

Metamodern Activism: *Both/And* Oscillations and Affective Hybridity in Translocal Social Movements

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Contemporary grassroots movements operate within diverse organizational structures, ranging from local initiatives to centrally coordinated transnational action. Many initiatives within socioecological and regenerative activism are organized through Translocal Networks (TLNs) connecting locally embedded communities while facilitating the circulation of practices, knowledge and affective ties across scales. Prominent examples include the Transition Network (TN), the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and Extinction Rebellion (XR) which employ hybrid repertoires bridging digital and physical spaces. While existing research highlights their decentralized structures, the cultural logics and affective sensibilities sustaining engagement amidst ontological and planetary crises remain underexplored.

In this paper, this gap is addressed through the *oscillatory* approach of metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010) to social movement research. Beyond modern idealism and postmodern irony, metamodernism foregrounds a sensibility of simultaneously holding contradictory orientations - hope and doubt, sincerity and reflexivity, critique and construction. Drawing on affect theory⁴, hybrid activism⁵ and visual communication, the study examines how these movements enact metamodern sensibilities through visual-discourse culture. It is argued that TN, GEN and XR enact metamodern sensibilities through oscillatory repertoires that hold contradictory orientations together, distinguishing these practices from other movements and resistance aesthetics based on critique by framing contradiction as an ongoing mode of political and affective engagement.

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⁴ Inspired by Bachmann-Medick & Tygstrup (2015), Massumi, B. (2025), Ahmed, S. (2014) and Clough & Halley (2007).

⁵ Crilley et al.(2020) and Showden et al. (2023).

Methodologically, the research employs an exploratory Visual Grounded Theory⁶ approach, treating newsletters, memes and images as visual-‘affective artefacts’ shaping participation and belonging. Analytical categories are generated inductively through iterative engagement with visual material rather than textual-content coding schemes, enabling to capture how images⁷ shape meanings, emotions, and movement identities.

This study proposes and analytically tests METAMOV-Beta⁸ to explore metamodern sensibilities in movement discourses, visual cultures, and organizational practices. Initial findings suggest that metamodernism offers a productive lens for examining TLNs such as TN, GEN and XR by identifying oscillatory repertoires through which contradictory orientations are held together. The framework demonstrates how social movements perform oscillation, sincerity amid irony, pragmatic utopianism, and affect/interiority alongside commitments to systemic change. Existing literature often lacks systematic methodologies for analysing how metamodern sensibilities are expressed and circulated through hybrid repertoires. By placing metamodernism in dialogue with social movement studies and political ecology, the paper operationalizes these sensibilities through observable cultural, affective, and visual indicators.

This research makes a two-fold contribution: it provides a metamodern reading of TN, GEN, and XR, and it introduces and pilots the METAMOV-Beta framework as a heuristic device for future research; it also operationalizes metamodernism as an empirical lens for analysing contemporary activism and identifies cultural, affective and visual indicators of metamodern sensibilities within TLNs. Preliminary results suggest that metamodernism provides an innovative lens: its focus on oscillatory repertoires reveals how movements sustain engagement by holding critique and construction, uncertainty and hope, and political action with affective experience in productive tension. And it reframes prefigurative politics by foregrounding the emotional and aesthetic resources required to inhabit ‘unfinished futures’ amid persistent crisis. By highlighting activism as an expression of metamodern culture, the study enriches theoretical discourse on social movement innovation in an era of ecological and ontological uncertainty.

Keywords: *metamodernism theory; social movements innovation; affect and activism; embodied hybrid repertoires; both/and oscillation; visual grounded-theory.*

⁶ Mey & Dietrich (2016) and (Ridge, 2024).

⁷ Doerr, N., & Milman, N. (2014). *Working with Images*. 418–427.

⁸ METAMOV-Beta framework (Metamodern Social Movement Analysis Framework - preliminary version) is a pilot and preliminary version: The METAMOV framework is an original analytical tool developed by the 1st author Amandine Gameiro as part of ongoing doctoral research. This paper presents a preliminary application of its *beta* version.

1. Introduction

In recent years, social movements responding to ecological and socio-political⁹ crises have increasingly adopted organizational forms and cultural practices that extend beyond conventional repertoires of collective action. Examples of such movements include the Transition Network (TN), the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), and Extinction Rebellion (XR). In this study they are designated as socioecological movements¹⁰, given that their collective projects are not only oriented towards influencing political institutions or engaging in contentious activism, but also towards transforming the relationships among society, economy, and ecological systems. They frequently operate through decentralized and translocal configurations, combining protest, hybrid¹¹ collective actions, and co-constructive experimentation, while integrating affective, ethical, and cultural dimensions into their political action. Also described as Translocal Networks¹² (TLNs), these movements connect place-based initiatives through national and global hubs, advancing sustainability transitions through strategies of relocalization while operating across digital and physical spaces (Esteves et al., 2025). Their translocal organization thus enables collective action to take place simultaneously across multiple scales and through multiple modes,

⁹ In this study the concept *socio-ecological movements* is used to refer to a subset of social movements in which transforming social–ecological relations constitutes a central dimension of collective action. Such movements understand ecological and social problems as interconnected and may therefore combine environmental action with struggles for social justice, alternative economic and political arrangements, cultural transformation, and new forms of collective organization. Their repertoires can include contentious mobilization, cultural practices, practical or prefigurative experimentation, including practices of relationality and interiority, aimed to develop alternative modes of living, governance, production, and ecological stewardship (Kothari et al., 2019; Escobar, A., 2020; Esteves et al., 2025). The term therefore emphasizes the integration of social and ecological transformation rather than a particular organizational form, scale, or repertoire of action.

¹⁰ Contemporary grassroots movements operate within a variety of organizational structures, ranging from locally based initiatives to more centrally coordinated transnational action.

¹¹ Hybrid activism combines both online and offline methods to engage participants in social movements. This approach recognizes the strengths of each method and aims to create a more inclusive and effective engagement process. It effectively merges the immediacy of online engagement with the personal touch of face-to-face interactions, creating a dynamic and responsive approach to social change. This strategy enhances inclusivity and increases participation by accommodating diverse community needs.

