



# ABSTRACTION

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MAP OF THE PROBLEMATIQUE

\*WHITE PAPER\* Draft V 1.0

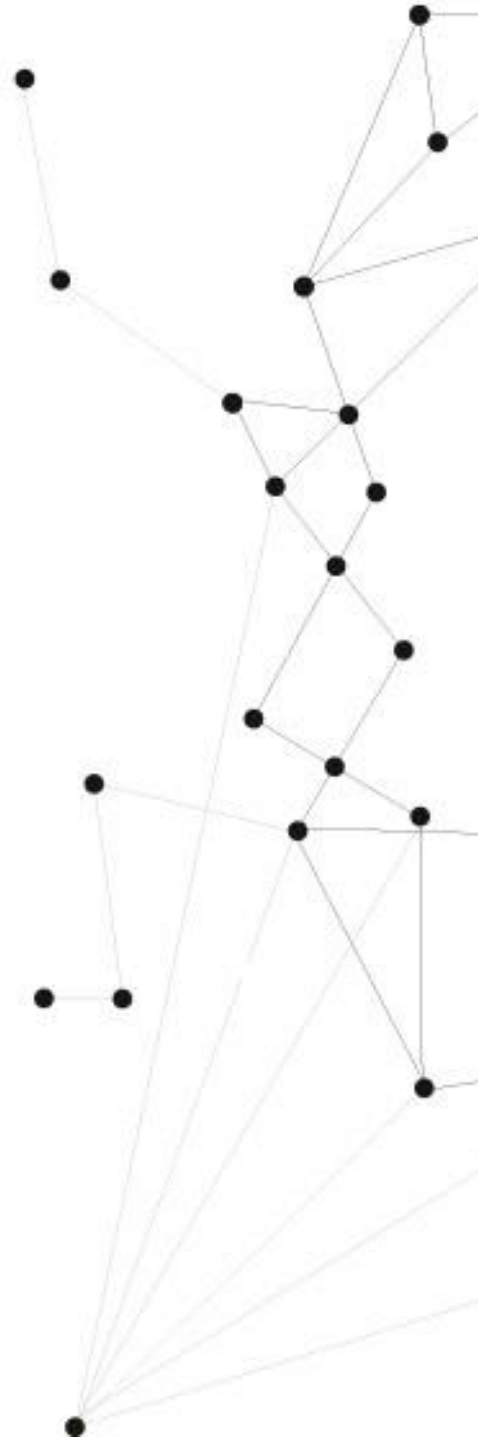
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THE ABS-TRACT ORGANIZATION

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# ABSTRACT

The Abs-Tract Organization (TATO) identifies the meta- problem as how all-important abstract (systemic) issues, such as climate change and war, become obfuscated and mystified through market forces and manufactured ignorance, creating negative externalities negative feedback loops that perpetuate conflict. This white paper attempts to map the meta-problem of society to demonstrate "abstraction" as the basis for the proposed meta- think tank and subsequent system-wide knowledge and policy intervention to directly address the meta-crisis. "Abstraction" writ large is proposed as a knowledge representation (KR) framework, with novel expression under metamodernism - an emergent paradigm suggestive of universal social philosophy. Abstraction also a multivariate thought process, social process, and critique of society and its conceptual objects. A sampling of abstract tools introduces the tree of Knowledge (ToK) System, the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom (DIKW) Pyramid, 'abductive logic programming' (ALP), critical discourse analysis' (CDA), 'root cause analysis' (RCA), immanent critique, and world disclosure, among other methodologies. "Vicious" (false) abstraction, on the other hand, is the errant translation of knowledge, leading to unjust or 'vicious' outcomes, the systematic habits of which are correlated with anti-intellectualism and endarkenment. Global capitalism is an 'abstract empire' that the 'open society' seeks to remedy, but falls short due to fallibility and compromising trade-offs. Global civil society and alter-globalization are emergent movements to establish social and political equilibrium, which TATO seeks to anchor in an abstract or "pure sociology" as a critical pedagogy and public policy platform, communicated through a public sociology that bridges critical theory with common sense to foster a 'critical mass society.'



# PREFACE

**The Abs-Tract Organization** ("TATO") is a nascent non-profit think tank for absolute social philosophy and global civil society, committed to definitively solving the world's systemic social problems through a high-level framework of "abstraction." TATO seeks capital to cover start-up logistics and basic operating costs. This includes setting up its legal structure, establishing its research programme and academic partners, initiating an outreach campaign, and developing a long term sustainability strategy while securing public and philanthropic support.

TATO's essential value proposition is found in the concept and special applications of "abstraction," a manifold term differentiated across and within many fields, including math, computer science, linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, and social theory. Such a vast methodological synthesis is resistant to summary, and is detailed within this Business Plan. Abstraction is generally defined as a conceptual process of complexity reduction that highlights the essential properties or first principles of a given object or idea. Given the wide range of expressions, from a shorthand for critical thinking to an integral process of knowledge production, the utility of abstraction cannot be understated. However, as the term 'abstract' is highly equivocal, TATO provides the necessary depth and insight to make abstraction more accessible and relevant to the public and specialists alike.

Our broad mission is to establish a new consensus of superordinate knowledge to streamline and pacify globalization. TATO emphasizes the urgency and opportunity to 'abstract' a unified social critique in the context of the emergent paradigm of "metamodernism," as a new cultural, political, scientific, and social movement representing a post-ideological, open source, globally responsive, paradox resolving, grand narrative. In this context, abstraction comes to refer to the cumulative pursuit of higher-order self-evident logic that transcends contradictory discourses and dissolves ideological conflict. Our process involves the depoliticization, demystification, and distillation of truth in order to directly confront the multifarious epistemic crises at present. A new enlightenment is already underway and is limited only by the persistence of detractors bounded by the constructed opportunism of the system.

The central problem is how all-important abstract (systemic) issues such as climate change and institutional racism become obfuscated and marginalized through market forces and cognitive biases, in turn producing self-defeating abstract wars of attrition against populations and the environment. This status-quo is exacerbated by our constant crisis of epistemic authority, where public trust is eroded, the mainstream media is corrupt and misinformative, and knowledge is instrumentalized at the expense of truth. The problem is in fact overdetermined by a nexus of causal factors. In response, we seek to simplify the meta- crises in order to maximize the signal-to-noise ratio in civil discourse to correct these aberrations at the root level.

# ABSTRACTION: Map of the Problematique

1.0 Introduction .....	5
1.1 Metamodernism .....	6
1.2 Abstraction .....	8
1.3 The Reproach of Abstraction .....	12
1.4 The Abstract Society .....	13
1.5 Vicious Abstraction .....	15
1.6 Abstract Empire vs. Open Society vs. The Open Conspiracy .....	17
1.7 Abstract Sociology .....	19
1.8 Public Sociology .....	20
1.9 Critical Mass Society .....	22
2.0 The Quantum Turn in Social Science .....	22
2.1 Conclusion .....	25
APPENDIX I .....	26
APPENDIX II .....	27
APPENDIX III .....	28
Selective Bibliography .....	30



# 1.0 Introduction

As the namesake of this organization and cornerstone of TATO's research agenda, "abstraction" warrants a detailed exposition and validation. First of all, TATO splits 'abstract' into a pun - Abs-Tract - to draw attention to the multiplicity of the word. The separation of the etymological roots reveals the literal meaning: *ab-* (away, from) and *tract* (draw off). Together, *abstract* means 'to draw away,' which is suggestive of two meanings: 'to withdraw' and 'to write.' These are the primeval origins of philosophy. Second, abs-tract is intended to be suggestive of a breakthrough in meta-philosophy, enabled by metamodernism. Just as splitting and fusion of atoms unleash torrents of power, so can the deconstruction and reconstruction of the word.

The challenge of this white paper is not merely to define abstraction, but to abstract a deeper narrative and tie together disparate instances of a universal concept, as a 'proof of concept' to consolidate the complexity of social problems into simple workable truths. The fundamental confusion may stem from the fact that abstraction is both a thinking process and a social process unto itself, but it is the intent of this whitepaper to resolve such apparent inconsistencies. To TATO, the general problem and general solution are both abstract. The general social crisis is abstract in that the roots become politicized, masked, hidden, obscured, and mystified (eg. war on drugs, pollution). The general solution is abstract in that objective analysis and problem solving depend on higher-order thinking and a conceptual framework. External abstraction makes the world and its social problems seem monolithic, while mental abstraction segments and organizes knowledge. It would seem then a tautology that 'abstraction can solve abstraction,' but it is meta-solution to the meta-problem. TATO has no illusions about abstraction being a simple fix or panacea for the crisis in which we find ourselves, however it is the key to definitively resolving conflicts at the semantic level, to 'unblock' collective action for common good on the global scale.

