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ALTERMODERNISM AND ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses globalisation from an aesthetic perspective and the new aesthetic movement that bloomed out of it, Altermodernism. Altermodernism is the contemporary art ideology that seemed to have risen from the seeds of globalization where the writers are able produce new identities. The movement in focus is in its foetus with regard to literature; however its inception had begun in the late 2000s. It manifested itself tangibly and was recognised by critics in the year 2009 as an art style.

Altermodernism transcends Post- Colonialism mirroring the current global scenario. The fall of Post-Modernism along with the Berlin Wall in 1989 laid the foundation of Altermodernism in the form of a contemporary all- inclusive art exhibition. Twenty years later when globalization rose so did Altermodernism, insidiously. Altermodernism blurs the lines that differentiates a medium and gives an alter- identity. The study will use Nicholas Bourriaud's *The Radicant* and *Altermodern*, Tim Holloway's study *Altermodernism* and *Altermodernist Fiction*, a case study by Alison Gibbons to expound on how globalization has influenced this aesthetic movement and has helped the hybrid identities of Post-Colonialism transcend its fixation with roots. Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* will be analysed from an Altermodernist point of view in this dissertation. The study will introduce an all-inclusive aesthetic world and may help shatter the binary world view and re-structure perception. It will trace the new ideology that will question the premise of our present belief system and social- political structure.

INTRODUCTION:

"One day there will be no borders, no boundaries, no flags and no countries and the only passport will be the heart". Quoting Carlos Santana, a modern musician, the question that needs reflection is, where are we going? Literary scenario today seems to be the chaotic remains of the Post-Colonial melancholy for the liberated colonies and Post- Modern euphoria for the occident. Though Post- Modernism was pronounced dead with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 as highlighted by Brooks and Troth in their book *The Mourning After*, one cannot deny the lingering presence of Post-Modernism. But there are also emerging trends in the current aesthetic scenario whose activity began in the 2000s spurred by Globalization. This study will discuss in detail one such aesthetic movement, Altermodernism. This new ideology will question the premise of our present belief system and social-

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political structure and discuss it as a literary theory of the contemporary *modern times*. As a literary genre, Altermodernism will be deliberated in the paper.

LITERARY SCENARIO OF 20TH CENTURY:

20th century had been a witness to two great wars and swift upgrading of human civilization. This in the literary scene had been an impetus to movements like Post- Modernism and its extension, Post- Colonialism. Post modernism was a reaction to the failings of Modernism whose ideology seemed to support the then totalitarian socio- political scenario. Postcolonialism was a response to colonialism. It analyses power structures and the after effects of colonization. Both movements tried to break away from dominance. Postmodernism emerged in the occidental world where the subjugated with in the occidental power structure rose against authority. While Postcolonialism emerged as a voice against the colonizers and as a means to soothe their pain. Postmodern works understood the fact that an entirely original work was impossible, reiterating Aristotle's idea of *mimesis*. Therefore, Postmodernists borrowed from the past and created a new body revamped literature. They blurred the lines between what was considered *High Brow* literature and ghettoised popular literature. Postmodern works were self-aware. The literature employed intertextuality, Pastiche, Metafiction technique, Hyperreality, fragmentation to add flavour. These works reflected the traumatized and rebellious predicament of a post war world, the rise of the common man. Postmodernism tests the boundaries of the so far carefully laid out rules for the creation of acceptable literature while embracing disorder.

Post Modernism was an attempt made by the western world to subvert the control extended over the common population by their authorities. Post Colonialism was an aesthetic practice of the same time, also subverting the power of their colonizers. Both Postmodernism and Postcolonialism were attempts to unmask authorities at a larger sense. These movements understand that language is always a means to obtain power. The despots employ language to exercise power on the subjects. George Orwell's 1984 stands to substantiate this very point. Postcolonialism was deeply connected with idea of *roots*. *Identity* depended entirely on where one belonged to. This set the mood of the literature produced under the Postcolonial banner. Postcolonialism and Postmodernism on observation seem to have used similar tools but to different ends. Their relevance ended with the end of the 20th Century.

