

**THE AESTHETICS OF NARRATION: A METAMODERN ANALYSIS OF BO
BURNHAM'S TELEVISION SPECIAL *BO BURNHAM: INSIDE***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project entitled “The Aesthetics of Narration: A Metamodern Analysis of Bo Burnham’s Television Special *Bo Burnham: Inside*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Maria Theresa Chakkunny, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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CERIFICATE

I hereby declare that this project entitled “The Aesthetics of Narration: A Metamodern Analysis of Bo Burnham’s Television Special *Bo Burnham: Inside*” by Andrea Maria Abru is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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Introduction

Welcome to the internet,

What would you prefer?

Would you like to fight for civil rights or tweet a racial slur?

Be happy,

Be horny,

Be bursting with rage,

We got a million different ways to engage! (*Bo Burnham:*

Inside 00:57:03 - 00:57:18)

Music has always been an important part of human existence, and just like humans and human societies, it has drastically evolved from what it used to signify and represent. Not only does it communicate ideas and serve as a medium of expression, it also helps in providing relief to listeners. In this era of the internet or post-truth, where information, be it credible or untrustworthy, is right at your fingertips, people are presented with a plethora of ways to express themselves like metamodernist creations such as fanfiction, remixes, memes, blogging and vlogging, apart from the historically common ways of expressing themselves through printed books and spoken word. Humans have the need for intellectual stimulation, and these various mediums of expression have catered to letting their thoughts flow as well as in communicating messages in interesting ways. Music is also an integral part of politics and

dissent, and with the advent of the internet, all sorts of music from various cultures have become accessible to everyone with access to the internet.

Various cultural movements have contributed to the emergence of new genres, like Jazz from the African-American communities of New Orleans, and Hip-Hop is another genre that has emerged from the Jazz genre. Furthermore, as technology develops, new sounds and frequencies are made easier to produce, which lead to the development of the Electronic Dance Music and Dubstep genres. For millennia, music has helped communities grow and communicate ideas, and in the 21st century, the content and melodies of music can be analysed from a metamodern perspective.

American musical comedian Bo Burnham has used music to communicate humour and pathos through his work, ever since he began posting videos on YouTube in 2006. As a white male who grew up in a predominantly white suburb, the content of his comedy has drastically changed, and the internet has contributed to his current sense of sensitivity to topics that weren't addressed or a part of his community, which he lacked when he was younger.

The aftermath of the popularisation of picture and video sharing apps such as Instagram and TikTok entails the deterioration of attention spans, with people excessively consuming media that ranges between 10-15 seconds at the most, regularly. A lot of the bits and pieces of the songs of this film have been popularised through these apps, not only because of its relevance but also because of its appealing music production— the latter arguably plays a greater role in these audio clips going viral.

This project attempts to analyse some of the metamodern elements of the film *Inside: Bo Burnham* and prove that music has, in fact, become a new tool for intellectual discussion and examines how people take notice and pay attention to music that becomes a global phenomenon, with the rise of the internet.

Chapter One outlines the theories of metamodernism and concepts that are commonly found in work associated with the post-postmodern age, such as *Inside: Bo Burnham*. Chapter Two sketches the summary of the television special and Chapter Three analyses the film co-relating the theories discussed in Chapter One to analyse and prove that music, in this day and age, is a vital tool to create discourse with the help of various platforms on the internet.

Written, directed, filmed, performed and edited by Robert Pickering “Bo” Burnham, *Inside: Bo Burnham* is a 2021 special that features a diverse range of songs and sketches about his life indoors during the pandemic, and arguably so, is essentially a documentation of his deteriorating mental health. Mental health during the pandemic was a topic of grave concern as global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25% during the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organisation). Apart from this, he explores themes of performativity and his relationship with the Internet and his audience, while also addressing various social movements and phenomena, and topics such as climate change. Other segments portray and discuss activities such as Instagram posts of a certain demographic, Facetiming one’s mother, live streaming video and sexting. This special received critical acclaim for its music, meta-commentary and comedic bits, and won various accolades such as Emmy Awards and a Peabody award.

Chapter 1

Understanding Metamodernism

“If you wake up in a house that’s full of smoke, don’t panic, call me and I’ll tell you a joke.” - Burnham, *Bo Burnham: Inside*

Different forms of media, such as print and broadcast media, have played an integral role in shaping human perception and judgement. With the advent of the internet, these distinct media technologies and platforms have merged together through digitization and computer networking, a phenomenon termed media convergence or technological convergence (Gasher).

It also gave rise to ‘New Media’, commonly known as Web 2.0, which includes communication tools related to the web such as online social media platforms, wikis, virtual worlds, blogs and other such forums (“New Media”). Metamodernism refers to the range of developments observed in areas of art, culture and philosophy as a result of the drastic changes of the twenty-first century. To understand metamodernism, one must have a rough understanding of modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism.

Modernism is a prominent philosophical and artistic movement that arose in the late nineteenth century out of the philosophical, political, scientific and ideological shifts that followed the Industrial Revolution, and reached its peak on the eve of the first World War. This movement reflected a desire for the creation of new forms of philosophy, social organisation and art which encouraged people to leave behind the obsolete culture of the past and rejected the ideology of realism.

Often associated with the Age of Radio and Ezra Pound’s injunction, “Make it new”, the movement evolved from the rejection of Enlightenment

positivism and faith in reason, and broke off from the peculiarities of the Romantic period (Cunff; Bledsoe and Matthew). It became self-conscious and began questioning language and its coherence. In other words, modernism is a movement that rejected the Victorian standards of how art should be made and consumed, and what it should mean.

Postmodernism is a critique of metanarratives of modernism, as it masks the contradictions inherent in any social organisation or practise. It is a discourse that entails several disciplines of study such as art, architecture, fashion, sociology and literature, characterised by rejection and intermixing of boundaries between low and high art using pastiche, parody, fragmentation, ambiguity, among other tools. It dismissed the claims that facts are objective since knowledge is conditional. Associated with Deconstruction and Poststructuralism and the Age of the Television, it arose in tandem with the power shifts and dehumanisation experienced by people with the advent of consumer capitalism post the Second World War (Cunff). Postmodernism is characterised by self-reference, pluralism, irony, epistemological relativism, moral relativism and eclecticism.