The subtitle of this paper is 'map of the problematique.\*' In a 2016 talk at the European Graduate School, Benjamin Bratton of the Center for Design and Geopolitics, referred to abstraction as a function of intelligence for an organism to "map its own surroundings," particularly with respect to food, friend, or foe. The formalizing of modes of reasoning is but a projection of this "primordial abstraction." As we evolve more complex forms of intelligence, 'abstraction as mapping' is the general principle of that complexification.[[source](#)]. The context of Bratton's talk was the intersection of design, philosophy, and AI, which is the essential aesthetic of TATO. An even more direct precedent for TATO to form can be found in Bratton's book *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, which he concludes is not a manifesto or manual, but rather, "a design brief that invites others to collaborate on the articulation and realization of the renewed modernity described here, with all their deliberate commitment and expert **abstraction**." Thus, the specificity of TATO's abstraction is highly integral to a wider project to map knowledge and social systems. The term 'problematique' comes from a Club of Rome (1970) report titled *The Predicament of Mankind: Quest for Structured Responses to Growing World-wide Complexities and Uncertainties*. "It is this generalized meta-problem (or meta-system of problems) which we have called and shall continue to call the "problematique" that inheres in our situation," the authors write. The meta-problem is reduced to 49 "Continuous Critical Problems" facing humankind, which have compounding effects and create new problems requiring broader scope solutions. These meta-problems are abstract, chief among being over-population, which acts as a force multiplier of social problems; (see Appendix for full list).

TATO seeks to map the meta-problem, starting with this survey of an abstract problematique. This white paper attempts to validate a system-wide knowledge and policy intervention to directly address the meta-crisis, to prevent many problems from being produced in the first place, and free up wasted system resources. Before an abstract exegesis can begin, the new epistemological context of metamodernity must be (re-)introduced.

# 1.1 Metamodernism

"Metamodernism is variously called a cultural paradigm, a cultural philosophy, a structure of feeling, and a system of logic. All these phrases really mean is that, like its predecessor's modernism and postmodernism, metamodernism is a particular lens for thinking about the self, language, culture, and meaning — really, about everything." - Seth Abramson, Attorney; Assistant Professor at University of New Hampshire [\[Source\]](#). Abramson outlines 15 principles to clarify and distinguish it from postmodernism. See Appendix for a summary:

1. Negotiation between modernism and postmodernism.
2. Dialogue over dialectics.
3. Paradox transcendence.
4. Juxtaposition.
5. The collapse of distances.
6. Multiple subjectivities.
7. Collaboration.
8. Simultaneity and generative ambiguity.
9. A cautiously optimistic response to metanarratives.
10. Interdisciplinarity.
11. Reconstruction instead of deconstruction.
12. Engagement instead of exhibitionism.
13. Effect as well as affect.
14. Walllessness and borderlessness.
15. Flexible intertextuality.

The concept of metamodernism has achieved a great deal of exposure and legitimacy academically, but it is still a niche movement. Details will continue to unfold as the paradigm refines itself. Although Abramson's principles do not explicitly factor in the concept of abstraction, he does at one point mention that "the idea that metamodernism eliminates the walls and boundaries between literal and **abstract** structures is an important one to the paradigm."[\[Source\]](#) Abstraction is a concept independent of any paradigm or era, but metamodernism provides a new context and new tools to enable abstraction by an order of magnitude. The first use of metamodernism dates back to the 1970s, and as of 2011, two young philosophers have reinvigorated the concept (Vermeulen and van den Akker). As of late 2016, the emergent progressive social movement behind Bernie Sanders - arguably a metamodern expression - was suppressed by the bipolar two-party system in the US presidential election, resulting in the election of the nightmarish-cartoonish wildcard Donald Trump. This scenario was perfectly anticipated, in abstract terms, in Rolling Stone as of 2013.

"This latest episode in the endless Republican reality show is not chiefly about the incompetence and incessant squabbling of ideologues and petty politicians, although it's that, too. Nor is it the outcome of the intense partisan polarization that has thrown Washington into gridlock, as if the problem is **abstract** partisanship itself, with Democrats and Republicans equally at fault. Least of all is it about rescuing the economy from the Democrats' profligate deficit spending, as Republicans claim – not with the deficit shrinking to its lowest level since the financial disaster of 2008 and with the outlook improving. This crisis is about nothing other than the Republican Party – its radicalization, its stunning lack of leadership and its disregard for the Constitution." [\[Source\]](#), Republican Extremism and the Lessons of History, Rolling Stone, Oct 2013.

The polarization of elites and masses is at a new breaking point, and metamodernism is the peaceful release of tension compelled by a broad consensus on truth, and to overturn the status-quo that is blocking that truth.

While the inconclusive character of postmodernism was figuratively a 'work-in-progress', metamodernism is explicitly working on 'progress,' pledged to the reconstruction of society. In policy terms, metamodernism necessarily represents simply what 'needs to be done' to solve the global crisis: social transformation to a permaculture ecology, a steady state economy, and the empowerment of secular humanist global civil society. The definitive policy objectives include: clean energy, demilitarization, universal basic income, universal health care/ drug legalization, universal education, human rights, and so on... TATO's abstract objective is thus to normalize functional socialism, not to mention put war out of business. The great irony is 'why haven't we done it yet?' Here is what it would look like, according to [Metamoderna.org](http://Metamoderna.org):

"A metamodern society is one where the problems of modernity have been solved: a society where we are no longer alienated, that no longer has excessive inequalities, and is ecologically sustainable. The metamodern society is possible to achieve; it constitutes a higher stage of development of society. But it is no utopia in the sense that no problems are present. As humanity approaches this developmental stage, new problems emerge, many of which are yet to be known." [[Metamoderna.org](http://Metamoderna.org)]

What makes abstraction particularly possible and useful now, as opposed to 20 years ago, is metamodernism (prescience) and the emergence of big data (omniscience). Social enterprise must now reclaim its own data from 'commercial sociology' (ie. Facebook), and steer away from predictive models of reality, to prescriptive and normative models. TATO does not ask 'who will win [the presidency],' but 'who should win?'; Who is the right figurehead and leader for optimal social and political justice? How can the public be better informed? Etc... The premise of Artificial Intelligence is also entirely dependent on abstraction. Thus, it is very crucial to have a meta- think tank organization dedicated to the abstraction as a science, that is also concerned with superordinate issues. We have the tools to reconstruct the world from the fragments of postmodernism, but in order to do so we must be able to resolve social issues conclusively at the discursive level. However, big data has been tried up in "commercial sociology," which is instrumental rather than critical. Abstraction is proposed as a metamodern epistemology, a way of knowing and conceptualizing of universal truth with social justice.

"[we] have identified a very promising niche in trying to position metamodernities as a post- poststructuralist state, in that the major issue with poststructural approaches is that they fall into what I refer to as the 'Derrida Trap' - that is, that deconstruction on its own is necessarily a pointless task. Unless you re-assemble whatever you have deconstructed into a 'better' version, then it leads you to nowhere except mindless relativism. This means that most poststructural approaches to real-world problems never seem to offer any form of practical solution - the simple example of that being in terms of urban planning. Post-structuralists have long lambasted the work of Le Corbusier, the 'broken windows' theory, and the Chicago School, among others, for being based upon a series of assumptions and uneven power structures that commit all manner of sins - but crucially, after all these critiques, there are very few practical alternatives to urban planning suggested by poststructuralists. They have done half a job in many ways - deconstructed the problematic assumptions of modernism, but offered no practical alternative. So in that sense there is a promising vein of thought that sets out where the think tank is in intellectual terms." - Adrian Smith, TATO analyst.



## 1.2 Abstraction

At the most general level, abstraction is about thinking. The importance of thinking should be self-evident. The fact that it is not is due to a breakdown in our usage of concepts. We must rehabilitate abstraction from the ground up, starting with a basic definition;

"Abstraction, the cognitive process of isolating, or “abstracting,” a common feature or relationship observed in a number of things, or the product of such a process. The property of electrical conductivity, for example, is abstracted from observations of bodies that allow electricity to flow through them; similarly, observations of pairs of lines in which one line is longer than the other can yield the relation of “being longer than.”

What is abstracted—i.e., the abstraction or abstractum—is sometimes taken to be a concept (or “abstract idea”) rather than a property or relation. Which view is taken on this issue depends in part on the view one holds on the general issue of universals (entities used to explain what it is for individual things to share a feature, attribute, or quality or to fall under the same type or natural kind)."  
[\[Britannica\]](#)

"Abstraction in its main sense is a conceptual process by which general rules and concepts are derived from the usage and classification of specific examples, literal ("real" or "concrete") signifiers, first principles, or other methods. "An abstraction" is the product of this process — a concept that acts as a super-categorical noun for all subordinate concepts, and connects any related concepts as a group, field, or category. Conceptual abstractions may be formed by filtering the information content of a concept or an observable phenomenon, selecting only the aspects which are relevant for a particular purpose. For example, abstracting a leather soccer ball to the more general idea of a ball selects only the information on general ball attributes and behavior, eliminating the other characteristics of that particular ball. In a type–token distinction, a type (e.g., a 'ball') is more abstract than its tokens (e.g., 'that leather soccer ball')." [\[Wikipedia\]](#)

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a visualization is worth several orders of magnitude more than a linear description. Below (Figure. 1) are two basic models of the hierarchical and/or nested nature of abstraction. An abstraction ladder is a common metaphor to delineate levels of analysis, providing a step-by-step process of distancing ideas and objects, or the abstract from the concrete. Bessie the cow is a typically banal example, but if it is framed in terms of cows and climate change, it would be relevant.



