

Metamodernism in Marvel Cinematic Universe's *The Infinity Saga*

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Abstract : Metamodernism in cultural studies refers to a framework for understanding and analysing contemporary cultural phenomena that bridge the gap between the postmodern and modern eras. It acknowledges the limitations and critiques of postmodernism while incorporating a renewed sense of sincerity, emotion, and ethical engagement that characterises modernism. It is often identified by analysing cultural artefacts such as literature, film, music, visual arts, and architecture. The paper discusses complex ideas, grand and micronarratives with surrealist hyperreal aspects in Marvel Cinematic Universe's *The Infinity Saga*. The conflict between 'good capitalist' Tony Stark and 'evil capitalists' in the "Iron Man" trilogy aligns with metamodernism by exploring the complexities of capitalism, ethics, and personal growth. The trilogy's nuanced approach to these themes, along with its blending of sincerity, irony, and the personal and political, exemplifies the metamodernist tendency to engage with contemporary issues in a multifaceted and emotionally resonant manner. The MCU's effective blending of grand narratives and micronarratives aligns with metamodernism's approach to storytelling. The saga blends diverse elements to create a rich, multifaceted narrative while acknowledging its intertextual connections to the source material and broader cultural contexts. The hyperreal and surreal blending in the Infinity Saga aligns with metamodernism by navigating the blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy, engaging with mythic narratives while staying emotionally resonant, and presenting complex narratives that involve audience participation. This blending of different modes of storytelling reflects metamodernism's emphasis on embracing diverse influences and navigating the complexities of contemporary culture.

Keywords: Metamodernism, Infinity Saga, MCU, micronarrative, hyperreality

INTRODUCTION

Metamodernism is a relatively recent concept that has been used to describe a cultural and artistic movement that emerged in response to postmodernism. It is characterised by blending elements from modernism and postmodernism and an attempt to reconcile their conflicting ideas and attitudes. It can be observed in various forms of art, including literature. In literature, metamodernism often manifests as a mix of sincerity and irony, grand narratives and fragmented perspectives, nostalgia and a forward-looking approach. It acknowledges the scepticism and deconstruction of postmodernism while reintroducing a sense of authenticity, emotion, and meaning often criticised as missing in postmodern works. Metamodern works can incorporate linear and non-linear narratives, mixing different narrative styles, perspectives, and temporalities. This reflects the interconnected and fragmented nature of contemporary life. While postmodernism was often accused of being detached and ironic, metamodernism seeks to reengage with genuine emotions and depth of feeling. It may blend moments of sincerity with moments of irony or playfulness. Metamodern literature often attempts to bridge apparent contradictions, such as the personal and the political, the local and the global, or the historical and the contemporary. It can feel nostalgic for past cultural forms and traditions while embracing innovation and looking towards the future. It also addresses social and ethical issues while acknowledging their inherent complexity and ambiguity. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their "Notes on Metamodernism":

The metamodernist oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity (3).

Metamodernism in cultural studies refers to a framework for understanding and analysing contemporary cultural phenomena that bridge the gap between the postmodern and modern eras. It acknowledges the limitations and critiques of postmodernism while incorporating a renewed sense of sincerity, emotion, and ethical engagement that characterises modernism. Metamodernism in cultural studies explores the complex interplay between various cultural elements and the evolving societal context. It is often identified by analysing cultural artefacts such as literature, film, music, visual arts, and architecture. It examines how these artefacts blend elements of irony and sincerity, nostalgia and innovation, and how they navigate the tension between opposing ideas. Cultural studies scholars look at how metamodernism addresses political and identity-related issues. Metamodernism often encourages a more active and ethically grounded engagement with socio-political matters, seeking to reconcile diverse perspectives and values. Metamodernism's exploration of the interplay between technology and culture is a significant study area. It examines how the digital age has influenced cultural production, distribution, and reception, leading to new forms of artistic expression and modes of interaction. Audiences' consumption and interpretation of cultural products play a crucial role in metamodernism. Cultural studies scholars explore how audiences engage with metamodern works, navigating between irony and sincerity and contributing to the co-creation of meaning. Cultural studies examine how metamodernism negotiates issues of cultural identity, locality, and universality in a globalised world. Metamodern cultural studies delve into how

narratives are constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined. The movement's blending of grand narratives with fragmented perspectives challenges traditional notions of storytelling.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Marvel Cinematic Universe's (MCU) *The Infinity Saga* is a prime example of how metamodernism can be observed in popular culture. The Infinity Saga comprises an interconnected series of films and storylines culminating in the battle against Thanos and the Infinity Stones. Metamodern elements can be identified throughout this saga in how the MCU blends sincerity with irony, engages with grand narratives, and navigates complex themes.