POST- POSTMODERNISM, POST- MILLENNIALISM AND ALTERMODERNISM:

Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in the 21st century are rapidly growing out of context and are losing relevance. These movements and literary fields of enquiry are being replaced by the resultant, Post- Postmodernism, Metamodernism and Altermodernism. "If postmodernism became terminally ill sometime in the late- eighties and early nineties, it was buried once and for all in the rubble of the World Trade Centre" claim Brooks and Toth. This is a reference to the events of September 11, 2001 which exposed the linchpin that would question the authority of Liberal Capitalist society of the 1990s. Post- Postmodernism, Post- Millennialism and Altermodernism mark this paradigm shift. These movements have their foundation in an attempt to be all-inclusive, a move towards coalition of the centre and the periphery without obliterating the structure. However Post- Post modernism as defined by McLaughlin is a "US- Centric" movement. This understanding of Post- Postmodernism could

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also be extended to Post- Millennialism of Eris Gans. These movements deepen the fissure between the ideologies of colonized and the colonizers. The phase at which the colonized and the colonizers are advancing with respect to philosophical and artistic ideologies seems to strengthen this rift.

But with globalization as a constant force acting to unite the world, Altermodernism could be understood as a progression from a divided paradigm of the postmodern era into a more coalesced Altermodern era different from the exclusive Post- postmodernism and Post- Millennialism.

ALTERMODERNISM:

Contemporary theorists thirst to describe our current and emerging modernity, each with a westernized version of the global mood. Nicholas Bourriaud, an art critic and curator, in the introductory essay to the Tate Brittan triennial 2009, theorized the cultural milieu in which we currently find ourselves in as Altermodernism.

In an attempt to define Altermodernism, Bourriaud uses the metaphor of the Archipelago. Altermodernism could be conceived as a network of cultural isotopes to form a whole. Cultures of the various social groups are viewed as Signs. Artists, according to the Altermodernist thought are Semionauts, a navigator journeying through the Signs.

INFLUENCE OF GLOBALIZATION:

Globalization as Amartya Sen suggests is a product of our global heritage. It has through internet and other modern technology, through displacement caused by colonization and wars not only helped society expand economically and commercially but also aesthetically. Cultural globalization possible through the transmission of ideas, values and indigenous heritage across borders also has now paved way for aesthetic globalization where artistic concepts are exchanged, influenced. Anthony Giddens declares this phenomenon of cultural exchange *detraditionalization*. Nicholas Bourriaud identifies this phenomenon as the cardinal factor influencing the contemporary global aesthetics and the 2009 Tate Triennial he curated stands to testify it. Altermodernism is based entirely on the fulcrum of Globalization.

ALTERMODERN IDEOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS:

"The origin of an artist is no longer of foremost importance as multiculturalism losses its relevance in our society of instantaneous communication not limited by our own physicality and we begin to see ourselves within a global context" (Tim Holloway, 2011)

Altermodernism reflects the new identity that is being created by individuals through Routes against the Postmodern and Postcolonial idea of Roots. Altermodernists actively attempt to amalgamate contrasting identities. By contrasting between the questions raised by Altermodernism and Post Modernism one can better understand this concept. Postmodernism posed the question "where do you come from?" while Altermodernism asks "Where should we go?" (Bourriaud: 2009a, 182). Altermodernism has its focus on routes and not roots. Modernism had narratives centred upon "Time", Postmodernism has its centred upon "Space", where one belongs to, Altermodernism does away with the temporality of its predecessors and bases itself upon both time and space, a journey.

This journey referred to is intertextual, it may be the journey of the artist between the cultures they are exposed to as well as the journey their art or literature takes or its characters. Cultures here

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become Signs, systems of signifiers and their signified though which an author is seen to navigate. Thus, the artist here becomes a *Semionaut*.

An Altermodern text uses technological advancement as its departure point. Art transcends from simply being to interacting with its audience. Text here is a hypertext, it connects. The repeated focus on connecting does not imply uniting into a singular entity, that is implausible. But rather it ought to be understood to bear similarities with a constellation or the archipelago. An idea developed by Bourriaud in his early work *Relational aesthetics*, which he later develops, Relational Art. Altermodern concepts are majorly practiced in arts and music. Mathew Stone, an artist, shaman, and a DJ from Britain is an example of Altermodernistic art. As stated by Stone, collaboration is the defining characteristic of an Altermodern art, in collaboration he says his individuality shines.