What follows the age of postmodernism, or rather is emerging and reacting to postmodernism, is post-postmodernism, which is a wide-ranging set of developments in philosophy, critical theory, art, literature, culture and architecture (Duignan). Metamodernism is one of the many attempts at describing post-postmodernism. The term “metamodernism” was first employed by the Dutch scholars Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their essay titled “Notes on Metamodernism” in the *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* in 2010.

It combines elements from both modernism and postmodernism to express and explain a variety of mindsets, practices, forms and genres of the twenty-first century (Kadagishvili 559). It is serious, sincere, it oscillates from one polarity to another between diametrically opposed ideas, like enthusiasm and irony, naivety and knowingness, totality and fragmentation, bright and plain and so on, whereas Postmodernism is playful, insincere, unsteady and ironic (Kadagishvili 561).

Associated with the Age of the Internet, its main philosophy is about accepting and embracing the polarising nature of human beings (Cunff). Metamodernism is described as the new artistic sensibility that oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity (Vermeulen and van den Akker).

According to Greg Dember and Linda Ceriello, the essence of metamodernism is a conscious or unconscious motivation to protect the solidity of the felt experience, as opposed to the scientific reductionism of the modernist perspective and the ironic detachment of the postmodern sensibilities (Dember and Ceriello). He proposed a list of eleven non-exhaustive methods that appear frequently in metamodern work; hyper-self-reflexivity, the narrative double frame (Eshelman's performatism), oscillation between opposites, quirky, the tiny (metamodern minimalism), the epic (metamodern maximalism), constructive pastiche, ironesty, normcore, overprojection (anthropomorphizing), and Meta-Cute.

Hyper-self-reflexivity refers to the idea of self-referentiality taken to an extreme, where a system is not just self-referential, but also self-referential about its own self-referentiality. It is a concept in media and communication studies that describes a phenomenon wherein the media becomes aware of its own presence, structure, and operation, while critically reflecting on them. It is often used to describe postmodern media forms, where the distinction between media and reality is blurred, and the media becomes self-conscious of its own construction and representation of reality (Dember and Ceriello).

Metamodernism inherits self-reflexivity from postmodernism, but it adapts to the purpose of affirming the felt experience. If the “self” being reflected upon in a metamodern work is the work’s author, the result is a highlighting of the author’s own lived, inner experience. In this case, the author’s own self-reflection provides a model for the reader’s self-reflection, and by extension, the reader’s own felt experience.

For example, *I’m Still Here* (2010) is a mockumentary directed by Casey Affleck starring Joaquin Phoenix as himself. It follows him as he announces his retirement from acting through his transformation in the public eye from actor to a hip hop artist. Throughout the filming of the mockumentary, Phoenix remained in character for several public appearances, giving most of the public the impression that he was genuinely quitting acting. The film can be seen and interpreted as a person’s fierce battle to defend their sense of self. Other examples include Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s British comedy-drama television series *Fleabag*, where the main character’s life is constructed through a narrative lens, with the unnamed protagonist, referred to as ‘Fleabag’,

constantly breaking the fourth wall as a means of breaking down her inner world (Antunes).

In his essay titled “Performatism, or the end of Postmodernism” (2000), Raoul Eshelman argued that some literary works have escaped the confines of postmodernist irony and scepticism by creating narratives built on nested ‘double frames’ (Eshelman). In Eshelman’s double frame, the outer frame is a story imbued with fantasy elements, with its own rules about how the world functions. The reader, or audience, is left with no choice but to engage and commit to that fantasy reality. The inner frame consists of the characters and their emotions, so the consumers of the work are free to engage with the inner frame’s emotional content ‘unironically’ due to the outer frame’s fantasy element drawing a boundary that distinguishes the narrative from our reality. Yann Martel’s award winning novel *Life of Pi* (2001) is an example of the concept of the double frame, as the protagonist, Piscine Molitor Patel, narrates two stories of surviving a shipwreck, one of which is an elaborate and obvious lie and the other which is the cold ugly truth. The narrative coerces us into believing the former story as it's more elaborate with its elements beautifully woven together.

Oscillation between opposites refers to the fluctuation between modern and postmodern cultural modes and values. In this context, oscillation refers to the back-and-forth movement between two opposing poles or perspectives, such as irony and sincerity, individualism and collectivism, among other factors, in such a way that both the oppositional factors are engaged with, without cancelling each other out or lingering at the average. It revives the positivist aspects of modernism while retaining the postmodern awareness of context and

irony. The idea is that rather than being fixed in one mode, individuals and society move fluidly between these poles, alternating between different modes of thinking and being. This allows for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the world. It is characterised by a desire for both sincerity and irony, hope and scepticism, and tradition and innovation (Vermeulen and van den Akker).

The term “quirky” emerged within the frameworks of film criticism and is often applied to work with similar characteristics such as music, literature, television and other media. As elaborated in James McDowell’s “Notes on Quirky”, the quirky can be seen as a sort of double frame that encloses a particular character instead of a narrative, with the outer frame being the character’s eccentricities which reveal something outside the norms, giving the consumers access to a kind of vulnerability as it prevents irony from dissolving the character’s emotional truth or felt experience (MacDowell). It breaks free from the schisms of irony and earnestness with the help of the double frame of eccentricity.

The sitcom *New Girl* (2011-18) revolves around a group of roommates and their friends in Los Angeles, and deals with the problems faced by the characters pertaining to their age, relationships and careers. The main characters each have their own eccentricities— Jess is an awkward and enthusiastic girly girl, Nick is an intelligent and witty bartender who dropped out of law school, Schmidt is obsessed over his social standing and views Jess as a personal project, and Winston is a competitive former athlete who moves into the loft after he gives up on becoming a professional, and Cece, Jess’s best friend who

is a driven and realistic extrovert. These friends learn to cope with, and sometimes revel in each other's eccentricities.