The metamodernist performs a juggling act of disparate influences and references, holding multiple contradictory perspectives and embracing a complexity that reflects the messiness of contemporary existence (Vermeulen & Akker 7).

The MCU is known for its emotional moments that resonate with audiences. While it incorporates action-packed scenes and superhero tropes, it also delves into its characters' emotional struggles, vulnerabilities, and relationships. This blend of sincerity and fantastical elements reflects metamodernism's embrace of authenticity and playfulness. The "Iron Man" trilogy portrayed the conflicts between 'good capitalist' Tony Stark and 'evil capitalists' like John Obadiah, Justin Hammer and Aldrich Killian. The conflict between 'good capitalist' Tony Stark and various 'evil capitalists' in the "Iron Man" trilogy can reflect certain metamodernist themes, particularly in navigating the complexities of contemporary socio-economic and ethical issues. Metamodernism often seeks to bridge opposing viewpoints and the conflict between 'good capitalist' Tony Stark and 'evil capitalists' showcases this tension. The trilogy presents a nuanced view of capitalism, acknowledging both its potential for innovation and progress (Stark's advancements in technology) as well as its potential for exploitation and greed (the antagonists' pursuits). This mirrors metamodernism's effort to hold seemingly contradictory ideas in tension. It emphasises ethical reflection and engagement with socio-political issues. The trilogy's conflict revolves around ethical dilemmas related to capitalism's impact on society, the environment, and individual well-being. Stark's journey from an arms dealer to a responsible entrepreneur demonstrates a shift from personal gain to ethical responsibility, reflecting metamodernism's call for active ethical engagement. The trilogy employs a blend of irony and sincerity in its portrayal of capitalism. While Stark initially embodies the 'playboy capitalist' stereotype, his development into a more socially responsible figure introduces sincerity. Meanwhile, the 'evil capitalists' represent the darker aspects of capitalism in an ironic light, emphasising its potential pitfalls. This blend of sincerity and irony aligns with metamodernism's approach to reconciling opposing modes. Metamodernism often celebrates hybridity and complex narratives that transcend traditional boundaries. The trilogy's portrayal of capitalism showcases positive and negative aspects, challenging the simplistic 'good vs. evil' narrative. This reflects metamodernism's embrace of the multifaceted nature of contemporary issues. Alison Gibbons, in her "Metamodernism: Literature, Culture, Theory":

Metamodernism celebrates the potential for grand narratives while acknowledging their limitations, weaving together the personal and the political in a tapestry of sincere engagement and ironic detachment (Van den Akker et al. 49).

The overarching narrative of the Infinity Saga—the struggle to prevent Thanos from wielding the power of the Infinity Stones—is a grand narrative that spans multiple films. However, within each film, some micro-narratives focus on character development, personal struggles, and smaller-scale conflicts. This interplay between grand narratives and individual stories reflects metamodernism's reconciliation of opposing narrative modes. The concept of grand narratives and micronarratives is present throughout the *Infinity Saga*, highlighting its metamodernist tendencies.

The grand narrative of the Infinity Saga centres around the acquisition and use of the Infinity Stones by various characters. This narrative thread provides a unifying structure for the saga, representing a grand quest spanning multiple films and phases. The conflict with Thanos serves as a grand narrative that drives the later phases of the saga. The heroes' efforts to prevent Thanos from acquiring all the Infinity Stones culminate in the monumental battle in "Avengers: Endgame." This struggle for the fate of the universe creates a central narrative focus. Within the grand narrative, each character undergoes a micronarrative arc. For instance, Tony Stark's evolution from a self-absorbed billionaire to a selfless hero is a micronarrative that contributes to the overarching saga. Micronarratives also involve the dynamics between characters. The saga's friendships, rivalries, and romantic relationships form micronarratives that add depth and emotional resonance to the overarching plot. While contributing to the larger narrative, individual films offer micronarratives that focus on specific characters or events. For example, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* delves into Captain America's journey while contributing to the broader themes of espionage and loyalty. The micronarratives of characters' backstories provide context and motivation for their actions within the grand narrative. These backstories enrich the characters' depth and contribute to their development. Micronarratives within the saga explore ethical dilemmas and societal challenges. The personal struggles of characters like Scarlet Witch and Vision in *WandaVision* address grief, identity, and power, reflecting contemporary concerns.