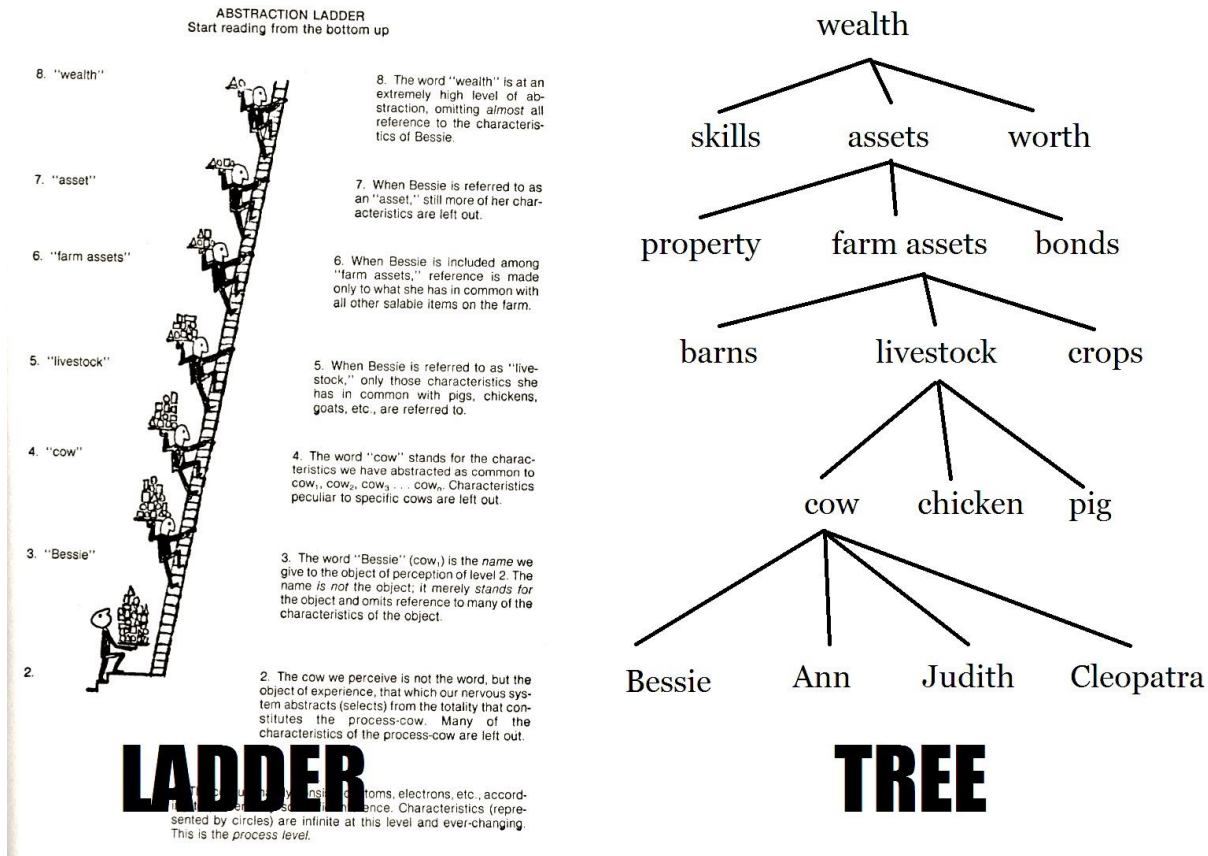


Figure. 1

A better example still is the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System (Figure. 2), depicting a nested hierarchy of abstraction that holistically integrates knowledge across dimensions. ToK is a theoretical unification of psychology, developed by Gregg Henriques, associate professor at James Madison University. The ToK is similar to E.O. Wilson's concept of 'consilience'; agreement between the approaches to a topic of different academic subjects, especially science and the humanities. The Official Website on the Tree of Knowledge System claims that the ToK is;

*"...a new unified theory of knowledge that maps the pieces of the scientific puzzle in a novel way that connects Quantum Mechanics to Sociological processes and everything in between into a coherent whole. The most novel aspect of the ToK is its visuo-spatial depiction of knowledge as consisting of four dimensions of complexity (Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture) that correspond to the behavior of four classes of objects (material objects, organisms, animals, and humans), and four classes of science (physical, biological, psychological, and social)."* ([source](#))

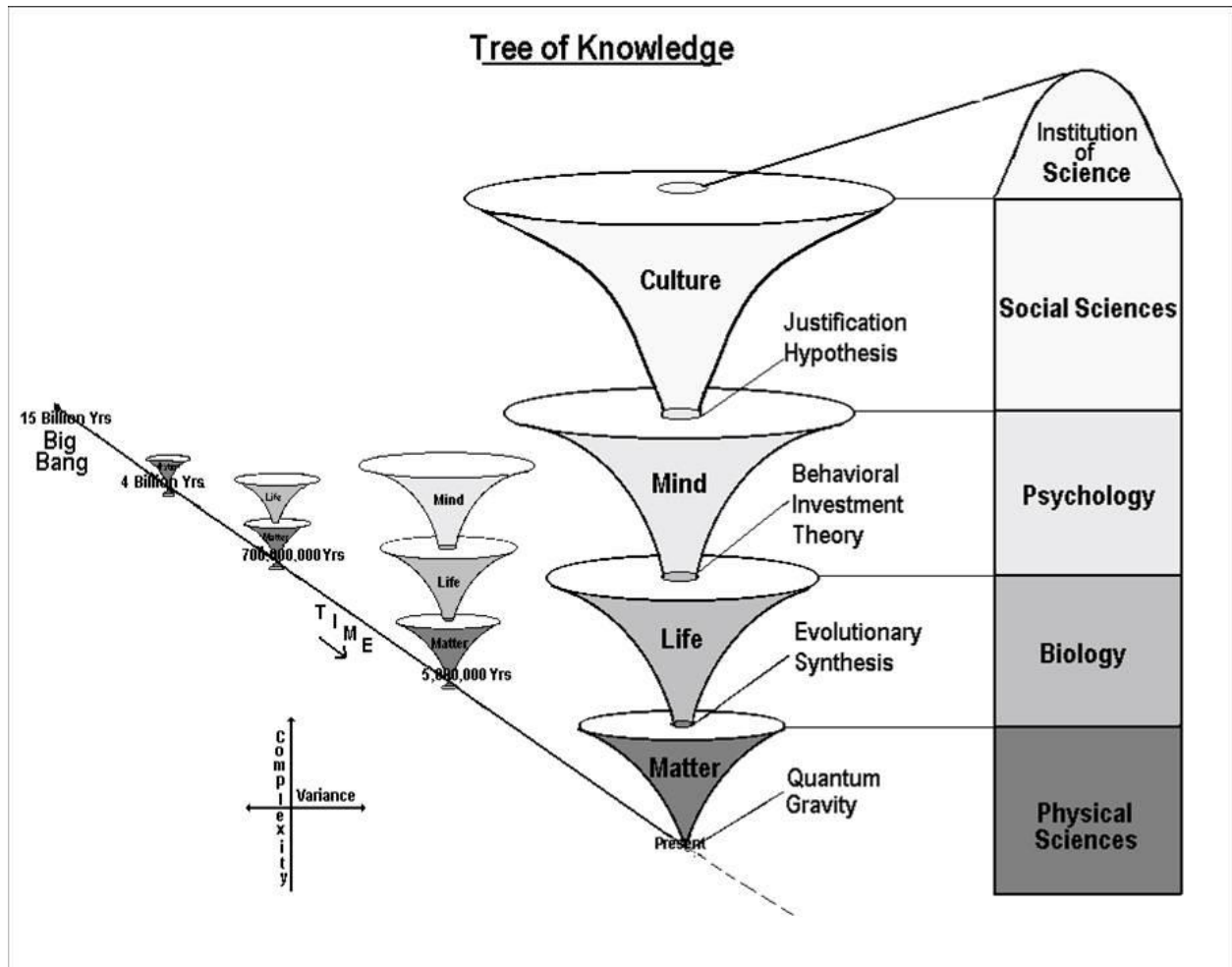


Figure. 2

A third abstract depiction of information ordering is the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom (DIKW) Pyramid. The original DIKW Pyramid is not perfect, as critiqued here in the Harvard Business Review [source], however it is little more than a 'reproach' for leaving out some necessarily details, such as the question of 'what is knowledge?' or how that layer interacts. This particular version (Figure. 3) integrates the dimensions of context and understanding, which converge on wisdom.



Figure. 3

The academic abstract is a vital concept, that condenses complex knowledge while retaining information integrity and consistency. The academic abstract is generally defined as "...a brief summary of a research article, thesis, review, conference proceeding or any in-depth analysis of a particular subject and is often used to help the reader quickly ascertain the paper's purpose." [Source] Consideration of large volumes of abstracts is the basis of qualitative meta-analyses. It is also useful in the general sense of any summary or statement that encodes nested information. As such, flash cards are one of the most effective learning aids.