“The Tiny” or metamodern minimalism inherits minimalism as a method from both modernism and postmodernism. “Minimalism” is a term coined to encompass the movements in both classic music and visual arts that emerged after World War II at the onset of the postmodern period. As a general term, it is used to describe small and simple aesthetics, stripped off of ornateness or clutter. Modernist work employs minimalism in order to reveal the underlying structures of things, and postmodern work employs minimalism to undercut modernism's penchant for grand narratives and its tendency to preach novelty, excessiveness and all things grand, metamodern art uses minimalism to create vulnerability and intimacy, bringing the reader of a work closer to the felt experience expressed in the work.

The mumblecore subgenre of independent films uses low-budget film production which focuses on the personal relationships between characters, by giving more emphasis to dialogues rather than the plot. *Frances Ha* is one such film directed by Noah Baumbach and written by Baumbach and his partner, filmmaker and actor Greta Gerwig. The film revolves around the life of Frances Halladay, a twenty-seven-year-old dancer who struggles with finding stability and reaching for her dreams as the people around her begin to settle down. The black and white comedy drama was shot using a Canon EOS 5D Mark II, which is primarily used in photography and as they didn't spend too much on crews and sets, they could afford to shoot a few scenes in Paris.

“The Epic” refers to the rebellion against postmodernist tendencies to shame grandeur and unabashed self-expression, such as extravagant

performances, lush musical arrangements, embrace of technology without caution, over-the-top sexuality, excesses that don't stop at just being provocative, but engage grandiose, hero-filled storytelling. Metamodernism, unlike postmodernism, doesn't lead towards randomness and destructive anarchy, but rather it aids in storytelling, and hence it is a version of maximalism. Metamodern work may feature both the tiny and the epic, side-by-side in the same work, and that in and of itself is an example of oscillation. The Flaming Lips is a psychedelic rock band from Oklahoma that centres their performances around maximalism. Their concerts involve huge unique set designs and grand special effects unlike regular performances.



Fig 1. P Squared. The Flaming Lips announce 2021-2022 tour, talk Space

Bubble Concerts on CBS. Written by Amanda Hatfield.

www.brooklynvegan.com, 3 May 2021.

Pastiche is a work of visual art, literature, theatre and music, which involves juxtaposing seemingly disparate elements from historically separated genres and cultures. It imitates the style or character of the work of one or more artists and in doing so, it pays homage to the original work, unlike parody.

Under postmodernism, pastiche was dissociative as juxtaposed elements that would result in amusingly absurd art, in order to call into question the unexamined premise of each work. In the context of metamodernism, constructive pastiche is employed to build a space inhabited by a felt experience that is not at home in either element or its own. This acts as a bridge for various cultural combinations which are normally separated by conventional divisions. An example of this can be seen in the second season of Sam Levinson's American teen drama *Euphoria*. In the opening scene of the fourth episode, the main characters, Rue and Jules, are seen recreating famous paintings and film scenes that depict lovers. This recreation is not a part of the plot, rather the creator's way of conveying their blossoming romance.





Fig 2. Sam Levinson. “You Who Cannot See, Think of Those Can”. *Euphoria*,
 Season 2, Episode 4. 30 Jan. 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ-OUI813Xk.

"Ironesty" is a portmanteau of irony and honesty, and involves using irony and self-awareness to challenge and deconstruct traditional values and beliefs while also being sincere and authentic in one's expression. It is a way of navigating the complexities and contradictions of contemporary society while remaining open to the possibility of progress and transformation. In other words, ironesty is irony/sarcasm/sardonicism/snark employed in the service of making an earnest point, or expressing a heart-felt emotion (Dember and Ceriello). On a similar note, Bo Burnham's YouTube videos and stand up specials employ a lot of ironesty, which is what he's popular for.

Normcore refers to the deliberate efforts by people to make the conscious choice to opt for indistinguishable clothing, going for the most “normal” look possible. Normcore allows people to “hide”, that is, to exist within a neutral identity, poised to jump freely into any subcultural scene, or to “hang out and groove” in the mainstream. According to Linda Ceriello and Greg Dember, the prioritisation of the emotional desire to connect with potentially anybody over the intellectual agenda of defining cultural categories through fashion choices is a metamodernist motivation. Ellen DeGeneres and Jimmy Kimmel, who are both comedians and television talk-show hosts, are some examples of people who dress normcore. Both Kimmel and DeGeneres wear suits because that’s what talk-show hosts ‘normally’ wear (Dember and Ceriello).

Overprojection or anthropomorphizing refers to the tendency of humans to attribute human qualities, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities, such as animals, objects, or abstract concepts. This helps in portraying inner, felt experiences to the point where it imbues itself in non-human entities. Characters like the Volkswagen Beetle car from the *Herbie* film series, and the characters of the Wes Anderson film and Roald Dahl's book *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* are some examples.

Meta-cuteness refers to the things that evoke a sense of childlike innocence and simplicity, but its target audience is adults. It tries to puncture modernist over-seriousness in a way that is kind and not snarky. Meta-cuteness tends to overlap with overprojection and quirky. Examples include usage of the glockenspiel, which is predominantly used in music made for children, in music who’s target audience are adults, such as Remi Wolfe, Clairo and Beabadoobee,

vocals of children in the song “Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey” theme song from the Malayalam film *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022) and the popularisation of the Hello Kitty-Sanrio aesthetic in fashion.

Chapter 2

The World of *Bo Burnham: Inside*

Bo Burnham: Inside on the superficial level may be labelled a musical comedy television special, but upon deeper analysis, it is a sincere artistic response to the changes that took place during the age of the internet. The special is a metamodern response to the COVID-19 crisis. It has been described as an ‘essential document’ of the current crisis (post COVID-19 fallout), and this is seen in the sections “How the World Works” and “Welcome to the Internet” (Quinn; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:14:04 - 00:18:18; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:56:31-1:01:06).

