from the text illustrates that the "activity" that swallows up Shukla's protagonist, Kitab, is his repeated engagement with the internet or the cyberspace for writing the blogposts, and the emotional state in which this process of "being swallowed up" takes place is that of "*trance*"—the representative emotional state of the pseudo-modern world (Kirby, "The Death"). In the light of the analysis, what this emotional state is doing is that it is taking the real world—the world represented through Rach, Hayley, and Kitab's father, reminding Kitab of the reality that "Aziz is dead"—away from the protagonist in a manner that makes it possible for him to creatively decide the most likely present adventures and personality of his late brother, Aziz, "as him" in the blogposts that he authors in the novel (Shukla). Through the analysis of *Meatspace*, this critical examination highlights that it is impossible for an individual—as the result of his/her frequent engagement with the internet—to escape the pseudo-modern emotional state of trance, which makes a person forget his/her surroundings by taking him/her away from the real world, and thus, permits him/her to decide the imaginative possibilities.

What brings *Crudo* and *Meatspace* on the same page is the fact that they highlight the issue of the psychological/emotional state of an individual in the age of internet, although differently. In the light of my critical examination, Kathy (the protagonist of *Crudo*) oscillates between the opposing poles, which are psychological in nature, every time she interacts with the internet or social media through which she receives different news/information—mostly negative, while Kitab (the protagonist of *Meatspace*), due to his frequent engagement with the internet, finds himself in the typical pseudo-modern emotional state of trance under the spell of which he is removed from the meatspace and enters the cyberspace where he writes those blogs about the possible adventures of his late brother, Aziz. To simply put, my critical study spotlights two individuals living in the age of internet and how their excessive engagement with the internet is effecting their mental/emotional states.

In order to conclude the conclusion of my thesis, I would like to state some suggestions for the future research. My thesis tries to spotlight the polarities the constituents of which are from both the on-screen (in the context of internet and social media) and the off-screen spaces. The future research can aim to spot the conflicting extremes that are formed only by the internet or the online world, and can then study the oscillation between them. Furthermore, I focus on the opposing poles that are psychic in their nature. The further studies can investigate the oscillation between the polarities that are of social and political nature. This critical inquiry examines an individual's oscillation between differing psychic positions, triggered by her excessive interaction with the internet. The upcoming investigations can expand the extent of the research by examining the oscillation of a group of people, within a family or society, between divergent extremes, psychic, social or political. In addition to this, the later research can also concentrate on the role of online video games and simulations in constructing the polarities, together with the exploration of oscillation between those polarities. Also, this thesis explores the "typical [pseudo-modern] emotional state" and how it "*takes the* [real] *world away*" with reference to an individual. However, the future examination can study the real life impacts of this representative emotional condition on an individual, and can even extend the ambit of study by stretching the research beyond the level of an individual (Kirby, "The Death").

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