¹² Many initiatives within socioecological and regenerative activism are increasingly organized through Translocal Networks (TLNs) that connect locally embedded communities while facilitating the circulation of practices, knowledge and affective ties across scales.

linking political contention with the construction and diffusion of alternative practices and ways of organizing social life.

From the perspectives of political ecology and environmental sociology, the transformation of social-ecological relations constitutes a central dimension of collective action in TN, GEN, and XR. Rather than treating ecological and social change as analytically separate domains, these socioecological movements articulate them as mutually constitutive. Their activities may therefore extend beyond conventional forms of political contention to include cultural transformation, practices of prefiguration, relationality and interiority, and practical experimentation directed towards the development of alternative modes of living, governing, producing, and relating to ecosystems. Beyond a focus on institutional change, they articulate broader civilizational critiques of extractivist development models while prefiguring regenerative and relational alternatives through both place-based practices and transnational organizational approaches (Pleyers, G., 2010; Esteves, A., 2022; Esteves et al., 2025).

In this paper, TN, GEN, and XR combine ecological mobilization with cultural transformation, grassroots experimentation, and imaginaries of regenerative futures. They share a common orientation toward systemic change enacted through hybrid practices of meaning-making and collective learning, affective engagement, positioning systemic and cultural transformation as central to their political projects. Understanding these dynamics¹³ represents an important challenge for contemporary social movement research, yet research on their hybrid strategies and cultural logics remains limited.

While scholarship has provided important insights through theories of networked mobilization (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Turner, F., 2008; Castells, M., 1996, 2015) connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), and digital activism (Vlavo, F., 2017; Atherton, A., 2023), such approaches have tended to privilege organizational structures, diffusion and information flows. This offers limited analytical traction on the cultural logics, affective orientations, and ambivalent political sensibilities - the '*structures of feeling*'¹⁴ - through which contemporary movements understand themselves and sustain engagement (Pleyers, G., 2010; Papacharissi, Z., 2015; Zajak

¹³ Grassroots movements that focus on environmental issues and social justice can be categorized as socioecological movements, while hybrid movements combine elements of various social causes, reflecting the complexities of contemporary challenges. Metamodernism can inform these categorizations by emphasizing the interplay between different cultural logics and the need for innovative approaches to address the multifaceted issues facing society.

¹⁴ Another signature of metamodernism theory by Vermeulen & van den Akker (2010) and Akker et al. (2017). See also Bachmann-Medick, D., & Tygstrup, F. (Eds.). (2015). *Structures of feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*. De Gruyter.

et al., 2020; Escobar et al., 2024). Consequently, key questions concerning how movements navigate contradiction, uncertainty, and hold together critique and construction¹⁵ amid long-term crisis remain under-addressed.

In this paper, it is argued that translocal socioecological movements dynamics can be productively understood through the lens of metamodernism, understood as a cultural sensibility rather than a fixed theory or periodization. Originating in cultural theory (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010; Akker et al., 2017), metamodernism describes a mode of orientation that moves beyond the polarities of modern idealism and postmodern irony by foregrounding *oscillation*, *sincerity*, and *complexity*: it describes a sensibility characterised by oscillation rather than synthesis, and by the simultaneous holding of seemingly contradictory orientations - such as hope and doubt, sincerity and reflexivity, critique and construction. Rather than resolving tension, metamodernism sustains it as a generative condition for action and meaning. While the concept has been widely applied in cultural and aesthetics analysis, arts, literature and political theory (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2014; Akker et al., 2017), its potential for social movement research remains underexplored.

Consequently, metamodern qualities are increasingly visible in contemporary activism, particularly in the tension between hope and despair, local pragmatism and planetary imaginaries, and critical distance and constructive engagement. Applying metamodernism to social movements shifts analytical attention from organizational form and strategic outcomes to cultural orientation and affective practices. From this perspective, activism is understood not only as strategic collective action, but as a cultural and affective process through which actors orient themselves toward uncertain futures, articulate regenerative imaginaries, and sustain commitment in the face of systemic instability - that is, how they generate meaning, belonging and orientation under conditions of ecological and social crisis. This perspective also reframes prefigurative politics: building on scholarship that understands prefiguration as the embodied enactment of alternative forms of life and as a practice of political imagination (Monticelli, 2021; Komporozos-Athanasίου & Bottici, 2022), it draws attention to the emotional and aesthetic resources through which activists inhabit and sustain 'unfinished futures'. Movements such as TN, GEN, and XR exhibit these characteristics through hybrid repertoires that combine protest and prefiguration, networked activism and a global interbeing/awareness of transformation,

¹⁵ From a metamodernism perspective, socio-ecological movements - GEN, TN and XR as the case-studies in this research - can be understood as expressing an oscillatory cultural logic that navigates tensions between critique and construction, local experimentation and planetary imaginaries, and pragmatic action alongside aspirational visions of systemic transformation.

irony and moral seriousness, utopian aspiration with pragmatic experimentation, and interiority approach alongside systemic approach and ethos (Rowe & Ormond, 2023). These are not inconsistencies to be resolved - they are patterned dynamics that reflect a broader metamodern logic shaping contemporary activism.

While hybridism also characterizes the TLNs under study, Crilley et al. (2020) argue that visual communication is also constitutive of contemporary activism¹⁶, not merely representational. Visual artefacts circulate across networked publics, organizing attention and sustaining engagement through affective resonance. As Showden et al. (2023) conceptualize, activism is *inherently hybrid* and unfolds across intertwined digital and embodied spaces where visual practices¹⁷ function as connective infrastructure. Furthermore, for Ghasemi (2024), post-postmodern cyberculturalism marks a paradigmatic shift toward digitally mediated modes of subjectivity, relationality and meaning-making, in which networked technologies restructure cultural production, identity formation, and political engagement beyond irony and relativism.