TATO employs many other conceptual byproducts of (thinking) abstraction. A basic concept is a heuristic; a method of problem solving that enables self-learning and discovery, or a set of automatic rules or commands that guide decision making. Common examples include a 'rule of thumb, an educated guess, an intuitive judgment, stereotyping, profiling, or common sense.' A heuristic is a good starting point for more rigorous abstractions to model ideas, society, and ethical decision frameworks, and critical thinking heuristics especially can play a greater role in universal education. Several deeper concepts will only be noted in passing here, for the sake of brevity. 'Critical discourse analysis' (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on the performativity of language and speech acts, to examine the power relations involved in discourse. 'Root cause analysis' (RCA), a problem solving technique to end undesirable patterns by identifying and intervening at the source event. The concept of 'immanent critique' is a dialectic method for locating contradictions in rules of

society and social systems. Immanent critique questions not only the context of its investigations, but also the ideological basis of the objects in question, which are socially constructed products of history, and is rooted in Hegel and Marx, and on through critical theory. A geometry between concepts begins to emerge that creates the intellectual space for meta- problem solving. The concept of 'world disclosure' refers to how individuals experience and interpret the world as it is presented to them. It is considered a 'pre-interpreted and holistically structured background of meaning' disclosed through day-to-day interactions. TATO proposes that the term also includes 'disclosure *about* the world' through universal education and immanent critique, particularly in the ideal conceptual products of "prime knowledge" and a "core philosophy," as per TATO's vision. Going deeper, 'abductive logic programming' (ALP) is a high-level knowledge representation (KR) framework that can be used to solve problems declaratively through abductive reasoning, or inference to the best explanation. ALP is a point of entry into computer programming, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, where abstraction is a foremost concept, instrumental in the development and training of chatbots and other intelligent knowledge interface systems. The emergence of benevolent AI hinges solely on our collective ability to program (teach) it humanity. In order to do that, we also need to also teach ourselves. From the depths of code back to basic practicality, the insight is abstraction is expressed by a student, quoted on the White House blog:

"In AP Computer Science Principles, I learned the importance of "**abstraction**", meaning to break a challenge into manageable pieces, and have applied this concept into various aspects of my studies and my life outside of the classroom." - Adrian Avalos, from National City, California, [[Source](#): the White House blog]

TATO follows through on countless more abstractions to a *reductio ad absurdum*, or 'reduction to the absurd,' which is a method to prove a statement true by showing the absurdity of its denial. For example, war is absurd, yet it cannot be disproven or stopped but by the careful and patient definition of its futility and 'mutually assured destruction.' Slavery, segregation, prohibition, fascism, genocide - these core pathologies should be denied on the face of it, yet they become organizing principles themselves and the social organism eats away at itself for the enrichment of a privileged class. All of these abstract insights beg the question of whether 'more research is needed,' as is often explicit in the conclusion of any given paper, or if enough is enough. On many issues, notwithstanding the present research agenda, TATO concludes that more research is *not* needed, and rather, debate closure should be pursued. In other words, it is a not question of lack of knowledge, but rather of epistemology and the means to actualize emancipatory knowledge. Much more could be said in simply defining abstraction, but this paper does not have the space to dwell on its many variations. From basic ladders, trees, and pyramids, to blueprints, schematics, and worldviews; from simple math to quantum physics to AI, abstraction is the quintessential concept. Perhaps this is why, as David Bromwich observed, "[Henry Hazlitt] was able to view **abstraction** as a necessary stage in every inquiry, because he read the word etymologically, as the detachment or drawing away of one quality from a mass of others, for the sake of a certain emphasis and result." [[Source](#)] The remaining sections mainly attends to the relation to philosophy and sociology, and for the purposes of TATO.

## 1.3 The Reproach of Abstraction

In *The Reproach of Abstraction* (2004) Peter Osborne addresses the tension between idealism and realism, to defend philosophical abstraction from skepticism. Abstraction is not only defensible, but the "key" to solving humanity's collective problems at the universal level. TATO seeks to revive abstraction as a methodological program to simplify complexity and refine concepts as a technique to mediate contested discourse. Osborne's critique of the 'reproach' is really a counter- or meta-critique, and as such is a prescient precursor to metamodern abstraction.

"[*The Reproach of Abstraction*] is a paper about **abstraction**, in particular, but by no means exclusively – and this 'by no means exclusively' is a large part of its point – **philosophical abstraction**.\* It is concerned at the outset with what might be called the reproach of **abstraction**: the commonly held view, across a wide variety of theoretical standpoints, more or less explicit, that there is some inadequacy inherent to **abstraction** per se, which is both cognitive and practical (ethico-political) in character. I aim to cast doubt on this reproach, in its exclusive form at least, in order to clear the way for a thinking of the idea of 'actual **abstractions**' as the medium of social experience in capitalist modernities. I take 'global capitalist modernity' to be the transdisciplinary object unifying inquiries in the humanities and social sciences, if only implicitly – the idea of global capitalist modernity is the transcendental horizon of their possible unification. I therefore take the notion of actual **abstractions** to be a methodological key to a philosophically reflective form of transdisciplinarity. It is only a transdisciplinarity such as this, I believe, that can rescue the idea of philosophy as a discourse of universal mediation from the corrosive critiques of its claims to an absolute universality, familiar in recent years in various pragmatist, historicist, contextualist and deconstructive forms. As Ricoeur once put it:

"Philosophical discourse achieves universality only by passing through the contingency of cultures ... its rigour is dependent upon equivocal languages ... its coherence must traverse the war between hermeneutics."

[\[Source\]](#)

A complementary concept to the reproach of abstraction is agnotology, the study of culturally induced ignorance. Through pseudoscience, misinformation, and propaganda, doubt and skepticism can be systematically manufactured for political and economic advantage. Case in point, the tobacco lobby suppressed the scientific truth about smoking from public policy for 70 years, profiting off the addictive and lethal consequences at the expense of public health. In this way, abstraction becomes of hiding the truth, rather than discerning it. Like the reproach of abstraction, its own tools are used against it. A collection of case studies, including the key issue of climate change, was published as *Agnotology: The Cultural Production of Ignorance*, edited by Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger in 2008. Agnotology can be seen as a political sociology of knowledge, to uncover hidden knowledge-power relationships that undermine social health, education, and justice. Corporations and states engage in such psy-ops under the pretenses of epistemic authority, but TATO seeks to bestow the benefits of knowledge and power to the people themselves.

## 1.4 The Abstract Society

*The Abstract Society: A Cultural Analysis of Our Time* is an obscure sociological treatise from 1970, by Anton C. Zijderveld, which sets the metamodern stage for the present abstract sociology. The problem is that society is abstract. The inset of the jacket cover reads as follows:

"In every modern industrial state more and more individuals find themselves confronting and revolting against an **abstract** entity - 'the system' or 'the establishment' which seems to rule their lives."

The book is a level-headed Marxist critique which relates the processes of modernization and alienation to abstraction. Society is abstract, caused by the pluralist segmentation of its institutional structure and the division of the sciences, among other factors. This abstraction poses a problem of increasingly complexity. "According to Karl Marx," Zijderveld writes;

"Hegelian totalitarianism was utterly unreal and **abstract**. He reformulated it in terms of socio-economic reality and thus carried on Hegel's search for totality and comprehensiveness." (p.74).

Thus, 'historical materialism' provided a concrete basis for an abstract social theory. Zijderveld owes credits formal legacy for this idea to Simmel, for whom sociology is basically founded on abstraction;

"Insofar as it is based on the notions that man must be understood as a social animal and that society is the medium of all historical events, sociology contains no subject matter that is not already treated in one of the extant sciences... Sociology thus is founded upon an **abstraction** from concrete reality, performed under the guidance of the concept of society." - Simmel

Therefore, we must construct an ideal concept of society. Notwithstanding the grand theory of Hegel and Marx, the over-specialization of contemporary science has...;

"become so **abstract** and obscure that not only colleagues within the same discipline but even experts within a single specialty have difficulty understand each other's issues. This is the exact opposite of intellectual totalitarianism, and I propose to call it *intellectual Taylorism*."

So here the problem is already abstract in a multiplicity of ways. Philosophy was too abstract (general), 'the system' became too abstract (complex), the sciences are too abstract (fragmented). Zijderveld attempts to clarify by problematizing micro- and macro- abstraction separately. Beginning with the individual dimension, the author's concept of abstraction revolves around the dangers of 'false consciousness' and 'reification' (considering abstract concepts as things), which are central to TATO's sociology of knowledge. He further relates abstraction to 'commodity fetishism' as;

"... the veneration of **abstract** realities... particularly possessed by the **abstraction** par excellence: money."

Now money too is abstract (sublime). Moving into the social dimension, he relates abstraction with increases with distance and size. As industrialization and bureaucratization grow, society becomes more abstract. The world is dominated by technocratic abstraction and modern consciousness is polarized into *intellectualization* and primitivization (or smartening up and dumbing down), hence 'the abstract society.' The general trend here is that abstraction is a variegated process with negative social implications, aside from the intellectualizing concept.



Towards the end of the book, Zidjerveld advances a critique of utopian thinking, and calls for 'intellectual ascetism... to master the forces of control on the level of consciousness first' over structural changes. For more depth on the book, a review article of *The Abstract Society* is attached in the appendix. Now, the focus shifts to negative practices of abstraction that manifest in counterproductive and anti-intellectual ways.

## 1.5 Vicious Abstraction

Vicious abstraction is a linguistic fallacy whereby some essential piece of information is removed. It is considered as part of a set of other semantic errors including weasel words, composition/ division, suppressed quantification, equivocation, amphibology, and the fallacy of accent. According to the semantic context, vicious abstraction comes in two main forms: 1) quoting out of context, which distorts the statement's meaning, and 2) misquotation, where paraphrasing omits or alters vital details.

