

The Meta-realist Manifesto

Modernism defined the first half of the 20th century.

Post-Modernism defined the second half.

Meta-realism is defining the first half of the 21st century.

Meta-realism is an artistic and cultural phenomenon that grapples with themes of self-awareness, materialistic existentialism, and meta-realism itself. Substantial contributors to this movement include David Foster Wallace, Charlie Kaufman, Dan Harmon, Donald Glover. Some meta-realist media: *Infinite Jest*, *Bojack Horseman*, *Synechdoche*, *Rick and Morty*... Let's discuss these points individually. But first:

The first two decades of the 21st century have been defined by the increased presence of the internet in daily life. This has led to a number of cultural phenomena: micro-celebrity and social media "influence", decentralized social justice movements (occupy wall street, BLM, twitter mobs), volatile mental health (rapidly inflating and deflating egos; inhibited attention span), and global political polarization. The internet is the new "mirror". By that, I mean that it is as culturally significant as the invention of the mirror. When humans first created the mirror it had a horrifying and intense result. Never before did humans have to face their own countenance. Their own hideousness. Of course, this is not true. Narcissus is a story of a man looking at his reflection in a pond: clearly humans could see themselves before they had mirrors. However, before mirrors, humans could not see themselves at any given moment unless they stood above a clear body of water. The ubiquity of reflection afforded by the mirror must have been game-changing. And such is the same for the internet. Celebrity, justice, news, politics, and mental health all existed before the internet, but the ubiquity of access is unprecedented. Essentially, it's like the superorganism that is humanity has been given a mirror with which it can view every inch of its body, no matter how hidden or unsightly.

This is what I mean by **self-awareness**. Young children such as myself learn all about what other people think about them at an early age. They learn all of the ways in which other despise every facet of their own identity. I myself learned to hate myself for being rich, white, male, but also for being shy, confident, horny, vanilla, scared, complacent, awkward, and even un-self-aware. The internet is a social mirror through which we see reflections of ourselves in others, and thus we are forced to see our true colors day in and day out. The question is, does this make us better people? This question is essential to Meta-realism: is self-awareness a virtue? Does self-awareness compel us to better ourselves, or does it just cause us to wallow in self-pity, self-contempt, and self-obsession? I think one of the meta-realist positions is that self-awareness is not a virtue and it should be respected for what it is: a source of power that can tear someone apart as much as it can build them up.

Now, what about **materialistic existentialism**? This is one of the ways in which self-awareness can be self-destructive. It's a remnant of post-modernism. It's the conclusion that "nothing matters so let's just sit on the couch and watch TV" which is a line from *Rick and Morty*. David Foster Wallace's magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*, serves as a warning about materialistic existentialism. Wallace wants the reader to ask oneself what one should do with the power to choose their own source of meaning in life. Existentialism permits us to choose what gives life

meaning but it doesn't stop us from choosing pleasure, hedonism, and addiction. Materialistic existentialism is the recognition that we live in a hyper-materialistic society and deriving meaning in such a society is still possible, but staggeringly difficult. We are all pitifully susceptible to such dopaminergic products as social media, dating apps, streaming services, online shopping, freemium gaming, political echo-chambers, and meme farms. Of course, this list is just the internet layer of the larger cake of materialistic obstacles such as fast food, luxury brand clothing, "luxury" cruises and excessive tourism, self-help books, plastic toys and collectible tv show apparel, malls, eating-disorder-relieving beauty products, and all sorts of other materialistic bullshit that post-modernists have been denouncing for more than half a century. The point here is that the meta-realist is insecure about the role of existentialism and secular philosophy on 21st century culture. The meta-realist fears the ways in which sarcasm, nihilism, and cynicism, serve to placate the masses and encourage materialism just as much as the unashamedly campy consumerist culture of the modernist period did. So, the question here is, what the fuck do we do know that we know consumerism and materialism are immune to criticism? What do we do know that we know that materialism will co-opt and assimilate any counter culture that seeks to eradicate them? Existentialism is not the answer, and certainly neither is nihilism.

Finally, **meta-realism**, which is a phenomenon that has gone by stupider names like "post-post-modernism", is a major theme of meta-realism. I don't really wanna get into this right now, but it makes all the sense in the world. People are obsessed with figuring out what comes after post-modernism and the reason is because they want to figure out how to critique it before it causes all the damage post-modernism did, and all the damage modernism did before that. The problem is though that when you hold a mirror up to a mirror, you see nothing but more mirrors. So, how can the meta-realist fix their own movement with that movement itself? How can they even recognize the problems with their own movement when their movement is just a reflection of other cultural movements? The meta-realist feels paralyzed by this, and there is no way out of this trap that I can think of. I don't know what the meta-realists answer to this question should be.

Very personal note that reflects my beliefs and not necessarily those of the meta-realist: Like the post-modernist, the meta-realist is a capitalist. Your movement cannot be anything but capitalist whilst living and breathing in a capitalist environment. Meta-realism, therefore, cannot be concerned with actually fixing the problems of capitalism, but only how to deal with the problems that exist right now. A meta-realist should acknowledge the idea that "there is no ethical consumption under capitalism" while also acknowledging that they have achieved a modicum of power, and perhaps even progress, by acknowledging this. Regardless, the capitalist sympathies and intuitions are deeply woven into the beliefs of the meta-realist. Does the meta-realist wish to be a capitalist? Not necessarily. But they are one, regardless. Participating in capitalism makes you a capitalist, but it's up to you how you feel about that.