Recent contributions in political ecology and related socio-ecological studies (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020; Escobar, A., 2020; Esteves, A., 2022; Escobar et al, 2024) have emphasized the need to rethink socio-ecological crisis through relational, ontological, and cultural transformations.. Clark & Szerszynski (2020) call for a planetary reorientation of social thought that situates social life within the dynamic processes of the Earth system, while Escobar et al. (2024) develop relationality as a political and transformative practice grounded in interdependence and more-than-human world-making. Through this lens, socio-ecological movements are sites of *ontological experimentation*, where alternative ways of relating to the self, community, and more-than-human worlds are enacted (Escobar, A., 2020; Esteves, A., 2022). These literatures also often lack systematic methods for analyzing how such transformations are performed and communicated, particularly through visual, affective, and symbolic practices, addressed in this paper by bringing metamodern theory with social movement studies and political ecology.

The primary aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual and analytical framework for examining how TLNs of socioecological movements express metamodern cultural sensibilities through their visual cultures and affective repertoires. Drawing on a literature review of social

¹⁶ Protest images, memes, and digital graphics operate as strategic devices that frame issues, shape collective identities, and mobilize affect within hybrid media systems where online and offline action are mutually reinforcing. Showden et al. (2023) emphasize that multimodal visual storytelling enables decentralized coordination, emotional solidarity, and public legitimacy in fragmented media environments, and enacting hybrid forms of political participation.

¹⁷ Livestreams, protest aesthetics, symbolic performances, and shareable content.

movement and metamodern theory and supported by a preliminary exploratory Visual Grounded Theory analysis¹⁸, a pilot-framework is tested as a tool for analysing hybrid activism and translocal movement dynamics. The following research question guides the study: *How can metamodern cultural logics in translocal social movements be analytically identified through hybrid activism, affective artefacts, and oscillatory narratives and political imaginaries?*

The research advances two interrelated contributions: (a) it extends metamodernism theory into social movement studies by conceptualizing metamodern activism as an oscillatory cultural practice characterized by ‘Both/And’ orientations, affective hybridity, and reflexive engagement with uncertainty; and (b) it introduces METAMOV-Beta, a heuristic¹⁹ framework prototype developed to facilitate the systematic identification of metamodern sensibilities. This version serves as an exploratory test-run for a more comprehensive framework currently under development²⁰. Consequently, the paper offers an interdisciplinary bridge between cultural theory, affect studies, and meaning-making in social movement research and an empirically operationalizable approach to understanding activism in conditions of ecological and ontological crisis.

2. Introducing Metamodernism and Affect

Metamodernism is a cultural philosophy that emerged after postmodernism, characterized by a synthesis of modern and postmodern ideas. While the term appeared sporadically since 1975²¹, it was systematized²² in the early 2010s by Vermeulen & van den Akker (2010, 2014) as an oscillation between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony, sincerity and knowingness.

¹⁸ Visual Grounded Theory (VGT) treats visual artefacts as primary data, using iterative coding and comparison to generate and refine analytical categories from patterns of meaning, affect, and practice within the visual material (Mey & Dietrich, 2016).

¹⁹ *Heuristic* definition relates to a speculative formulation serving as a guide in the investigation or solution of a problem. Here, “heuristic framework” refers to an exploratory analytical instrument designed to guide the systematic identification and interpretation of empirical indicators of metamodern sensibilities. METAMOV-Beta is therefore a preliminary pilot version rather than a definitive typology: its experimental evidence markers are used to test the empirical visibility and analytical utility of metamodern sensibilities in networked activism, with refinement and further validation intended through subsequent research.

²⁰ See notes 1 and 8.

²¹ The term ‘metamodernism’ was originally coined in 1975 by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh.

²² As stated in Pipere & Mārtinsone (2022) the term metamodernism did appear sporadically in academic texts between the 1980s and the 2000s, however those usages are generally pre-Vermeulen & van den Akker (2010) and not yet systematized into a unified theory.

Rather than resolving these tensions, metamodernism sustains them as a productive condition. Central to this philosophy is the rejection of binary epistemologies; it embraces ‘Both/And’ orientations, allowing actors to commit to ideals while remaining reflexively aware of their contingency (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2014). This sensibility resonates with contemporary socio-political contexts marked by ecological crisis, uncertainty, and plural ontologies (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020).

Major theorists highlight distinct dimensions of this metamodern shift. Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) focus on ‘*depthiness*’ - a felt or performed depth rather than a metaphysical one. Alison Gibbons (2017) highlights renewed interiority and subjectivity in contemporary narrative forms. Greg Dember (2024) foregrounds the defense of *interior felt experience* and emotional sincerity against postmodern detachment, while Linda Ceriello (2018, 2022) examines metamodernism as a resurgence of sacred affect, interior longing, and symbolic depth. Jason Storm (2021) explores metamodernism as a new framework for understanding knowledge and social categories, connecting meaning-making and a post-secular culture.

In contemporary theory, affect²³ is understood as a relational, socio-cultural force shaping bodies, meanings and political life. Sara Ahmed (2004) argues that emotions operate through ‘affective economies’ where feelings circulate between bodies, objects, and signs, creating collective affinities and identities - they materially shape social worlds and political alignments. Brian Massumi (2015) emphasizes affect’s pre-cognitive capacity²⁴ - our potential ‘to affect and be affected’ - as fundamental to social emergence and political experience. Together with the concept of ‘*structures of feeling*’²⁵ (Bachmann-Medick & Tygstrup, 2015), these perspectives position affect as a critical lens through which to analyze how mediated encounters constitute social life.

A signature of metamodern culture is ‘*ironesty*’ - a blend of irony and honesty (Dember, G., 2024). This approach values individual feelings and subjective experiences as significant,

²³ Affect is a central analytic for understanding how social relations are produced through intensities and atmospheres that exceed conventional cognitive, representational, or discourse-centred models, connecting cultural studies and sociology (Clough & Halley, 2007).

²⁴ In *Politics of Affect*, Brian Massumi (2015) emphasizes affect’s pre-cognitive capacities, that is, our potential ‘to affect and be affected’, as fundamental to social emergence, agency, and political experience, collapsing traditional subject/object and body/mind distinctions and foregrounding affect as emergent intensity in relation.