Altermodernism in literature is still an uncharted territory. Alison Gibbons' paper *Altermodernist Fiction* talks at length about the application of the theory to literature.

ALTERMODERNISM AND LITERATURE:

Alison Gibbons' paper published in *The Rutledge companion to experimental literature* analyses three case studies of Altermodernist fiction: Liam Gillick's *Eramus is late* (2000), Brian Castro's *Shangai Dancing* (2009), and Charles Avery's *The Islander Project* (2010). She neatly lays out her observation on these text with Nicholas Bourriaud's Altermodernist analysis of W. G. Sebald's works as a guide. She bases her analysis based on the Altermodern treatment of *Time, Form and Identity* by the authors of the work.

Form of an Altermodernist work is experimental mixing not only the literary genres but also weaves its narratives through diverse mediums. Altermodernist fiction pushes the age long debate on the ontological status of a literary work into chaos. An altermodernist text is not simply what its author intends to express, nor is it an interpretation of the reader. The text interacts with its readers.

Time in an Altermodernist fiction is not an absolute. Time is treated as a heterochronic narrative, a series of pluralized parallel accounts. The author draws a network connecting these pluralized accounts through its narrative.

Identity as contrasted with the Postcolonial hybrid identity owing to multiple roots and the feeling of alienation in both the spaces, Altermodernist identity is about Routes. The character's journey, his navigating between spaces and time creates an intertextual narrative generating a new identity.

ACCENTUATING THE ALTERMODERN IN ORHAN PAMUK'S ISTANBUL:

Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk, the recipient of 2006 Nobel Prize for literature is widely considered as a Postmodernist. However his novel *Istanbul* contains evidences of Altermodern characteristics. *Istanbul* is a non-fiction that recounts the author's childhood and also attempts a portrait of the city. The book evokes a sense of melancholy in the reader and the epitaph rightly declares, "The beauty of a landscape resides in its melancholy", a quote from Ahmet Rasim.

Employing Alison Gibbons' and Bourriaud's guidelines to Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* we notice the form of the text is that of a travelogue as well as a memoir. The novel also weaves the narrative through both the picture medium and literary medium, words. Pamuk navigates between Times and Spaces interwoven with Identities. It is a travel undertaken by the protagonist of the narrative physically, as

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well as a psychological travel also simultaneously recording the gradual displacement from the old Istanbul to the new of the collective conscious of the society and the journey of the city itself. It weaves a narrative connecting islands. The narrative wanders between times and the physical space in relation to times. These wanderings construct an identity not only for the Orhan Pamuk inside the text but also for the readers.

The book's sub-structure imitates a journey through the archipelago. The narrative holds individual ideas, the islands, while the consciousness of the author, the reader and that of the city takes the journey weaving in and out of the Islands, connecting the archipelago. The Time in *Istanbul* is heterochronic. A series of pluralized accounts of his Childhood and establishes connection with the city when he says "Istanbul's fate is my fate". He takes up the consciousness of the city thus entwining his identity with that of the city's through the Time.

The text discusses not only Orhan Pamuk's Identity but also the identity of the city. This would be referred to as "Identity crisis" by Postcolonialists. Altermodernism makes this "problem identity" the Identity. Identity is not static or an absolute and Orhan's journey into his own consciousness and that of the city's creates new identities.

CONCLUSION:

The current cultural scenario, especially the present literary scenario appears to be obscured by various theories. It seems essential to pose questions regarding to where we, our consciousness, collectively and individually, are travelling to and the routes which we seem to be taking culturally, aesthetically? And Nicholas Bourriaud's Altermodernism is by far the acceptable middle ground which seeks to clear the mist.

Altermodernism also helps alter or rather re-structure our perspective on Identities and redefine socio-political scenario significantly. Altermodernism may contain the potential to help create an all-inclusive utopia, breaking binaries and thus power structures. However, the validity of the Altermodern thought as a literary movement is still at its foetal stage. Altermodernism in literature despite its promises provokes scepticism as there are only a handful of works of writers like Rana Dasgupta, Ronit Matalon, Teju Cole and Orhan Pamuk which may be considered entirely Altermodern. Altermodernist thought is yet to spread its wings to poetry and drama. Altermodernism is an appealing theory of our present cultural milieu it would be irrational to be blind to the existence of other similar projections of our cultural and ideological journey that is reflected by our literature and art.

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