The film begins with a shot of Burnham entering his room, the same studio space that he enters at the end of his 2016 special *Make Happy*. He also wears a similar outfit, implying that he is picking up from where he left off. This song conveys seemingly authentic and direct introspection of his present situation:

If you'd have told me a year ago
That I'd be locked inside of my home
(Ah, ah, ah)
I would have told you a year ago
Interesting, now leave me alone”
Sorry that I look like a mess
(Ah, ah, ah)
I booked a haircut but it got rescheduled
Robert's been a little depressed, no
And so today I'm gonna try just

Getting up, sitting down
Going back to work
Might not help, but still, it couldn't hurt
I'm sitting down, writing jokes
Singing silly songs
I'm sorry I was gone
But look, I made you some content
Daddy made you your favourite
Open wide
Here comes the content
It's a beautiful day
To stay inside. (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:00:45 - 00:02:18)

Burnham begins the song by taking a jab at his introversion (“Interesting, now leave me alone”). He also portrays mundane elements of the pandemic where not getting haircuts at the salon was the norm due to restrictions on people in light of the pandemic (Forbes). This is also the first time he brings up the topic of depression, which is not only a recurring theme in this film, but also a social problem that was brought to light and was, and still is, of paramount importance. Burnham leaves an apology saying “I’m sorry I was gone, but look I made you some content”, and immediately adds an element of humour by adding “Daddy made you your favourite, open wide, here comes the content, it’s a beautiful day, to stay inside”. By addressing that he was missing in action for a while (due to his recurring panic attacks during live performances), and the monotony of life indoors during the pandemic, he brings about elements of both humour and pathos.

After the beginning, we get a glimpse into the process of making the film; from the camera placements, lighting set-up and the microphone and camera set-up (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:02:53 - 00:03:45). Post the behind-the-scenes elements begins the song titled “Comedy”, a satirical song about the world of comedy. Not only does the song poke fun about the idea that comedy is solely about making people laugh, it also highlights the pressures faced by him as a comedian living in the age of the internet. It talks about his disillusionment experienced after pursuing comedy as a profession, as the entire art form, like other art forms, have been commodified for the purpose of getting maximum revenue. He also expresses his concern over political problems such as climate change and war, and contemplates leaving comedy (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:04:05 - 00:04:37). Burnham asks if he should stop trying to be funny or if he should give away his money (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:05:08 -00:05:15). The latter question is quickly answered with a “No”, poking fun at rich people who hoard their wealth, including himself as his estimated net-worth is said to be four million US dollars, thereby also being a form of self-criticism (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:05:15 - 00:05:16).

His dilemma and confusion is conveyed through the spotlight on his face while the rest of his surroundings are shrouded in darkness. The light switches on as though it were a revelation, since he evidently does not want to leave his profession, so he jokes about it by making it seem as though it’s a mission from God to heal people with his comedy and that the world needs direction from a white guy like him, which could be a jab at the rise in the trend of tone-deaf celebrities partaking in superficial activities for various causes or white supremacy in general (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:05:26; *Bo Burnham: Inside*

00:05:26 - 00:05:54). The lights get switched off once again, and Bo Burnham says: “The world is so fucked up. Systematic oppression, income inequality, the other stuff... And there's only one thing that I can do about it. While— While being paid and being the centre of attention..’ (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:05:56 - 00:06:18). It is an example of self-introspection/ criticism since the lines imply that Burnham does not necessarily pay attention to the “other stuff”, which entail the refugee crisis, poverty, racism and other social issues, as they do not personally affect him (@justinswensonofficial and @NoShameSocko).

The world’s so sad

Pain, war, genocide, racism, sexism

But I gotta remember there’s good things about it too,

Like the fact that none of that’s happening to me, score! (*Bo*

Burnham: Inside 00:12:16 - 00:12:33)

Burnham says that there’s only one thing he can do about it, while being paid and the centre of attention, and that’s healing the world with comedy. He speaks of “making a literal difference metaphorically”, which is an oxymoron since he’s implying that he is making a difference but in a figurative sense (@justinswensonofficial and @NoShameSocko; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:06:09 - 00:06:28). This persona of Burnham has an ill-informed desire to do good and is a caricature of the typical white saviour complex (Cammaraota). For a moment, he sees the problem of white people taking up space in the first place and decides to not speak, but quick enough, he says he is bored and that it's no fun for him. It could be a caricature of the White Man’s burden propagated predominantly amongst White American males who speak about the upliftment

of minority communities but not necessarily listen to the said communities (*Inside* 00:06:50 - 00:07:05).

After the anaphora of ‘healing the world with comedy’ being used in the song, Burnham talks about the impractical aspect of the statement by bringing up how comedy would be useless if one wakes up in a house filled with smoke or if one comes across men clad in white cloaks, which alludes to the Klu Klux Klan, and quickly questions if he should be continue making jokes (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:07:50 - 00:08:00). The pre-chorus and chorus are repeated, and he mentions how he thought that he’d never return to this profession, but this special marks his comeback, and is followed by a sudden transition to the blinds of his window (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:08:00 - 00:09:19). This is followed by a sincere message by Burnham, who talks about the nature of the special, which is unlike other specials as it doesn’t have an audience and is filmed in a room, and how he hopes that the viewers find some solace after watching this. His poor mental health is also seen as he discusses suicidal ideation, and he also talks about how this special is a “little all over the place” so viewers should not expect to see smooth transitions. Aptly enough, this message is abruptly cut by another distinct frame which marks the start of the song “FaceTime With My Mom (Tonight)” (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:09:32 - 00:11:02).

The aspect ratio shifts from the 16:9 ratio to the 9:16 ratio to imply that he’s using his smartphone to FaceTime with his mother. The song is a hilarious take on the concept of video calling one’s mother, and the awkwardness and the embarrassment that ensues due to the struggle of keeping the conversation going. Moreover, as his mother’s generation is known to be technologically-

challenged, issues pertaining to the ease of communication are frequent, such as how his mother covers the camera lens and keeps the phone at a distance of only six inches from her face (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:12:10 - 00:13:28). The song is filled with similar observations, and makes use of the negative space of the 9:16 ratio by adding two frames on either side to shift the ratio back to the original 16:9 (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:13:01 -00:13:20). As the song progresses, the aspect ratio of the central frame slowly shifts back to 9:16, which signifies the end of the phone call with his mother (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:13:15 - 00:13:25). The frame cuts to Burnham sitting in his room, seemingly doing nothing. However, in a later frame, we see Burnham in the right corner of the screen sitting on a chair, which could imply that he was dissociating (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:13:56).