²⁵ Another signature of metamodernism theory by Vermeulen & van den Akker (2010) and Akker et al. (2017). See also Bachmann-Medick, D., & Tygstrup, F. (Eds.). (2015). *Structures of feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*. De Gruyter.

resisting being flattened into detached critique²⁶. Depth in metamodernism is not about rediscovering pre-postmodern metaphysical structures; it is about acknowledging real lived experience and emotional resonance without reducing them to surface irony (Rose, O.G., 2025 February 26). Metamodernism arises after ideological exhaustion, in a context where totalizing ideologies are experienced as both necessary and dangerous. This makes it particularly useful for analyzing movements that refuse rigid doctrines while advancing transformative utopian visions.

However, metamodernism remains contested for conceptual and political reasons^{27,28,29}, particularly regarding the tension between its academic formulation³⁰ and its appropriation as a *zeitgeist*. Critics state that oscillation can appear too elastic, risking descriptive vagueness and difficult to delimit empirically. Its definitional boundaries remain unstable and risk collapsing into a general label for post-postmodern cultural tendencies rather than a distinct theoretical paradigm (Storm, J., 2021). Questions also arise whether it constitutes a distinct paradigm or merely rearticulates tendencies described as post-postmodernism³¹[5], digimodernism³², or Anthropocene thought³³. Furthermore, its periodizing ambition is debated, as postmodern logic remains pervasive globally (Gibbons, A., 2017).

²⁶ See <https://www.thelivingphilosophy.com/p/4-greg-dember-metamodernism-and-the> (Dember, G., 2025b, October 27) and <https://medium.com/what-is-metamodern/say-hello-to-metamodernism-follow-up-questions-and-answers-8d0c28d2bbd4> (Dember, G., 2025a, July 16).

²⁷ <https://philosophics.blog/2025/02/24/metamodernism-a-postmodern-critique/>

²⁸ <https://artxchange.substack.com/p/why-metamodernism-isnt-yet-an-official>

²⁹ <https://samuelludford.medium.com/against-metamodernism-51be3cbb751>

³⁰ <https://mythonoesis.substack.com/p/some-concerns-with-metamodern-theory>

³¹ See Nealon, J. T. (2012). *Post-postmodernism: Or the cultural logic of just-in-time capitalism*. Stanford university press.

³² See Kirby, A. (2009). *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

³³ In addition to metamodernism, other emerging paradigms currently discussed in academic literature, and especially relevant to activism, affect, digitality, and post-neoliberal transitions are: *post-postmodernism* (McLaughlin, R., 2012; Nealon, J., 2012); *digimodernism* (Kirby, A., 2009); *altermodernism* (Bourriaud, N., 2009); *planetary-anthropocene thought* (Chakrabarty, D., 2009; Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016; Latour, B., 2017); *posthumanism / new-materialism* (Braidotti, R., 2013; Barad, K., 2007; Bennett, J., 2010); *regenerative paradigm-ontology* (Blaser, M., 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 2014; Escobar, A., 2018, 2020); *post-neoliberal / post-capitalist imaginaries* (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Srnicek & Williams, 2015); *accelerationism* (Noys, B., 2014; Bendell, J., 2023); *affective-turn* (Ahmed, S., 2004; Clough & Halley, 2007; Massumi, B., 2015).

A major controversy arises when metamodernism is used as a '*zeitgeist movement*', creating a divide between descriptive-academic theory and a normative-prescriptive approach³⁴. In academic settings, it functions as an analytical lens for identifying cultural expressions that sustain sincerity and reflexivity. Outside academic discourse, it has been adopted by thinkers³⁵ as a *civilizational political ideology* or *developmental model*, notably in the work associated with Hanzi Freinacht³⁶, who presents metamodernism as the foundation for a new political paradigm and societal transformation. Such programmatic formulations risk imposing the ideological closure that metamodernism seeks to avoid³⁷.

Ongoing academic efforts³⁸ continue to position metamodernism as a valuable theoretical approach and a productive framework within a constellation of paradigms interpreting societal transformation. In this paper, metamodernism is strictly academic-descriptive: '*structure of feeling*'³⁹ can be empirically mapped in activist visual cultures: structure of feeling in which people act as if meaning, progress, and ethical responsibility matter, while remaining aware of their fragility. Attempts to turn metamodernism into a fixed doctrine are viewed as theoretically inconsistent. This paper refers strictly to descriptive theoretical/academic metamodernism and does not endorse metamodernism as a prescriptive social, political, or *zeitgeist movement*⁴⁰.

³⁴ See <https://metamoderna.org/> and <https://www.brendangrahamdempsey.com/metamodern-spirituality-series>

³⁵ See Brendan Graham Dempsey and Hanzi Freinacht in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamodernism>

³⁶ See Freinacht, H. (2017). *The Listening Society: A Metamodern Guide to Politics, Book One*. Metamoderna ApS. and Freinacht, H. (2021). *Nordic Ideology: A Metamodern Guide to Politics, Book Two*. Metamoderna ApS.

³⁷ See <https://portalsofperception.org/portals/normalizing-the-extraordinary-in-the-metamodern-god-lab-with-layman-pascal-and-brendan-graham-dempsey/>

³⁸ An example is the work from Linda C. Ceriello and Timotheus Vermeulen with the call for proposals and book series editions on metamodernism, here <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/series/studies-in-metamodernism-theory-and-criticism-across-the-disciplines/> or the AHRC Metamodernism Research Network <https://ahrc-metamodernism.co.uk/>

³⁹ See Bachmann-Medick, D., & Tygstrup, F. (Eds.). (2015). *Structures of feeling: Affectivity and the study of culture*. De Gruyter.

⁴⁰ Examples of metamodernism as a prescriptive social movement: <https://metamoderna.org/>, <https://www.brendangrahamdempsey.com/>; <https://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Metamodernism>

3. Metamodernism and Social Movements: From Networks to Cultural-Affective Dynamics

Applied to social movements, metamodernism illuminates how activists navigate tensions between critique and construction, pragmatism and utopianism, local action and planetary imaginaries. Movements such as TN, GEN, and XR simultaneously critique dominant socio-economic systems and experiment with alternative modes of organizing and relating. They operate as both political actors and cultural producers.