[X] = "X" (out of context)

[X] = "[x]" (misquotation)

Vicious abstraction has many parallels outside linguistics. Vicious abstraction is invoked as the selective reduction of information that is "vicious" to the extent that it is false or inverts the meaning of the original fact. William James discusses the concept more broadly in a chapter of *The Meaning of Truth* titled "ABSTRACTIONISM AND 'RELATIVISMUS'";

"Let me give the name of 'vicious **abstractionism**' to a way of using concepts which may be thus described: We conceive a concrete situation by singling out some salient or important feature in it, and classing it under that; then, instead of adding to its previous characters all the positive consequences which the new way of conceiving it may bring, we proceed to use our concept privatively; reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of that name **abstractly** taken, treating it as a case of 'nothing but' that concept, and acting as if all the other characters from out of which the concept is **abstracted** were expunged. [Footnote: Let not the reader confound the fallacy here described with legitimately negative inferences such as those drawn in the mood 'celarent' of the logic-books.] **Abstraction**, functioning in this way, becomes a means of arrest far more than a means of advance in thought. It mutilates things; it creates difficulties and finds impossibilities; and more than half the trouble that metaphysicians and logicians give themselves over the paradoxes and dialectic puzzles of the universe may, I am convinced, be traced to this relatively simple source. THE VICIOUSLY PRIVATIVE EMPLOYMENT OF **ABSTRACT** CHARACTERS AND CLASS NAMES is, I am persuaded, one of the great original sins of the rationalistic mind." - [William James, The Meaning of Truth, 1909](#)

The phrase "vicious abstraction" is interesting terminology. The vicious effects may not be apparent, but there are implied ripple effects, and the aggregate effect of small lies is considerable. TATO argues that these pathologies are widespread and systemically reinforced. So serious and commonplace are these distortions, that perhaps this term is appropriate as an umbrella term for a whole set of abstractions with negative consequences. The following quote is illustrative of the way by which racism becomes institutionalized and invisible, and the feeling "vicious" is an apt sentiment.;



You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968, you can't say "nigger" — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so **abstract** now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that **abstract**, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me — because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more **abstract** than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger."

— [Lee Atwater, Republican Party strategist in an anonymous interview in 1981](#)

The racism example demonstrates how causation can become distanced and protracted, such that there can be effects (in this case, racist effects) that focus only the proximal cause. Racist attitudes are sublimated and abstracted away from individual interactions into institutional processes. The whip from the past still lashes the present, but now through an abstract chain reaction or ripple effect expressed across micro-relations. Consider this example as one of hundreds, if not thousands, of abstract processes subsumed in the broader racialized prohibition regime called 'the war-on-drugs.' Whether intentional or not, this abstract subterfuge is wrong as it is counterproductive. The issue needs full disclosure in the form of truth and reconciliation.

Another way an abstraction can be vicious is its denial to others. Here, Cornel West laments how the exclusivity of a given abstraction can be used to deny rights to another group. At the same time, it is suggestive of how a concept can elude people through the equivocation of language.

“I just think it is very important that we don't sanitize and sterilize what brother Bernie Sanders talks about when he talks about health care as a right as opposed to a privilege. See voting rights was a privilege for a long time; you had white brothers with property and white brothers without property, women didn't have the right to vote. So it remained sanitized, it was an **abstraction** for a small group, but it functioned as a privilege. Black folk didn't get it til '65. So just language is so **abstract**, that when Bernie Sanders says it's a right, he wants to specify the ways in which voting rights is universal...”

— [Cornel West, calling out the Democratic Platform Committee for rejecting single payer health care in 2016.](#)

There is a broader systemic pattern of vicious abstraction. The environmental crisis is abstract in several ways here. It is abstracted (mystified) through commodity fetishism. It is abstracted through containment (landfills), negative externalities (pollution), and the suppression of environmental science. It is abstracted through politicized science and manufactured ignorance, as revealed through agnotology. It is abstract in its sheer complexity, and its removal from daily life and immediate concerns. Bill Clinton may have inadvertently hit the nail on the head in 2000, when being interviewed by Leonardo DiCaprio:

DiCaprio: "Why do you think this issue is so constantly overlooked?"

Bill Clinton: "I think it's because it takes a long time for the climate to change in a way that people feel it. And because it seems sort of **abstract** now."

(source: [Before the Flood](#), at 16:40-55)

That the problem is 'abstract' is certainly a common shorthand for dealing with complexity, but it is also a critical tool for understanding and fixing the problem.

## 1.6 Abstract Empire vs. Open Society vs. The Open Conspiracy

The 'abstract' narrative is continued in contemporary discourse. In the book *The Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*, George Soros refers to global capitalism as "an abstract empire," in that capitalism is super-sovereign and deterritorialized, analogous to global empire. "the empire is almost invisible, possessing no formal structure." (p.171). He writes...;

"The first question that needs to be answered is whether there is such a thing as a global capitalist system. My answer is yes, but it is not a thing. We have an innate tendency to reify or personify **abstract** concepts - it is built into our language - and doing so can have unfortunate consequences. **Abstract** concepts take on a life of their own, and it is only too easy to go off on the wrong track and become far removed from reality; yet we cannot avoid thinking in **abstract** terms,' because reality is just too complex to be understood in its entirety. That is why ideas play such an important role in history- more important than we realize." p.171 Soros, Open Society

Capitalism is problematized in terms of both the abstract nature of globalization and our abstract methodologies. However, Soros is skeptical that a global consensus can be formed based on principles alone, due to fallibility. In fact, he writes that "it is not possible to gain general acceptance for those principles simply by explicating them." (p.136). TATO rebukes these assumptions and contends that metamodern society is up to the challenge of universal education, knowledge disclosure, and global truth and reconciliation. However difficult it may be, honesty in public policy is the new standard TATO upholds. Soros goes further in eschewing any abstract plans, opting for a middle way;

"The solution cannot be the same as on the state level. A global state would constitute a greater threat to liberty than the individual state. Nor can we design a solution in the **abstract**: That would also contradict the principles of open society." Soros, p.136

TATO intends to challenge Soros' assumption via a metamodern disclosure. In other words, TATO advocates designing abstract solution. A literally prototypical example of this is found in [\*The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution\*](#), published in 1928 by H. G. Wells. In typical visionary fashion, Wells anticipated the entropy of society, with its penchant for power and secrecy, and suggested a blueprint for global society that is on par with metamodernism's open-source nature. He describes the 'open conspiracy' as a "scheme to thrust forward and establish a human control over the destinies of life and liberate it from its present dangers, uncertainties and miseries." According to Soros, the most important feature of the center is that it dictates its own economic policies, and because it "holds in its hands the destinies of other countries." (p.173). In the core-periphery model, the United States is at the center as a provider of capital and a "clearinghouse for information." Unfortunately, this turn of phrase is meant in the sense of banking, as opposed to knowledge delivery. For a 'knowledge-based economy,' sociological information has been poorly processed in the United States. All of this relates back to the abstract nature of 'the system' and what to do about it. An

'open society' has not been sufficient; we need an 'open conspiracy.' A summary of the key points is broken down in the book as follows:

### **Initial premises**

- (1) Firstly, the entirely provisional nature of all existing governments, and the entirely provisional nature, therefore, of all loyalties associated therewith;
- (2) Secondly, the supreme importance of population control in human biology and the possibility it affords us of a release from the pressure of the struggle for existence on ourselves; and
- (3) Thirdly, the urgent necessity of protective resistance against the present traditional drift towards war.

### **Broad principles**

- (1) The complete assertion, practical as well as theoretical, of the provisional nature of existing governments and of our acquiescence in them;
- (2) The resolve to minimize by all available means the conflicts of these governments, their militant use of individuals and property, and their interferences with the establishment of a world economic system;
- (3) The determination to replace private, local or national ownership of at least credit, transport, and staple production by a responsible world directorate serving the common ends of the race;
- (4) The practical recognition of the necessity for world biological controls, for example, of population and disease;
- (5) The support of a minimum standard of individual freedom and welfare in the world; and
- (6) The supreme duty of subordinating the personal career to the creation of a world directorate capable of these tasks and to the general advancement of human knowledge, capacity, and power;
- (7) The admission therewith that our immortality is conditional and lies in the race and not in our individual selves.

The Open Conspiracy implies opposition to 'closed' conspiracies, such as war, imperialism, corruption, oppression, etc... Thus, Wells' blueprint factors into the study and reconciling of conspiracy culture and the military-industrial complex as a way to solve those very problems. To speak of any progress made in the name of the open society (via Open Society Foundations, New World Order, or otherwise), one must also concede the truth about the dark underbelly of globalization. The open society, for all its good intentions, has not been pursued exclusively in the light of day, as H.G. Wells advocated. Liberal democracy has been spread around the world by force via neocolonialism and intervention. Neoliberal trade policies have widened inequality, although can claim some success by reducing poverty in general. Organized crime and corruption pervade the highest levels of business and government around the world. What this amounts to is 'systemic conspiracy,' defined as the "broad array of social controls" institutionalized in a "large organization, technology, or system -- a powerful and obscure entity so dispersed that it is the antithesis of the traditional conspiracy" (Melley). US foreign policy, and to some extent the world order, is controlled through a nexus of special interests within the military-industrial complex referred to as the 'deep state,' a more substantiated term than the conspiratorial 'shadow government.'