The MCU is characterised by its interconnectedness, where characters, events, and references appear across various films. This intertextuality creates a sense of unity while acknowledging the saga's diversity of influences and genres. This blending of different elements reflects metamodernism's hybridity. These elements reflect metamodernism's embrace of blending diverse influences and creating a tapestry of interconnected references. The MCU blends various genres, including superhero action, science fiction, fantasy, and even elements of spy thrillers and heist films. This genre hybridity adds depth and complexity to the storytelling, catering to various audience preferences. The saga effectively mixes severe and emotional moments with humour and lightheartedness. This hybrid tone contributes to a well-rounded viewing experience, capturing both the gravity of the challenges faced and the relatability of the characters, which often embody hybrid identities, combining human and non-human qualities. This hybrid nature is evident in characters like Tony Stark (human and inventor), Thor (god and hero), and Vision (synthetic being and sentient entity).

The MCU is known for cross-referencing events and characters across films, creating an intertextual narrative. Moments from one film might have implications or references in another, fostering a sense of continuity and connection. The MCU draws heavily from its comic book material, incorporating plotlines, character traits, and visual aesthetics. Intertextuality with the comics adds depth for fans familiar with the source material. The saga features numerous cultural references, from music and fashion to pop culture elements. These references create intertextual connections to the real world, grounding the fantastical elements in

relatable contexts. The MCU frequently brings characters from different films together, creating intertextual interactions. This practice culminates in events like *The Avengers* films, where characters from individual franchises collaborate. The saga includes foreshadowing and Easter eggs referencing future events or paying homage to the comics. These hidden references contribute to an interconnected narrative. Seth Abramson's "The Next Big Idea in Literature": "Metamodernism thrives on the tension between the hyperreal and the genuine, blending the surreal with the authentic to create a new kind of cultural expression" (Sarah 132).

The concept of hyperreal and surreal blending can be observed in the Marvel Cinematic Universe's (MCU) "Infinity Saga," especially when examined through a metamodernist lens. The saga's ability to seamlessly integrate fantastical elements with real-world themes and emotions contributes to its metamodern quality. Metamodernism often explores the interplay between reality and hyperreality, where the boundaries become blurred. The Infinity Saga exemplifies this by presenting a world grounded in real-world settings and issues (e.g., urban landscapes, political dynamics) while incorporating fantastical elements (e.g., superheroes, alien civilisations, mystical realms). This hyperreal blend reflects metamodernism's exploration of the coexistence of different realities. It engages with surreal and hyperreal aesthetics to evoke emotional responses. *The Infinity Saga's* use of cutting-edge visual effects, cosmic landscapes, and otherworldly creatures contributes to its surreal quality. This visual extravagance is often paired with emotional moments that resonate with audiences, juxtaposing the fantastical and the profoundly human. This blend reflects metamodernism's oscillation between the sincere and the ironic. Metamodernism often explores complex narratives with layered temporalities. The Infinity Saga's inclusion of time travel, alternate realities, and flashbacks introduces a temporal complexity that resonates with metamodernism's embrace of non-linear narratives. This complexity allows for emotional layering, where characters and audiences experience various emotions across different timelines. It often invites audience participation and collaboration. Its intricate continuity, Easter eggs, and interconnections across films encourage active audience engagement. Fans analyse, speculate, and contribute to the co-creation of meaning, aligning with metamodernism's tendency to involve audiences in constructing narratives.

CONCLUSION

The conflict between 'good capitalist' Tony Stark and 'evil capitalists' in the "Iron Man" trilogy aligns with metamodernism by exploring the complexities of capitalism, ethics, and personal growth. The trilogy's nuanced approach to these themes, along with its blending of sincerity, irony, and the personal and political, exemplifies the metamodernist tendency to engage with contemporary issues in a multifaceted and emotionally resonant manner. The MCU's effective blending of grand narratives and micronarratives aligns with metamodernism's approach to storytelling. The grand narratives provide a unifying structure and overarching themes, while micronarratives offer individual depth and exploration of characters, relationships, and socio-ethical concerns. This interplay creates a tapestry that reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of contemporary life, a hallmark of metamodernist storytelling. The MCU's hybridity and intertextuality align with metamodernism's approach to storytelling. The saga blends diverse elements to create a rich, multifaceted narrative while acknowledging its intertextual connections to the source material and broader cultural contexts. This blending and referencing create a sense of unity and complexity, reflecting the metamodernist tendency to embrace contemporary culture's diverse and interconnected nature. The hyperreal and surreal blending in the Infinity Saga aligns with metamodernism by navigating the blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy, engaging with mythic narratives while staying emotionally resonant, and presenting complex narratives that involve audience participation. This blending of different modes of storytelling reflects metamodernism's emphasis on embracing diverse influences and navigating the complexities of contemporary culture.

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