The metamodern oscillatory dynamic is evident in their integration of systemic change narratives with practical, place-based interventions; in their use of irony alongside moral urgency; and in the centrality of inner transformation within collective action. These features challenge linear models of mobilization, suggesting that activism operates as a form of cultural performance as much as political strategy. Metamodernism also aligns with relational and regenerative ontologies in political ecology. Escobar et al. (2024) argue for an emergent politics of relationality that transcends human exceptionalism and instrumental rationality. Metamodern activism enacts this shift through regenerative ethos and affective practices (Rowe & Ormond, 2023).

Applying this lens shifts analytical attention from organizational forms and patterns of connectivity toward cultural and affective orientations. Network and relational approaches have been central to social movement research, illuminating processes of recruitment, interorganizational relations, resource circulation, and collective action (Diani & McAdam, 2003), while Castells (1996, 2015) emphasizes the role of networked communication and digitally mediated forms of mobilization. . Research on digital and hybrid activism has further examined how new technologies reconfigure cultural practices and political participation (Kirby, 2009; Turner, 2008), how activists combine online and offline spaces and develop new aesthetics and discourses of resistance (Vlavo, 2017), and how movements generate alternative forms of participation, solidarity, and transnational engagement (Pleyers, 2010; Zajak et al., 2020). While these approaches illuminate important dimensions of contemporary activism, the metamodern lens developed in this study complements them by asking how movements sustain engagement through affective repertoires, aesthetic practices, and utopian aspirations alongside pragmatic experimentation. . By foregrounding oscillatory sensibilities, it draws attention to how activists navigate contradiction and uncertainty while holding critique and construction together. Metamodern sensibilities in social movements are therefore approached not as inconsistencies

to be resolved, but as patterned cultural dynamics through which contemporary activism can organize meaning, affect, and political engagement.

4. Methodology: from Affective Artefacts to the METAMOV-Beta analytical framework

This study employs Visual Grounded Theory (VGT), combining constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, K., 2014) with systematic visual analysis (Mey & Dietrich, 2016; Ridge, 2024). This choice reflects the premise that contemporary movements mobilise not only through discourse but through visual, affective, and aesthetic practices. Within visual sociology, images are treated as primary social data that actively shape relations and cultural practices (Harper, D., 2012; Pauwels, L., 2015; Rose, G., 2016).

Visual artefacts - protest signs, campaign imagery, digital graphics, and memes - function as mediators of collective action, enabling movements to communicate complex messages across cultural boundaries (Doerr & Milman, 2014; Doerr & Teune, 2022). In digital contexts, these images play a crucial role in translating local struggles into broader transformative imaginaries (Doerr, N.M., 2024). VGT allows these visual compositions to serve as primary sources for theoretical development through iterative coding and comparison (Mey & Dietrich, 2016).

VGT is particularly suited for identifying metamodern sensibilities, which are frequently articulated through aesthetic forms⁴¹, symbolic⁴², practices, and affective⁴³ or visual⁴⁴ communication (Akker et al., 2017) rather than explicit discourse. Rather than treating images as illustrative supplements, this approach conceptualises visual materials as active sites of meaning production that shape political interpretation and collective identity (Crilley et al., 2020).

4.1 Data Corpus and Case Selection

The empirical material consists of multimodal artefacts from the Transition Network (TN), Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), and Extinction Rebellion (XR) between 2018 and 2025. The corpus includes campaign posters, newsletters, social media visuals, digital graphics, memes, and other

⁴¹ <https://medium.com/what-is-metamodern/after-postmodernism-eleven-metamodern-methods-in-the-arts-767f7b646cae>

⁴² <https://whatismetamodern.com/film/barbie-movie-gerwig-metamodern/>

⁴³ <https://whatismetamodern.com/music/charli-xcx-brat-summer-metamodern-kamala/>

⁴⁴ <https://dailytargum.com/article/johnson-rise-of-metamodern-films-20241007> and <https://www.thomasflight.com/metamodernism-at-the-movies/>

publicly circulated symbolic artefacts, as a representative sample of the dataset⁴⁵. These three cases were selected because they share a socio-ecological orientation, a regenerative ethos and operate through hybrid TLNs, while differing in organizational form, communicative practices, and movement repertoires. They also share an explicit engagement with deep cultural and systemic change, employing imaginative practices and tools to challenge established ways of thinking, unblock collective imaginaries, and envision alternative forms of social and ecological life. This combination provides analytical variation for exploring whether metamodern sensibilities can be identified across distinct forms of networked activism.

As this study constitutes a preliminary methodological pilot, the corpus was intentionally limited rather than designed to achieve statistical representativeness or exhaustive coverage of the movements. A small, information-rich sample was selected purposively to enable close visual and affective analysis and to support the iterative development and testing of *METAMOV-Beta*. Selection focused on artefacts that provided substantive evidence of movement meaning-making, including representations of socio-ecological transformation, collective identity, affect, relationality, regenerative imaginaries, and tensions between critique and construction. The corpus therefore functions as an exploratory analytical sample through which the empirical visibility and utility of the framework can be assessed, rather than as a comprehensive dataset from which claims about the prevalence of metamodern sensibilities across the three movements are made.

⁴⁵ A subsequent study will apply the *METAMOV-Beta* framework to a comprehensive visual-text dataset and primary/secondary empirical data [2022-2026], thereby consolidating and contributing to metamodernism theory in new fields, particularly hybrid and networked social movements. The in-depth exploration will be conducted through a series of iterative visual coding processes, thematic clustering, and abductive engagement with metamodernism theory. It is posited that, through this process, recurring patterns of oscillation, affective hybridity, and regenerative imaginaries will be consolidated into the *METAMOV-Beta* framework.



Figure 1 - Example of imagery identity and official logos across XR (left), TN (centre) and GEN (right).