H.G. Wells himself considered this obscure book the definitive statement of his worldview, and pinnacle of his life's work, yet it has fallen by the wayside, even to the extent that it doesn't appear to be a part of the "conspiracy theory" canon. Though Wells does not discuss 'conspiracy' in the modern sense, it is implicit that his 'open conspiracy' is an open opposition to the systemic forces of globalization that shape society in secretive and

coercive ways. The open conspiracy could be seen as a precursor to 'alter-globalization,' the global justice movement for environmental protection, economic fairness, human rights, and civil liberties, among other issues. The concept of an open conspiracy is an awakening to a group of ideas; a synthesis of realizations, historical, biological, and sociological.

The juxtapositions of abstract empire and open society reflect a postmodern diagnosis and treatment, which have subsequently failed. The metamodern turn does not invalidate these concepts, but it synthesizes them and, most importantly, addresses all anomalies. Therefore, we can juxtapose ['abstract empire/'open society'] with ['open conspiracy/'abstract society'] and focus on the latter paradigm as the path forward. Soros' notion of 'radical fallibility,' made explicit in his aversion to blueprints (despite having them), intended as a precautionary principle against pure reason, could be considered part of the 'reproach of abstraction' that Osborne critiqued, and that TATO must address. Open conspiracy is introduced here as a metamodern solution proposed ahead of its time; an open-source open-ended anti-war knowledge-based society. In this vision, Wells had nobly inscribed the hope of reconstructing the world order before World War 2 was even on the horizon. Instead, society has become more abstract and in denial of its own core pathologies.

## 1.7 Abstract Sociology

Sociological abstraction is the study of theoretical concepts across different levels, and is related to philosophical abstraction. Such concepts are mental constructs, for example, the idea of 'class' or a 'nation.' A distinction is made between a concept and *operationalized* concept, which is tied to concrete forms. Sociological theorizing (between concepts) is typically understood across three levels;

"The most abstract level of sociological theory is often referred to as *Grand Theory*. Grand Theory attempts to explain the inter-relationships among numerous concepts and intends to be independent of time and space. In other words, it intends to be universally applicable. An example would be Talcott Parsons' Action Systems Theory, which attempted to explain the workings of society at a very abstract level. Another example would be Marx's Historical Materialism, which argued economic relations were the foundation of social structure.

"*Middle-range theories* are also explanations of human behavior that go beyond one particular observation but are limited in scope and do not attempt to explain all of society. A classic example (with Grand Theory implications) would be Durkheim's research on suicide. He proposed a relationship between the breakdown of social bonds found in religions (Protestantism vs. Catholicism) as the reason for higher rates of suicide in specific areas.

"*Micro-level theories* are limited to explanations of specific observations and are not intended to be universal. For instance, current work on religious activity in the U.S. seems to indicate that religious pluralism and market forces have played a role in reducing the apparent amount of secularization (defined here as 'decreased levels of religiosity'). As the U.S. is one of few examples of a modernized country where levels of religiosity have remained relatively high over time (perhaps the only example), the theory seems applicable only to the U.S. and only during a specified time period."

[\[Wikipedia\]](#)

The key for TATO is how sociology is abstract, and how abstraction can renew sociology. On this, Simmel writes...

"The first problem area of sociology, it will be remembered, consisted of the whole of historical life insofar as it is formed societally. Its societal character was conceived as an undifferentiated whole. The second problem area now under consideration, consists of the societal forms themselves. These are conceived as constituting society (and societies) out of the mere sum of living [humans]. The study of this second area may be called "pure sociology" which **abstracts** the mere element of sociation. It isolates it inductively and psychologically from the heterogeneity of its contents and purposes, which, in themselves, are not societal." [\[Source\]](#)

TATO approaches abstract sociology in the sense of "pure sociology" (Simmel), and further develops it along the lines of the abstract society (Zijderveld), as well as philosophically (as a thinking process, and metaphilosophy). However, TATO also implies a kind of radical sociology to address the 'reproach of abstraction' and 'vicious abstractions' as have been discussed. To this effect, the United States has a well-documented history of anti-intellectualism, which strongly persists in the present moment, despite the US being a highly advanced 'knowledge economy' (according to the OECD). Anti-intellectualism has been a targeted process in many cases, but is also an unconscious social process that affects everyone (elites as well as masses.) The paradoxical rift between knowledge and power, TATO argues, is the root cause of political polarization that has poisoned the well of public discourse, and caused anti-socialist sentiment at the expense of the public interest. This in turn has bred an anti-sociological character that has impaired not only society, but the study of it as well. In 2013, conservative former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, was criticized for invoking the phrase "commit sociology," (as if it were a crime to study society). [\[Source\]](#) The context was whether to address the root causes of terrorism or to prioritize dealing with its proximate causes. It prompted Michael Adams, the President of the Environics Institute, to write an impassioned op-ed titled "I commit sociology, and I don't intend to stop." [\[Source\]](#) Anecdotes aside, sociology, through its critical and emancipatory character, is threatening to the status-quo and the establishment. Moreover, the state, historically, is not above killing intellectuals and activists who speak truth to power. It is time for the pendulum to swing in the other direction.

"[The social sciences] is in the unfortunate position of still having to prove its right to exist. Yet this is fortunate, too, for sociology's struggle for existence is bound to lead to a clarification of its basic concepts (which is good and necessary in itself) and to the establishment of its specific manner of investigating reality." [\[Source, Simmel\]](#)

Simmel's insight is truly ahead of its time, and confers a humility and responsibility to the thankless task. The problem lies in definitions, at the level of semantics. It is simple; sociology must prove itself by defining itself. Sociology validates itself by its conceptual contributions to society. Metamodern abstract sociology is precisely about the 'clarification,' or perhaps more accurately, resolution. The solution to social problems is a new sociological turn, to broad truths and pure ideas. The insights from this knowledge base must be communicated as well, hence public sociology.

## 1.8 Public Sociology

The Division of Sociological Labour	Academic Audience	Extra-Academic Audience
Instrumental Knowledge	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
Reflexive Knowledge	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

Table. 1

Public sociology is a subfield that emphasizes the transmission of knowledge to the wider public. With respect to the four domains of sociology, our main task is to bridge critical and public spheres, and revitalize the professional and policy realms. TATO aims to educate the public and its representatives about social theory and the non-obvious insights into how society does or does not work. The goal is to inspire in everyone a 'sociological imagination,' defined by C. Wright Mills as "the vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society." ([Source](#)) To this effect, a call for public sociology was made in 2004, by ASA President Michael Burawoy.

"As mirror and conscience of society, sociology must define, promote and inform public debate about deepening class and racial inequalities, new gender regimes, environmental degradation, market fundamentalism, state and non-state violence. I believe that the world needs public sociology - a sociology that transcends the academy - more than ever. Our potential publics are multiple, ranging from media audiences to policy makers, from silenced minorities to social movements. They are local, global, and national. As public sociology stimulates debate in all these contexts, it inspires and revitalizes our discipline. In return, theory and research give legitimacy, direction, and substance to public sociology. Teaching is equally central to public sociology: students are our first public for they carry sociology into all walks of life. Finally, the critical imagination, exposing the gap between what is and what could be, infuses values into public sociology to remind us that the world could be different."  
 - Burawoy, M. 2004 American Sociological Association Presidential address: For public sociology. American Sociological Review, 2005, Vol. 70, Issue 1, 4-28.

Within sociology there has also been a defensive reaction to its optimistic and normative character, but objectively this conservative skepticism is misguided. TATO reaffirms the dire need for public sociology. Public intellectuals are being drawn from the hard sciences, while economics and psychology uphold the popular front for the humanities, which mystifies the root causes of social problems. Sociology is relegated to the classroom, and other disciplines continue to encroach on what's left of it. This is particularly the case with neuroscience; specifically, the nascent field of neurosociology and the discovery of 'mirror neurons.' We are continually drawn away from dealing with the problem of society itself.



## 1.9 Critical Mass Society

In socio-dynamics, critical mass is reached when the minimum number of adopters of innovation in a social system cross a tipping point, creating and sustaining further growth. Mass society refers to a managed working class population, culturally homogenized and socially alienated via industrialization, bureaucratization, and large-scale impersonal social institutions. Critical mass society combines these concepts in a novel way to empower grass roots action and social progress. It all begins and ends with education and critical pedagogy. The essences of critical mass society are mass enlightenment against the 'false consciousness' of social myths, consumer culture, and oppressive institutions.

As outlined in our Campaign section, one of TATO's public sociology strategies is to champion "critical mass society," by fostering a movement of distributive epistemic justice (universal knowledge equality) through a public sociology of knowledge. We can accomplish this by producing and distributing research and media to raise public awareness about the epistemic 'knowledge gaps' and 'blind spots' in society that prevent obvious truths from being realized in pragmatic policies. Our methodologies draw on *critical theories* to depoliticize knowledge and address the (hidden) root causes of social pathologies that sabotage and obstruct progress, justice, and equality everywhere in the world. The research agenda of TATO emphasizes meta-theory and abductive reasoning, or abstraction, as a core aspect of critical thinking and critical social theory.

