

Post modern Inclinations: THE POETRY OF FRANK CIMATU

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The Postmodern Pulse: Seriality and Proceduralism, and Poetic Form

Postmodernism as a concept brings in the idea of inventiveness. It presupposes the onset of novel modes of perception that allow the artist to create distinctive artifacts, which announce the beginning of a new horizon of creativity where innovation is the essential operational process. Lyotard posits that postmodernism is a movement within modernism and indeed, the two exhibit an affinity in characteristics and techniques employed such as pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony, and others. However, there are fundamental features that distinguish the two.

An exploration of postmodern literature and investigations into the artistic sensibility that animates postmodern works inevitably draw in discussion on matters of form. Poet William Carlos Williams has written of "the necessity of a new form *before* a new poetry of any sort can be written" (qtd. in Conte 4). "Form" as a term, is used in literary studies on one hand to refer to "literary genre" or "type" in the restricted sense of the word, but is likewise used to describe a fundamental literary concept.

... The "form" of a work in this central sense, is its essentializing organizing principle; and here we find a great diversity in critical formulations. All critics agree that "form" is not simply a fixed container, like a bottle in which "content" or subject matter" is poured; but beyond this, a critic's definition of form varies according to his particular premises and orientation. (Abrams 67)

Ihab Hassan (in Connor 118-119) provides a table which summarizes the basic differences between modernism which exhibits a preference for closed/conjunctive forms and

postmodernism, which exhibits a proclivity for the open/disjunctive. While exploring the work of art as “a statement being made in the form of a work of art” is accepted and hardly to be considered irrelevant, the alternative approach to interpretation is premised on the idea that the mode of expression is primary such that style (or form) takes priority over content or subject matter. Susan Sontag in the essay “On Style” elaborates:

What haunts all contemporary use of the notion of style is the putative opposition between form and content. How is one to exorcise the feeling that “style,” which functions like the notion of form, subverts content? One thing seems certain. No affirmation of the organic nature between style and content will carry conviction—or guide critics who make this affirmation to the recasting of their specific discourse—until the notion of content is put in its place.

... The great task of critical theory is to examine in detail the *formal* function of the subject-matter. (Sontag 29)

We recall a basic opposition in Hassan’s table as one between art object/finished work in modernism and art as process/performance/happening in postmodernism. The manner in which something is said can be seen as precisely the matter, which is being conveyed. Again, Sontag:

Art is not only about something; it is something. A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary on the world.

... [T]heir distinctive feature is not that they give rise to conceptual knowledge (which is the distinctive feature of discursive or scientific knowledge—... but to something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgment in a state of thralldom or captivation. ... [K]nowledge we gain through art is an experience of the form or style of knowing something, rather the knowledge of something (like a fact or moral judgment) in itself. (Sontag 30)

Hassan’s table conveniently sets apart the two movements to illustrate the boundary that divides modernism and postmodernism. However, in his study of postmodern poetry,