4.2 Affective Artefacts and Analytical Orientation

Following Piredda (2020), visual materials are conceptualised as '*affective artefacts*' - objects that mediate emotional experience and belonging connecting bodies, imaginaries, technologies, and environments, enabling the circulation of feelings such as hope, grief, urgency, and care. This aligns with new materialist approaches where meaning-making is distributed across human and non-human elements (Bennett, J., 2010; Fox & Alldred, 2016) and regenerative political ecology (Esteves, A., 2022; Escobar et al., 2024). The aim is to analyse the 'affective artifacts' within the visual dataset sample and also observe their composition, colour, symbolism, repetition, circulation, comparison among the TLNs and contextual use within movement practices.



Figure 2 - Example of affective (visual) artifacts across XR (left), TN (centre) and GEN (right).

4.3 Analytical Procedure: From Coding to Framework Construction

The analytical process followed three iterative phases: (a) **Open visual coding**: Visual artefacts were examined for recurring motifs, practices, affective qualities, symbolic patterns, and tensions, generating provisional codes such as “playful urgency” and “pragmatic utopianism”; (b) **Focused coding**: Initial codes were compared and grouped into higher-order patterns, particularly recurring forms of oscillation, affective hybridity, and tensions between seemingly contradictory orientations; © **Abductive⁴⁶ refinement**: Where recurring or theoretically puzzling

⁴⁶ *Abductive* is used here in the grounded-theory sense of iterative theoretical inference rather than as a formal coding stage of VGT. Following Charmaz (2014) and Timmermans & Tavory (2012), abductive reasoning involves moving between empirical observations and theoretical possibilities, particularly when intriguing or unexpected patterns prompt new interpretations that are subsequently examined against the data. In this study, abduction describes the inferential movement through which recurring visual patterns were related to, and used to refine, the emerging metamodern categories.

patterns could not be adequately accounted for by initial codes, the analysis moved iteratively between empirical material and metamodernism theory. These observations generated provisional theoretical interpretations, which were then returned to the visual material for comparison, refinement, and qualification. This abductive movement informed the consolidation of the empirical patterns into the experimental evidence markers of *METAMOV-Beta*.

4.4 The *METAMOV-Beta* Framework: A Heuristic Prototype

The *METAMOV-Beta* is a preliminary version of the Metamodern Social Movement Analysis Framework developed by the lead author⁴⁷ as part of ongoing doctoral research. Building on the iterative coding and abductive refinement process of VGT, the framework translates recurring visual, affective, and symbolic patterns identified in the corpus into a set of experimental evidence markers for identifying metamodern sensibilities in networked activism.

This pilot application tests the framework's analytical sensitivity before its further refinement and deployment in a larger longitudinal study [2022–2026]. The initial evidence markers were derived through an iterative dialogue between the metamodernism literature and the visual analysis of the empirical corpus, capturing the following sensibilities:

1. Oscillation between critique/construction, grief/hope, irony/sincerity, pragmatism/uncertainty
2. Affective hybridity
3. Sincere but reflexive utopianism
4. Relational and regenerative imaginaries, with depth and interiority
5. Networking complexity with emergence and cultural co-production

In particular, the oscillatory pairings of critique/construction, grief/hope, irony/sincerity, and pragmatism/uncertainty were identified from recurring tensions and “Both/And” orientations emphasized in the foundational literature on metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, 2017) and subsequently used as sensitizing concepts during VGT coding. Their inclusion therefore reflects both theoretical grounding and empirical relevance to the patterns observed in the corpus. Rather than a final typology, *METAMOV-Beta* functions as a heuristic exploratory matrix comprising six experimental evidence markers, depicted in the following table (Table 1).

⁴⁷ See notes 1 and 8.

Table 1 - The METAMOV-Beta Framework - Pilot (Experimental Indicators)

<i>Evidence markers</i>					
Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3	Evidence 4	Evidence 5	Evidence 6
SINCERE- IRONIC ENGAGEMENT	OSCILLATION BETWEEN IDEALISM & PRAGMATISM	INTERNET CULTURE + DEPTH	PERSONAL AS POLITICAL & REIMAGINED "LIFE AS A MOVIE"	AMBIVALENCE TOWARD GRAND NARRATIVES... YET USING THEM	DIGITAL- HYBRID DECENTRALIZATIO N and RELATIONALITY
<i>Preliminary Definition</i>					
Activists use humour, satire, playful protest while earnestly mobilizing desire for change	Movements dream of systemic transformation while acknowledging limitations and contradictions	Memes and digital visuals carry affective depth, critique, narrative, even pedagogy	Personal vulnerability and self-transformation are framed as legitimate political acts with reflexive awareness	Movements distrust 'solutions narratives' yet adopt planetary, holistic imaginaries) without ideological closure	Organizing is emergent, network-like, <i>rhizomatic</i> ⁴⁸ , neither centralized nor chaotic.
<i>Visual/Affective Indicators</i>					
Memes, "Ironesty," playful but moral protest imagery	Utopian horizons paired with "how-to" practical guides.	Multimodal storytelling, "depthiness" in social media posts.	"Life as a movie" narratives, self-transformation visuals	Relational symbols, rhizomatic ⁴⁹ metaphors, planetary ethics.	Decentralized aesthetics, hybrid online/offline visuals.

⁴⁸ *Rhizomatic* refers to a decentralized and non-hierarchical mode of organization characterized by multiple entry points, lateral connections, and emergent forms of coordination rather than a single centre or fixed hierarchy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The concept has also been applied to contemporary social movements to describe distributed, networked, and adaptive forms of mobilization (Funke, 2014; Varvarousis, 2020).

⁴⁹ See note 48.

4.5 Reflexivity and Methodological Limits

VGT is an interpretive and theory-generative approach that involves researcher positioning, reflexivity and analytical judgment. The analysis is shaped by the researcher's engagement with metamodernism theory and familiarity with socio-ecological and regenerative movements. Rather than adopting a neutral stance, the research employs *reflexivity as a methodological strength*, thereby elucidating the interpretive process. Simultaneously, this approach does not aspire to representativeness or causal explanation. It emphasizes depth, pattern recognition, and conceptual innovation to generate theory based on the empirical data. As this is a preliminary and interpretive-based study, the METAMOV-*Beta* framework is treated here as a provisional analytical contribution, open to refinement and testing in future empirical contexts. The results of this pilot run will inform the final iteration of the framework, ensuring its robustness across diverse socio-ecological contexts.