One strategy we employ is to *incentivize* critical thinking (and critical outcomes) at both the individual and institutional level, prompting chain reactions that catalyze the widespread support of progress. The theory behind this strategy is centred around the ability to make categorical truth statements that conflicting parties are compelled to agree upon, which necessarily must appeal to both the people and their representatives independently. thereby reconciling micro-macro dynamics. Authoritative self-evident declarations constitute the top-down approach, while a bottom-up approach involves *selling* the reflexive benefits of critical thinking as value-generating positive feedback loops. Supposing that mass enlightenment in itself is not considered valuable enough, we also propose that this venture, like renewable energy, is a *profitable* opportunity that will stimulate equitable economic growth, thus making investment and adoption a 'no brainer.'

## 2.0 The Quantum Turn in Social Science

The line between the social sciences and physical sciences is often referred to as "the demarcation problem" because there is no clear answer to where physics ends and sociology begins, or how to apply scientific models to the social. A philosophical assumption that is problematic is "dualism," in how the distinction of mind and matter imports assumptions from classical physics. These problems are effectively 'solved' through a quantum turn in the social sciences, insofar as society is metaphysical, rather than physical. Simply put, the answers to classical problems are 'either/or' and for quantum problems are 'both/and.' A recent quantum turn in social science literature further clarifies the potential. For example, the 'quantum consciousness hypothesis' (QCH) ties abstraction into the cognitive basis for a quantum social science:

"When considering a quantum-like model of the functioning of the brain ... **abstract** mental images, such as concepts, are processed on the basis of the quantum-like representation of information. A physical mechanism of creation of the quantum-like representation of classical signals is presented. Quantum-like images are encoded by covariance matrices of classical signals. In the quantum



terminology, these are density matrices. Thus concepts are represented by density matrices (which are in fact classical covariance matrices). The same model can be applied to “collective brains” and thus social systems. " p. 27, *Quantum Social Science*, Cambridge University Press, 2015

A decisive proposal for a quantum turn, titled *Quantum Mind and Social Science* (2015), suggests society is a holographic organism. Each individual is an instantiation, embodying particular collective notions. Like a pixel, or holon, we encode information from the whole. After laying the methodological ground work in chapters 1-5, the book communicates an immediate relevance to the reformulation and reformation of sociology and society;

"Chapter Six ("A Quantum Model of Man") develops a quantum rival to the machine model of man, emphasizing free will, creativity, and the performative nature of agency. Chapter Seven ("A Quantum Model of Society") interprets holist or discursive theories of meaning in terms of the concept of quantum information, to argue that society should be conceptualized as a super-organism with collective consciousness. Chapter Eight ("A Teleological Model of Social Evolution") asks if society has a kind of consciousness, then could it also have "purposes"? This leads to a teleological view of social evolution at odds with the orthodox Darwinian account."

[\(source\)](#)

Notwithstanding these advances, there are parallel discourses in the social sciences that must be integrated first. The details and implications of Wendt's thesis will be returned to. In *Social Humanism: A New Metaphysics*, Brian Ellis discourses on the prospect for a universal basis of agreement. The book precedes Wendt's new thesis, and the word 'quantum' is not present, so any quantum connection is not self-evident. Nevertheless, TATO proposes that the connection is staring us in the face with the subtitle 'a new metaphysics.' The themes of social idealism and meta-theory, which TATO is predicated on,

"In this book, Ellis argues that moral and political objectives are not independent of one other, and so must be pursued in tandem. Social humanism is a moral and political philosophy that does just this. As a political philosophy, it justifies the implementation and maintenance of many of the characteristic social policies of welfare states. As a moral philosophy, it provides the foundation required for most human rights legislation... To this end, Ellis elaborates on the theory of social humanism and the need to reconsider the metaphysical foundations of morals. He develops the theory of social idealism as a meta-theory for both morals and social policy, exploring the global consequences of this new approach." [\[Source: Social Humanism: A New Metaphysics, Ellis, 2012, Routledge\]](#)

In advocating for a global perspective, Ellis guides the reader through a decidedly 'abstract' narrative in the history of philosophy. Whereas *synderesis* is defined as the inclination of the mind to practical reason and further, to universal first principles, he continues...;

"This **abstract** point of view was seen as being a natural counter to self-interest, which, it was thought, would otherwise dominate our thinking. The Thomists argued that synderesis provides us with knowledge of the Natural Law, which provides us with the universal premises required for moral reasoning. Aquinas believed that any actions taken freely in accordance with the universal premises supplied by synderesis would be acts of conscience, and therefore have **special authority** (D'Arcy, 1961). Secular moral objectivists do not, of course, believe in Natural Law theory or necessarily in the right of conscience. But **many still believe that there is a set of objectively true moral principles**

**that we could arrive at successfully, if only we were to cultivate the habit of thinking about them in this special way."** (emphasis added)

"The 'view from human kind' inherent in the Thomistic theory of synderesis is essentially the same as Rawls's view from behind his 'veil of ignorance'. For, it is the view at which you would arrive by **abstracting** from your own position, characteristics, and so on and see yourself as just another member of the human race. It is what I would call 'the humanistic or cosmopolitan point of view'. It is much less **abstract** than Thomas Nagel's (1986) conception of a view from nowhere. But it is more **abstract** than what I would call 'the social point of view', which is just the view that you would obtain by thinking of yourself as simply another member of your own society. There are other **abstractions** too that lie in between the humanistic point of view and the view from nowhere. For, you could cut your human identity out of the equation altogether and see yourself as just another biological organism. This would yield 'the biological point of view'. To reach the view from nowhere, you would have to take the process of **abstraction** still further. For, to do so, you must **abstract** from yourself as knower and consider how the world would be in itself, independently of our perception of it. This process of **abstraction** is the one that results in what we call 'the physical point of view'. From this point of view, there is no normativity left to talk about. So, physically considered, there is no best of all possible worlds." p. 161

Ellis is searching for a universal, humanistic, cosmopolitan point of view that could be validated based on a universally accepted moral principle. He continues;

"There is, at present, no global social contract in which such a principle could be embedded... [and] if any such principles could be found, they would have to be included as basic principles in this global contract."

TATO would like to develop a global social contract, as well as the vital principles it would be based on. To be clear, abstraction as a process is not itself a vital principle, but rather a tool to devise those principles. Abstraction *is* a vital principle in so far as on the most abstract level of conceptualizing human nature, we are all identical and sacred, indispensable, instantiations of the whole. Along with an abstract social contract, comes the prospect of an abstract constitution, and other new legal precedents.

A final note on the quantum turn concerns communication. Language too is meta-(physical), and cannot be easily reduced to a universal architecture. Quantum linguistics is a recent field which models how language is a basis for quantum entanglement between human beings. Complex equations aside, the simple insight of the quantum approach to language, is the multiplicity of meaning (potentiality) of a given word or phrase. The quantum physicist David Bohm contributes a practical application for breaking through discursive stalemates, in what has come to be known as a Bohm Dialogue (or Bohmian Dialogue or "Dialogue in the Spirit of David Bohm"), which is a...;

"freely flowing group conversation in which participants attempt to reach a common understanding, experiencing everyone's point of view fully, equally and nonjudgementally. This can lead to new and deeper understanding. The purpose is to solve the communication crises that face society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness. It utilizes a theoretical understanding of the way thoughts relate to universal reality. It is named after physicist David Bohm who originally proposed this form of dialogue." [\[Source: Wikipedia\]](#)

## 2.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, "abstraction" writ large is proposed as a knowledge representation framework, with novel expression under metamodernism - an emergent paradigm suggestive of universal social philosophy. Abstraction also a multivariate thought process, social process, and critique of society and its conceptual objects. "Vicious" (false) abstraction is the errant translation of knowledge, leading to unjust or 'vicious' outcomes, the systematic habits which are correlated with anti-intellectualism and endarkenment. Global capitalism is an 'abstract empire' that the 'open society' seeks to remedy, but falls short due to fallibility and compromising trade-offs. Global civil society and alter-globalization are emergent movements to establish social and political equilibrium, which The Abs-Tract Organization seeks to anchor in an abstract or "pure sociology" as a critical pedagogy and public policy platform, communicated through a public sociology that bridges critical theory with common sense to foster a 'critical mass society.' The concept of abstraction is a meme tracked through various discourses to highlight its versatility as a semantic signifier and unifier. The quantum turn in social science promises that a complete metaphysics of society is within reach, though it may exceed our grasp. As per the tradition of ending research papers, more research and knowledge production on abstraction is needed, and thus TATO is worth supporting. Statement of potential conflicts of interest or corruption by funding sources: absolutely none.

# APPENDIX I

Book review

London School of Economics

**Anton C. Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society:***

***A Cultural Analysis of Our Time.*** London:

Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972,

xii + 180 pp., £2.95.

"The title of this book may suggest yet another routine pop-sociological account of man's 'alienation' in modern society. In fact, it is a serious contribution, readable and unpretentious, meriting considerable attention.