This ominous scene cuts to a seemingly happy children's song titled "How the World Works", which goes from talking about how amazing the world is to becoming a critique of capitalism (@NoShameSocko and @Max202020; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:14:05; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:15:51 - 00:16:46). Burnham uses ventriloquism and introduces a sock puppet named Socko to the viewers, and begins conversing with it (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:15:12). The song is perhaps symbolic of Burnham's internal anti-capitalist thoughts which are suppressed for the sake of producing accessible content and escaping censorship from the producers, since he benefits from these specials. The title of the song could also be a reference to the eponymous book by Noam Chomsky, and the overall message of the song is one of scepticism and critical examination of the status quo, and encourages listeners to think for themselves and question the systems and institutions that shape our lives.

After the song ends, the scene cuts into Bo Burnham settling down and explaining how he was a former comedian and is currently a “Social Brand Consultant” (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:18:19). He satirically explains the importance of marketing during the age of the pandemic since “customers expect a lot more from their brands than they did in the past” (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:18:44 - 00:18:50). It eventually becomes obvious that he’s poking fun at brands that take a stand on social causes while marketing their products, not because they genuinely want social change but to create more brand awareness (Grief; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:18:55 - 00:19: 07).

This abruptly but smoothly transitions to Burnham in a red-flannel, singing “White Woman’s Instagram” with a change in the aspect ratio from 16:9 ratio to the 4:5 just as in “FaceTime with my Mom (Tonight)” except the aspect ratio is the same as an Instagram post instead of a phone screen. (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:20:23 - 00:24:25). This song is similar to “Straight White Male” from his 2016 film *Bo Burnham: Make Happy* with a similar critique of the shallowness of a white woman by being ignorant or wilfully dismissive of the problems of the world online by their idyllic fabrication of reality, while also the acknowledging the occasional earnestness that seeps through the facade of social media (@momotaru et al.).

The song ends and cuts to a video of Burnham reacting to what seems to be the video for White Woman’s Instagram (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:24:26). This scene cross dissolves into a visual of Burnham’s setup, which then uses a J-cut to transition to a monologue by Burnham about the importance of being quiet, or to put it more bluntly like Burnham, of shutting up. He questions whether it is necessary to have an opinion and expresses his frustration about

people putting out their opinions on everything they come across. His self-awareness is evident as he proceeds to speak about how he isn't shutting up, and the scene cuts off to the song titled "Unpaid Intern" right before he begins justifying himself, almost as if he's refusing to take accountability for his hypocrisy.

Unpaid Intern is a song with a jazz tune and black and white visuals, describing the plight of unpaid interns and it ends with scat singing (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:26:10 - 00:26:42). This immediately cuts to visuals of Burnham on the left side of the screen, with a set up similar to YouTubers where he reacts to the song (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:26:43 - 00:29:10). He then explains that the idea behind the song was that there were plenty of songs about the working-class in the past but not a lot of songs about the labour exploitation of the modern world (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:27:05 - 00:27:13). When the song comes to an end, he finds himself reacting to the video of him reacting to it, which then loops two more times, which then gives him the time to introspect and earnestly talk about his reaction to his reaction while also noticing his physical appearance. This seemingly overwhelms him, which causes us to stop playing the video.

This is followed by the infamous song 'Bezos I' which mocks Jeff Bezos, former CEO of the American multinational technology company Amazon.com Inc, for his seemingly endless wealth and ability to get away with almost anything, and this song is reprised later in the film in the song aptly titled 'Bezos II' (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:29:15 - 00:30:12; @Donutbigboy et al.; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:01:53 - 01:02:20). The song, which ends in Burnham screaming into the microphone, abruptly cuts to a visual of him laying on a

pillow on the floor, next to several electrical equipment. He begins to do a commentary on how big corporations exploit the neurochemical effects of the brain to make profits and the flattening of the entirety of the human experience into the lifeless exchange of superficial value which benefits them, and how that's maybe not ideal (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:30:12 - 00:31:29). He then slowly and nonchalantly declares that he is horny.

This cuts to his song 'Sexting', with Burnham standing in front of a wall with a projector aimed at him, projecting images of text messages that are normally sent during sexting (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:31:30 - 00:34:46). The song describes sexting, or the act of sending sexual text messages which saw a surge during the pandemic, and the problems faced while sexting (Bianchi et al.). Burnham has given a lot of importance to detail for the visuals in his song, with the air-conditioning set to 69 degree Fahrenheit, alluding to the sex-position 69, and a short scene of an elaborate text message to the person he's sexting projected onto Burnham entailing that there's no pressure to keep sexting and that their comfort matters, thereby revolving around consent (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:31:33; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:33:37). After the song ends, the visuals cut to Burnham sitting in front of the camera embodying the energy of early 2010s YouTubers' expressing gratitude for consuming their content, but right before he gets into it he picks up a knife which makes his message seem ominous, and is a potential depiction of the lack of control when it comes to viewing content due to its addictive nature (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:34:47 - 00:35:29; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:34:52).

Following this, the scene cuts to Burnham's bedroom with the camera on the floor, with him in the left corner singing 'Look Who's Inside Again' (*Bo*

Burnham: Inside 00:35:30 - 00:37:19). The parts of the song require him to sing in one breath, like the first three lines, and since he falters on the last word, he expresses his frustration and begins singing it again. In this song, Burnham laments about how there isn't much to say to be funny when you're confined to your room, which is juxtaposed with his comedic origin as a teenager writing songs and filming them in his room. He ends the song by sighing 'one more', which signifies how he always strives for perfection (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:37:15).

Right after this, the scene cuts to Burnham watching his first public video on the projector's screen, which is borderline problematic like most of his old videos, which foreshadows his next song 'Problematic' (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:37:19 - 00:38:00).