5. Preliminary Findings: Metamodern Sensibilities in Translocal Social Movements

The pilot application of the METAMOV-*Beta* framework (Tables 1 and 2) indicates that TN, GEN, and XR consistently enact metamodern sensibilities through oscillatory repertoires that hold contradictory orientations together, distinguishing these practices from other movements and resistance aesthetics based on critique by framing contradiction as an ongoing mode of political and affective engagement. The visual materials analyzed reveal a distinct '*structure of feeling*' where urgency coexists with hope, and irony with sincerity. Hybrid repertoires, affective rituals and shared practices, visual imagery and symbolism - function as infrastructures of meaning that sustain participation in conditions of uncertainty and crisis. Rather than a final categorization, these findings serve as preliminary evidence of the framework's capacity to map affective and oscillatory repertoires.

Table 2 – Preliminary Findings: Testing the METAMOV-Beta Framework (preliminary version)

<i>Evidence markers</i>					
Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3	Evidence 4	Evidence 5	Evidence 6
SINCERE- IRONIC ENGAGEMENT	OSCILLATION BETWEEN IDEALISM & PRAGMATISM	INTERNET CULTURE + DEPTH	PERSONAL AS POLITICAL & REIMAGINED "LIFE AS A MOVIE"	AMBIVALENCE TOWARD GRAND NARRATIVES... YET USING THEM	DIGITAL- HYBRID DECENTRALIZATIO N and RELATIONALITY
<i>Observed Metamodern Dynamics (Pilot phase)</i>					
Humour used to invite emotional integration, not detachment.	Holding utopian horizons while navigating daily constraints.	Memes and digital visuals used for moral seriousness and pedagogical depth.	Vulnerability, self as political, and "life as a movie" as mobilization strategies.	Adopting holistic imaginaries (regeneration) without dogmatism.	Emergent, rhizomatic ⁵⁰ organizing (neither hierarchical nor chaotic).
<i>Representative Examples (TN, GEN, XR)</i>					
XR's "pink boats"; satirical signs with deep moral messages	GEN's planetary vision paired with "sun-to- sun" off-grid approach	Collapse imagery in XR; TN's "optimistic- futures" digital visuals	Public debriefings of grief; social media as a site of self- reflexive action, change- maker as political agency	Relational ontologies; "planetary interbeing" vs. rigid ideologies	XR/GEN/TN hubs as organic, non- linear ecosystems

⁵⁰ See note 48.

6. Analysis of the Preliminary Findings

The following analysis (Table 3) reflects the exploratory performance of the METAMOV-Beta framework in interpreting the cultural logic of socio-ecological movements.

Table 3 – Preliminary Findings: Analysis

Finding	Observation
Oscillation Between Critique and Construction	A recurring pattern identified by the pilot framework is the oscillation between systemic critique and constructive experimentation. XR juxtaposes images of collapse with "regenerative culture" rituals. This dynamic does not seek a final synthesis; instead, it sustains the tension as a productive condition for action. This "Both/And" orientation suggests that these movements operate beyond the modern/postmodern binary.
Affective Hybridity	The METAMOV-Beta markers successfully captured a hybrid affective repertoire where conventionally oppositional emotions (grief/hope, urgency/care) coexist. This hybridity functions as a "cultural infrastructure. In this preliminary stage, we observe that affect is not just a resource for mobilization, but a stabilizing force that allows activists to navigate a prolonged multi-crisis without exiting the movement.
Reflexive Utopianism and Sincere Irony	The analysis confirms the presence of reflexive utopianism, where radical futures are proposed while acknowledging their fragility. This is frequently performed through 'ironesty' ⁵¹ (Dember, G., 2024) - a blend of sincerity and reflexivity. The juxtaposition of humour and moral seriousness avoids both naive idealism and postmodern cynicism, a pattern particularly visible in XR's protest aesthetics.
Relational and Regenerative Imaginaries	The findings highlight a shift toward relational ontologies. By framing activism as a process of "reconstruction" (regeneration) rather than just "deconstruction" (critique), these movements move beyond the postmodern ethos. This indicates that metamodernism provides a bridge to political ecology, positioning movements as sites of ontological experimentation.

⁵¹ See Dember, G. (2024). *Say Hello to Metamodernism!: Understanding Today's Culture of Ironesty, Felt Experience, and Empathic Reflexivity*. Exact Rush Multimedia Publishing.

7. Discussion: Validating the METAMOV-Beta Lens

The findings demonstrate that the METAMOV-Beta framework offers a valuable lens for interpreting contemporary activism beyond social movement network analysis, framing it as a cultural, metamodern, and affective dynamics. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics cannot be achieved through analytical frameworks that prioritize organizational structure, communication mechanisms, or strategic framing as the primary units of analysis. By foregrounding the affective dimension, this pilot version successfully navigated the contradictions of prefigurative politics without falling into analytical paralysis. Metamodernism thus provides a critical framework for addressing this gap in contemporary social movement research.

While social movement theories focused on contention or repertoires and network-based models illuminate decentralization and digital strategies, they offer limited insight into how movements sustain meaning, affective, and cultural engagement in contexts of acute uncertainty and ecological crisis. For the specific analytical purpose pursued here, a metamodern perspective foregrounds the affective and sensory dimensions, through which actors are oriented toward collective engagement and prospective futures. . The oscillatory dynamics identified in the analysis constitute a cultural logic through which movements navigate contradiction without paralysis and emptiness⁵². This logic does not replace networked organization but operates in conjunction with it, shaping the affective and symbolic conditions under which translocal social movements sustain engagement and orient themselves toward alternative futures.