Zijderveld would not, I suppose, reject the label 'phenomenologist'. Yet the book is undogmatic and unencumbered with the ponderous jargon of the-if I may be paradoxical- thoroughgoing phenomenological determinist. Its theoretical foundations are laid in an excellent survey of the 'homo duplex theorem' (of which we sociologists, I fear, make rather heavy weather) from Luther through Marx and Simmel to Mead, Thomas and Schutz. Existentialism is mentioned, but there is no outpouring of metaphysical nonsense about man's 'being'. Quite the contrary; the author has his feet on the ground, and sees that kind of thing more as a sign than an explanation of the problem.

Zijderveld makes the familiar point that 'modern society has become abstract in the experience and consciousness of man'; this has happened because of a discrepancy between the objective autonomy of institutions and the subjective autonomy of the individual. The individual is subject to the social control of many institutions, but none of them control him totally. 'Because of segmentation, the social structure leaves voids ... which the individual fills up with his private meanings, his dreams, phantasies, explanations and justifications. Since they lie between the institutional segments of pluralistic society, these private meanings escape control and rationality of the rest of the social structure and are experienced as the subjective and unalienable [sic] foundation of human existence. The individual calls this his private autonomy or even "freedom", but is unaware that this freedom is merely residual: it is, so to speak, put together from the leftovers of a segmented social structure'. The seemingly greater freedom of pre-modern man is very different, stemming from much nearer total and unquestioned social control.

The most stimulating section is Zijderveld's long chapter analysing the revolt, mainly by young people, against the 'abstract society' in the 1960s. He draws three ideal-types of protest movements: The Gnostic (ex oriente and drugs-lux); the Anarchist (cultural rather than political, as exemplified by the Amsterdam Provos in their earlier, white bicycle phase); and the Activist, seen in much student protest. Zijderveld demonstrates that each is a form of 'romantic absolutism'. Activist protest has focussed on the university. Originally it attacked the rationality of the bureaucracy, which curbed the pursuit of knowledge; latterly it spilled over to a rejection of the rational pursuit of knowledge itself, and into a desire to smash the institution altogether. But, writes Zijderveld, 'All reactionary *Gemeinschaft* utopias and "back-to-nature" dreams are doomed to fail because they blindly deliver the individual to the coercive forces of abstract society'.

What, then, is the alternative? In a last, avowedly social philosophical chapter, Zijderveld pleads for 'intellectual asceticism'. 'Modern man has to learn to master the forces of control on the level of consciousness first, before he proposes structural changes'. Ralph Nader, not Cohn-Bendit, is Zijderveld's man of the future. There is more solid sociology here than this brief sketch has perhaps suggested. Incidentally, the book is not translated; the author writes good plain English and has a nice turn of phrase, as witness 'intellectual Taylorism' in his discussion of the academic division of labour."

STEPHEN MENNELL

1972

# APPENDIX II

## [From Club of Rome report]

### CONTINUOUS CRITICAL PROBLEMS: AN ILLUSTRATIVE LIST

- 1) Explosive population growth with consequent escalation of social, economic, and other problems.
- 2) Widespread poverty throughout the world.
- 3) Increase in the production, destructive capacity, and accessibility of all weapons of war.
- 4) Uncontrolled urban spread.
- 5) Generalized and growing malnutrition.
- 6) Persistence of widespread illiteracy.
- 7) Expanding mechanization and bureaucratization of almost all human activity.
- 8) Growing inequalities in the distribution of wealth throughout the world.
- 9) Insufficient and irrationally organized medical care.
- 10) Hardening discrimination against minorities.
- 11) Hardening prejudices against differing cultures.
- 12) Affluence and its unknown consequences.
- 13) Anachronistic and irrelevant education.
- 14) Generalized environmental deterioration.
- 15) Generalized lack of agreed-on alternatives to present trends.
- 16) Widespread failure to stimulate man's creative capacity to confront the future.
- 17) Continuing deterioration of inner-cities or slums.
- 18) Growing irrelevance of traditional values and continuing failure to evolve new value systems.
- 19) Inadequate shelter and transportation.
- 20) Obsolete and discriminatory income distribution system(s).
- 21) Accelerating wastage and exhaustion of natural resources.
- 22) Growing environmental pollution.
- 23) Generalized alienation of youth
- 24) Major disturbances of the world's physical ecology.
- 25) Generally inadequate and obsolete institutional arrangements.
- 26) Limited understanding of what is "feasible" in the way of corrective measures.
- 27) Unbalanced population distribution.
- 28) Ideological fragmentation and semantic barriers to communication between individuals, groups, and nations.
- 29) Increasing a-social and anti-social behavior and consequent rise in criminality.
- 30) Inadequate and obsolete law enforcement and correctional practices.
- 31) Widespread unemployment and generalized under-employment.
- 32) Spreading "discontent" throughout most classes of society.
- 33) Polarization of military power and psychological impacts of the policy of deterrence.
- 34) Fast obsolescing political structures and processes.
- 35) Irrational agricultural practices.
- 36) Irresponsible use of pesticides, chemical additives, insufficiently tested drugs, fertilizers, etc.
- 37) Growing use of distorted information to influence and manipulate people.
- 38) Fragmented international monetary system.
- 39) Growing technological gaps and lags between developed and developing areas.
- 40) New modes of localized warfare.
- 41) Inadequate participation of people at large in public decisions.
- 42) Unimaginative conceptions of world-order and of the rule of law.
- 43) Irrational distribution of industry supported by policies that will strengthen the current patterns.
- 44) Growing tendency to be satisfied with technological solutions for every kind of problem.
- 45) Obsolete system of world trade.
- 46) Ill-conceived use of international agencies for national or sectoral ends.
- 47) Insufficient authority of international agencies.
- 48) Irrational practices in resource investment.
- 49) Insufficient understanding of Continuous Critical Problems, of their nature, their interactions and of the future consequences both they and current solutions to them are generating. \*

# APPENDIX III

## 15 Principles of Metamodernism

(The following list is combined from two articles ('10 principles,' and '5 more...', by Seth Abramson, and is otherwise excerpted verbatim.)

Metamodernism is variously called a cultural paradigm, a cultural philosophy, a structure of feeling, and a system of logic. All these phrases really mean is that, like its predecessors' modernism and postmodernism, metamodernism is a particular lens for thinking about the self, language, culture, and meaning — really, about everything.

1. Metamodernism as a negotiation between modernism and postmodernism. Because postmodernism was a direct response to modernism, these two cultural philosophies include a number of diametrically opposed first principles.

2. Dialogue over dialectics. Postmodernism favored “dialectics” over dialogue, whereas metamodernism explicitly advances the cause of dialogue.

3. Paradox. Metamodernism embraces the paradoxical. For instance, in negotiating between modernism's belief in universality and postmodernism's belief in contingency, metamodernism posits that certain ideas can be “objectively” true for an individual even though the individual also understands that they are not universally true.

4. Juxtaposition. Juxtaposition occurs when one thing is super-imposed atop another thing from which it would normally be deemed entirely separate. A good example of a metamodern juxtaposition is the juxtaposition of sincerity and irony that we often find in metamodern literature.

5. The collapse of distances. The distance between the self and others, and between the self and society, is one that postmodernism celebrates by finding myriad ways to put the self (or groups of selves) in a dialectic with opposing selves or groups.

6. Multiple subjectivities. Postmodernism required the “Balkanization” of self-identity — the partitioning of the self and groups of selves into clear boxes of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and so on — in order to establish its dialectics.

7. Collaboration. Metamodernism encourages not only dialogue but collaboration. In a world in which we are constantly being influenced by innumerable forces — some we recognize as influential for us, some we don't — metamodernism literalizes this experience by encouraging us to consciously join our efforts and perspectives with those of others.

8. Simultaneity and generative ambiguity. Early descriptions of metamodernism suggested that an individual thinking metamodernistically “oscillates” between opposing states of thought, feeling, and being — almost as though human beings were pendulums swinging between very different subjectivities.

9. An optimistic response to tragedy by returning, albeit cautiously, to metanarratives. Since the term “metamodernism” was coined in 1975, metamodern theorists have all agreed that metamodernism is used by individuals and societies as a generative response to tragedy; indeed, the phrase “a romantic response to crisis” is often used to describe metamodernism.

10. Interdisciplinarity. The reason metamodernism is so oriented toward crisis-response is because its tendency to dismantle and rearrange structures is a tacit acknowledgment that those structures — as they were previously arranged — are what likely caused the crisis in the first place.

11. Reconstruction instead of deconstruction. If postmodern deconstruction encouraged us to use “dialectics” — a zero-sum tug-of-war between opposing principles — as a way of understanding how meaning is constructed differently depending upon where one is standing, metamodern reconstruction attempts to unite opposing principles even if the result is a paradox.

12. Engagement instead of exhibitionism. Too often, meaning-making processes in contemporary society revolve around staking out a position and defending it — and being seen publicly so staking and defending — rather than engaging an issue collaboratively with an eye toward enacting positive change (however subtle and gradual).

13. Effect as well as affect. In the arts, we often look for evidence of poststructuralist principles in either the absence or dominance of affect.

14. Walllessness and borderlessness. These are unwieldy words that don’t really exist in common parlance — and with good reason — but the idea that metamodernism eliminates the walls and boundaries between literal and abstract structures is an important one to the paradigm.

15. Flexible intertextuality. “Intertextuality” refers to the presence of relationships between individual texts. Traditionally, when we find intertextuality in artwork it’s intentional — a clearly “authored” effect that’s achieved through conspicuous devices like allusion and quotation.



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