'Problematic' is a song performed by Burnham which addresses his problematic past by talking about his upbringing and the demographic he was exposed to (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:38:01 - 00:41:12). Not only is it an attempt at explaining why he was the way he was when he was younger, it is also a song where he takes accountability for his actions. The visuals for this song entails religious imagery, which is supported by Burnham's request to God to forgive him for his sins as he didn't realise what he did, which is similar to Jesus' lines during his crucifixion where Jesus asks God to forgive the people for crucifying him, as they didn't know what they were doing (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:40:46; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:38:35). Burnham also pokes fun at celebrities and other famous figures who immediately issue apologies for their questionable actions instead of actually taking the time to self-reflect and change (*Bo Burnham:*

Inside 00:39:36). The aspect ratio of the visuals of this song is 2.35:1 or the cinemascope.

The song then cuts to various visuals of the same setup, at different times of the day, which cuts to a visual of Burnham sitting in a dark room when the camera recording these visuals falls down (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:41:12; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:41:54). Beside Burnham in the scene that follows the camera falling is a digital clock with the digits 11:58. Burnham begins his monologue, where he begins to explain how he began working on this special six months ago, which cuts to a tiny frame of Burnham for one second, where he looks confused (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:41:56 - 00:43:50; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:42:11). It goes back to the previous frame and Burnham laments about how he wanted to finish this special before he turned thirty, but he proceeds to say that he turns thirty in less than a minute when the clock displays 11:59 (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:43:03). Since he can't complete it before he turns thirty, he says that he'll sit there and enjoy the rest of his twenties, and proceeds to wait till the clock displays 12:00. As soon as the clock displays 12:00, it J-cuts to the song '30' with a cross fade transition.

'30' is a song that seems to have emerged from a mid-life crisis, with him reminiscing about his childhood and lamenting about the lack of fulfilment he feels and the song is peppered with ad libs expressing dread at turning thirty (@NoShameSocko et al.; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:43:50 - 00:46:48). He ends the song declaring that in 2030 when he's thirty, he'll kill himself. Similar to the way he ends 'Look Who's Inside Again', he ends the sighs, 'We'll do one more' (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:46:45).

He then goes on record and clarifies that he doesn't want to kill himself, and the phrase

“I do not want to kill myself” is repeated multiple times (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:46:47 - 00:46:28). He also tells people that if they feel like killing themselves, they shouldn't, and pleads as if it sounds exhausting. The scene cuts from Burnham's anti-suicide rant to a scene of Burnham sitting in front of the projector that plays that video on his white shirt looking exhausted (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:47:05). Burnham proceeds to express his frustration at people who have suicidal thoughts by saying one of the most commonly used responses of there being people that love people who love them, but he also tries to be earnest by saying that that's may not be necessarily true but attempts at imparting a seemingly insincere ray of hope by saying that there could be people that love you in the future. He also says that if he could be dead for eighteen months, he would like to die on the very same day (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:47:23 - 00:47:25; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:47:42).

The scene that follows this rant is an intermission, where Burnham cleans a glass screen (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:48:10 - 00:49:17). The scene that follows is the room with the setup for the shoot, and Burnham begins singing 'Don't Wanna Know' (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:49:39 - 00:50:41). The song expresses Burnham's desire to know about what the audience is feeling but also his fear of knowing what they think, as his work becomes a part of his identity as a creator and artist, which could affect him personally.

This immediately cuts to twitch-streamer Burnham on the right corner of the screen, that seemingly glitched into the film earlier, playing a game by

SSRI Interactive called 'Inside', which requires the gamers to make their avatars do actions like waking up, crying, standing up, walking around, trying to open the door, using a flashlight and playing the piano till the day is complete (Renfro; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:13:56; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:50:42 - 00:53:30). The name SSRI interactive could allude to SSRIs, which are commonly used antidepressants, as they have seen a spike in sales and usage during the pandemic (Pazzagli et al.).

The scene following this is a view of Burnham's setup from another angle, where Burnham unfolds his bed, turns off the lights and goes to sleep, with a spotlight on his face. For a brief moment, the scene cuts to a door slightly open with sunlight entering which could signify Burnham's desire to step back outside and feel the sunlight (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:53:31 - 00:54:16). Right after, the scene cuts to Burnham singing his song 'Shit', where he describes how he feels how filthy and how the feeling won't go away (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:54:17 - 00:55:33).

The song follows a monologue by Burnham where he gets candid about his mental health, and how it's rapidly approaching new lows, and then as he begins to describe how he feels, it cuts to a scene focusing on his face with colourful lights in the background as he sings about how he feels, which sound like common symptoms of a panic attack, to an upbeat tune and then cuts back to the previous scene (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:55:34 - 00:56:30).

Immediately following this comes Burnham's performance of the song 'Welcome to the Internet', an upbeat song that increases in pace eventually towards the end (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:56:31 - 01:01:05). The song describes the content available on the internet, often juxtaposing the useful or entertaining

with the useless or disturbing. The song's chorus addresses the addictive nature of the internet, and how it desensitises us to various things and keeps the minds of people constantly engaged, thereby commodifying it. For the song's bridge, Burnham reminisces about the time of the internet's genesis, when it was less saturated with content and activity. He uses calm music while singing about how it was always the plan to put the world in the hands of the people and then pauses, before breaking into ominous laughter and using his piano to make it sound disturbing with the context presented and repeating the chorus of the song more sinisterly and then repeating it once again at a faster pace (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:00:24).

This cuts to Burnham's monologue about his initial apprehension about not being able to finish the special, which then turned to apprehension about finishing the special because when once the special is done, Burnham will have to get back to his life (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:01:06 - 01:01:52). He declares that he's going to work on it forever and that he's not going to release it, and at the end of the monologue it cuts to Burnham singing 'Bezos II', which comprises of him singing the words 'Jeffery Bezos' to upbeat noises and congratulating him in the end, perhaps for making profits and becoming the richest man alive during the pandemic while people lost their jobs (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:01:53 - 01:02:20; Thapliyal).

This cuts to Burnham in a dark room looking perplexed and manic while listening to people laugh, which then cuts to Burnham emulating a live performance and doing a ironic stand-up bit about how real-world human-to-human tactile contact can kill people, and all human interaction should be confined to digital spaces, since the outside world is a mere theatrical stage

where one stages and records content for the digital world, and about how pirates should laminate their maps (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:02:21 - 01:02:36; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:02:37 - 01:04:18).