Importantly, activism perceived through a metamodernism lens reframes prefigurative politics. Rather than treating prefiguration solely as the alignment of means and ends, the analysis highlights the emotional and aesthetic resources required to inhabit ‘unfinished futures’. Oscillation functions as a mode of resilience and a *productive tension* for co-creation and emergence, allowing activists to act without certainty, to care without guarantees, and to hope without denial.

From a political ecology perspective, these dynamics respond to ontological crises. As extractivist and (post)modernist narratives lose credibility, movements experiment with relational and regenerative ways of becoming/belonging, enacted through affective

⁵² Characteristics of postmodernism.

engagement⁵³ and self *as if* collective and political expression. The integration of affect, visual symbolism, and relationality represents a significant advancement in social movement theory, contributing to a more culturally and materially attuned understanding of political mobilization. In this study, metamodernism provides a conceptual approach that connects cultural sociology and political ecology, thereby illuminating how ontological shifts are experienced and enacted within these activist movements. Notably, it aligns with recent advancements in new materialism and political ecology⁵⁴. However, as an exploratory study, the performance of METAMOV-Beta also highlights areas for further refinement. While the six evidence markers effectively identified oscillatory patterns, the depth of ‘interiority’ narratives suggests that the framework’s final iteration should incorporate more nuanced ethnographic layers. This test-run confirms that a metamodern lens is not only theoretically sound but empirically operationalizable for socio-ecological movements

8. Limitations and Challenges

As this study is preliminary, exploratory and interpretive-based⁵⁵, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent to the research. Firstly, the analysis is primarily based on publicly available visual and narrative materials. While these artefacts play a pivotal role in the realm of movement communication and identity, they are not entirely effective in capturing the full complexity of internal deliberations, power dynamics, and the lived experiences of their members. A methodological and subjective challenge is also inherent in the analysis of affect and aesthetics. Interpretation is inevitably shaped by the researchers' positionality and cultural literacy, albeit reflexivity is recognized as a fundamental component of VGT, rather than a supplementary feature.

International and translocal studies, especially those concerning networks, have a degree of representativeness but also of inaccuracy. International networks represent their members to a certain extent, and similarly, research on TLNs and movements may conclude with generalized assumptions that may not be reflective of or experienced locally by their members.

⁵³ In this paper tracked as affective artefacts and well documented by visual-text materials and practices across the three movements studied.

⁵⁴ See Escobar, A., Osterweil, M., Sharma, K., Dilnot, C., Staszowski, E., & Tassinari, V. (2024). *Relationality: An Emergent Politics of Life Beyond the Human*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts. and Fox, N., & Alldred, P. (2016). *Sociology and the New Materialism (intro)*. SAGE Publications.

⁵⁵ Positionality of the researcher(s) using visual grounded theory as a method where reflexivity and subjectivity play a central role.

VGT prioritizes interpretive depth over representativeness. The *METAMOV-Beta* framework is not intended to serve as a definitive typology of TLNs and social movements; rather, it is conceived as a preliminary heuristic instrument developed through specific cases as a first exploration of metamodernism in social movements. It was not designed to solve the inherent challenges/dilemmas of those movements. Its applicability to other cases and TLN social movements are crucial, particularly outside socio-ecological or regenerative hybrid and networking contexts, which remains an open empirical inquiry.

Metamodernism itself is both evolving in academic terms and a contested concept (see end of section 2). While this approach has proven to be analytically constructive, it carries the potential to become excessively elusive if it is not meticulously anchored in empirical evidence. The present preliminary study mitigates the risk by operationalizing metamodernism through concrete visual and affective indicators within a representative dataset or empirical materials. Further refinement and testing are necessary and may involve the integration of ethnographic and participatory methodologies.

Finally, not less important, is the fact that metamodernism is only one among several emergent paradigms⁵⁶ attempting to interpret contemporary cultural shifts and transformations in social movements.

Conclusion

This preliminary research introduces metamodernism as a cultural-analytical framework capable of capturing oscillation, affect, and regenerative imaginaries beyond the scope of traditional network analysis. The paper makes a two-fold contribution: it provides a metamodern reading of TN, GEN, and XR, and it successfully piloted the *METAMOV-Beta* framework. The results validate the framework as a robust tool for analyzing the cultural and affective dimensions of TLNs. As a preliminary study, it establishes the foundation for a more comprehensive iteration of the *METAMOV-Beta* model⁵⁷.

By treating visual and affective artefacts as primary data, the framework provides a transferable approach for the analysis of movement cultures across diverse contexts. Furthermore, the study contributes to interdisciplinary research by bridging metamodernism, political ecology, and social movement studies, demonstrating how relational imaginaries are performed materially and affectively. This suggests that ontological shifts are not only theorised

⁵⁶ See end of Section 2 and note 33.

⁵⁷ See note 1 and 8.

but also performed in material and affective ways through movement practices. Consequently, the paper contributes substantially to the development of metamodernism theory.

Future research will focus on expanding this *METAMOV-Beta* version into a definitive analytical framework, combining visual and textual primary materials, and integrating larger datasets to solidify its theoretical and empirical scope. Future applications should include testing the framework across other translocal domains, including, but not limited to, feminist and decolonial movements. Longitudinal research could examine how metamodern sensibilities evolve in response to political shifts, while ethnographic and participatory methodologies could further enhance our understanding of embodied and affective dynamics that extend beyond the realm of text and visual artefacts.

In conclusion, this paper argues that contemporary translocal movements enact a distinct cultural logic characterized by metamodern oscillation, affective hybridity, and reflexive utopianism. The visual analysis of TN, GEN, and XR has demonstrated that activism is performed not only through networks and strategies, as well as through affective, hybrid, and aesthetic practices that sustain engagement in conditions of uncertainty. The *METAMOV-Beta* framework, which is introduced in the paper, makes both a conceptual and methodological contribution to metamodernism and social movement studies, extending analysis beyond organizational models and providing a more nuanced understanding of cultural orientation and affective dimensions. This approach positions metamodern activism as a crucial lens for comprehending political action in a period characterized by ecological crises, ontological instability, and contested futures.

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