Following this is a performance of 'That Funny Feeling', which is a song that reflects the nuances of the age of the internet by mentioning ironies, contrasts and inappropriate pairings with calm acoustic coffee shop music playing in the background (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:04:19 - 01:09:23). This cuts to a seemingly anxious Burnham's speaking to the audience, saying that he began working on the special a year ago, which is a lot longer than he anticipated. As he begins to speak further, Burnham exhibits signs of frustration and aggression and then immediately storms out (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:09:24 - 01:11:19). This then cuts to a scene with Burnham possibly having a breakdown, as he manically begins to let out muffled noises with his hands in his face (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:11:20 - 01:11:36). This J-cuts to the performance of the song 'All Eyes on Me', which emulates a real performance with pre-recorded audio of audience cheering and appropriate lighting (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:11:37 - 01:17:30). He talks about how he quit comedy because he got severe panic attacks, but when he improved his mental health and was ready to perform live in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. As he continues to sing the song, it is revealed that some scenes were shot on a camcorder.

This cuts to a video of Burnham waking up in the morning, brushing his teeth, rewatching his content, using his equipment and editing the song 'All Eyes on Me' (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:17:31 - 01:19:29). This cuts to Burnham getting seated on his chair to play the song 'Goodbye', which he describes as a

‘possible ending song’. This is seemingly a younger Burnham, with shorter hair and a trimmed beard, and as he plays the song, it crossfades to an older Burnham, or the Burnham which viewers were accustomed to seeing towards the end of the special (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:19:30 - 01:24:00). The song is self-explanatory, as he bids adieu to the viewers. A montage of the behind-the-scenes footage of the earlier scenes begins to play, and the song contains lyrics from ‘Welcome to the Internet’, ‘Look Who’s Inside Again’ and ‘Comedy’ (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:21:23). Burnham expresses his fear that he’ll become irrelevant if his content doesn’t appeal to his audience, and at the same time fears that performing could negatively affect his mental health. When this song ends, it slowly fades into the scene with a slightly open door, and Burnham decides to step out into the light. An audience is heard applauding, and after the applause Burnham tries to go back inside but the door remains locked, which causes him to frantically try and open the door whilst sounds of an audience laugh play in the background (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:24:01 - 01:26:10).

This then slowly becomes a match cut of the same visual playing on the screen, whilst Burnham watches it (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:26:11 - 01:26:24). The film ends with the song ‘Any Day Now’ as the credits roll (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:26:23).

Chapter 3

The Aesthetics of Narration: Analysing *Inside* through a metamodern lens

Looking at Bo Burnham's career, which spans almost seventeen years, his career evolved from ambiguous borderline problematic satire to an awareness of what and how to satirise from his position of privilege. After plummeting to the world of fame, he began satirising the very medium that gave him his stardom by repeatedly mentioning the downsides of his career and at the same time expressing his urge to be a performer (Cox).

This special offers a unique, introspective and intimate look into the life of Bo Burnham as well as of the human condition in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is characterised by isolation. Burnham's performances convey a sense of disconnection and loneliness that many people have experienced during this time.

The special is a documentation of the collective trauma of the pandemic and its effects on our mental health. Burnham explores themes such as anxiety, depression, and the difficulty of maintaining a sense of self in the digital age, which are of paramount relevance.

Burnham's use of music, humour, and visual imagery creates an engaging and relatable experience for viewers, and by using satire to skewer everything from social media to politics, along with his sharp wit and incisive commentary, the special provides viewers with an understanding of the zeitgeist of the digital age.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a period of anxiety, isolation and loneliness for many, and this gave the masses a lot of time for self-reflection and

introspection. Many of Burnham's songs capture the feelings of anxiety and isolation, such as his songs "Content", "Facetime with My Mom (Tonight)" and "Sexting" convey this while also being relatable to the masses, particularly

people that are part of the millennial and Generation Z demographic. In the song "Content", Burnham speaks about how he's booked a haircut, but it got rescheduled, which was due to the strict regulations on people entering public spaces, such as hair salons (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:01:31). In his song "FaceTime with My Mom (Tonight)", he talks about the routine of FaceTiming, which is the action of having a face-to-face conversation with someone through the internet using the mobile application FaceTime, on the with his mother, which started off as a way to keep in touch with her since stay-at-home orders were issued to prevent the spread of the virus (AJMC). He also recognises that this is a virtual interaction, which is why the aspect ratio changes from 16:9 to 9:16, since the latter is the aspect ratio for most smartphones. Although technology plays an important part in bridging the communication gap, the older generation finds it difficult to utilise this technology, which Burnham mentions in the song (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:11:03 - 00:13:23). In the song "Sexting", he talks about the isolation he suffered and how distances between people and their significant others are bridged through the internet, but he also emphasises that this doesn't fully emulate physical interactions as it is solely confined to the digital space by not changing the aspect ratio, unlike in the songs "White Woman's Instagram" and "Facetime With My Mom (Tonight)" which see a change in the aspect ratio to convey to viewers that these songs are about the virtual world (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:31:31). In "Look Who's Inside Again"

he alludes to his comedic origins while at the same time drawing parallels with his current circumstances as he is forced to make content in the confines of his room (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:35:30 - 00:37:19).

Burnham's career has spanned over sixteen years, performing in front of audiences and making people laugh while also peppering his performances with satire laced social commentary. This became a source of income for him, and plummeted him to fame. After the release of his special "Make Happy" in 2016, due to severe panic attacks, he took a five-year hiatus to recover and work on his mental health. His tryst with fame began after his 2006 video titled "My Whole Family" went viral, when it was posted on YouTube (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:37:52 - 00:38:01). Since then, Bo has been a performer and often talks about performing as an artist in his specials. In his song "Content", he apologises for staying away from making comedic content and that he's back with content for his fans. The song "Comedy" is a satirical song where Bo introspects about whether comedy is relevant at a time like this, since although comedy makes people laugh, it isn't a solution to the world's problems (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:04:05 - 00:04:37). The song is performed with Burnham embodying a white saviour complex persona, which is vastly different from his real persona. Furthermore, he does a skit parodying a social brand consultant where he satirises brands that use social issues to further their sales (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:18:41- 00:20:21). Burnham also mentions corporations trying to rope in social issues in his song "That Funny Feeling" (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:05:47 - 01:05:50).

In the song "White Woman's Instagram", he uses his lyricism and visuals to emulate a typical white woman's Instagram account, and uses the 4:5

ratio of the Instagram posts to aid in that (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:22:53 - 00:23:18). Instagram is a photo and video sharing social networking application that is popularly used by Generation Z and Millennials, and this shows that social media, though mostly described as a facade, can occasionally display earnestness and oscillate between being sincere and insincere.

The performance of the song “All Eyes on Me” emulates a live-performance, with the lights and pre-recorded audience reactions, and serves to communicate with the viewer about wanting to receive attention, his break from performing and his anxieties (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:11:37 - 01:17:30). The song directly communicates Bo’s raw feelings without any inhibitions.

In the song “Goodbye”, Burnham attempts to reverse the roles by saying, “If I wake up in a house that’s full of smoke, don’t panic, so call me up and tell me a joke” by making the viewer a performer (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:23:03 - 01:23:09). The line is similar to a line from the song “Comedy”, where he’s the performer communicating with the audience about having the desire to help the world, but in this song, which is towards the end of the special, he realises that he’s the one who’s in need of help (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:08:13 - 00:18:18; @livhm and @NoShameSocko).

Double frame is a major metamodern element that is employed in the songs “Comedy” and “White Woman’s Instagram” to convey sincerity. The entire film is essentially a performance by Bo made to not only entertain audiences but also document nuances of the era of the pandemic.

An important social issue talked about in the special is mental health. Throughout the special, Burnham grapples with his own feelings of despair and hopelessness, using humour and music to cope with the overwhelming emotions

he experiences. Performing songs in front of a live audience for Burnham is anxiety inducing, but writing and singing them serves as a tool of self-expression and emotional release. Apart from the monologues by Burnham about mental health, the topic is mainly discussed by the songs “30”, “Don’t Wanna Know” and “Shit”.

The song “30”, which is performed after Burnham’s monologue at 11:58pm on the day before his birthday about how he wanted to finish the special before he turned thirty, begins with Burnham reminiscing about his childhood and proceeds to continue by expressing his lack of feeling fulfilled by comparing himself with what his grandfather did (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:42:04 - 00:46:47). He then talks about how his friends are having children, conveying to the viewers how his anxieties of growing older are amplified. The song ends with Bo expressing suicidal ideation, with Bo clarifying in a later monologue that he doesn’t feel that way (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:46:50 - 00:46:56).

Anxiety and loneliness are major themes in the song “Don’t Wanna Know”, which expresses Bo’s desire to know what people think of his work but he’s afraid of criticism and immediately follows up by saying, “I don’t wanna know”, since his work becomes a part of his identity as an artist, so any criticism levied against his work could be taken personally by him (@Entorpy et al).

The song “Shit” is a more blatant expression of Burnham’s daily routine during the pandemic, with him explaining that his clothes are dirty, he hasn’t taken a shower in nine days and that he keeps staring at the ceiling waiting for him to overcome the feeling, among other things (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:54:17

- 00:55:33). Losing motivation to stay hygienic is a symptom of declining mental health.

As discussed earlier, *Bo Burnham: Inside* offers social commentary about the problems plaguing the post-digital age. The song “How the World Works” is one such song that discusses how the world works, by using a double frame, the outer frame is introduced as a song directed towards kids, and the inner frame constitutes the social commentary (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:14:04 - 00:18:18). It starts off with Burnham singing about simple facts about nature, and highlights the good about the world. He then brings out his sockpuppet, nicknamed Socko, to help him explain how the world works. Socko, a metacute element in the film, begins by indirectly establishing the power dynamics between the two, and then proceeds to bash the education system for propagating false and classist narratives, and states that the world is built with genocide and exploitation. Socko also delves into corruption and a brief description of the capitalist framework upon which the world today functions. Burnham, who seems uninformed, naive and willing to listen, asks Socko how he can help, but Socko angrily calls out his shallowness by pointing out that Burnham is trying to see these social issues through the lens of bettering himself. This leads to Burnham trying to pull Socko off his hand to silence him, which establishes the power dynamics between Burnham and Socko which parallels the same for the ruling class and the working class respectively. The song is essentially a metaphor for the power dynamics between the working and ruling class.

The sixth track of Burnham’s special, titled “Unpaid Intern” employs the element of constructive pastiche by using jazz beats (*Bo Burnham: Inside*

00:26:10 - 00:26:42). The genre of jazz emerged from the African American working-class communities of New Orleans, and Burnham sings about how interns are exploited without pay. This is followed by a video of Burnham reacting to the music video similar to YouTubers who run “reaction” channels, explaining that the idea behind this song is that unlike the past, the modern world lacks music about the exploitation of labour (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:26:43 - 00:29:10). The music video then cuts to his reaction video, and Burnham is forced to react to himself reacting to the song, which becomes a loop until Burnham puts a stop to it. This is an example of hyper-self-reflexivity in Bo Burnham’s work.

“Bezos I” and “Bezos II” are dedicated to Jeffery Bezos, who was the former president of Amazon Inc (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:29:15 - 00:30:12; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:01:53 - 01:02:20). The former song alludes to the perpetuated rags-to-riches story, which was proven to be false since his parents had invested a large amount of money (Hartmans). It also mentions two other billionaires, Mark Zuckerberg and Warren Buffet, who have an estimated net worth of \$127 billion and \$ 101 billion dollars. By bringing them up, in a song about Bezos, he tries to imply that their wealth pales in comparison to Bezos, who was the richest man alive with a net exceeding \$200 billion.

The special also explores the nature of the digital age, with “That Funny Feeling” capturing the essence of the era of the pandemic (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 01:04:19 - 01:09:23). He mentions the peculiarities of the era— its ironies, contrasts, inappropriate pairings and the feeling of hopelessness while observing the world— all while Burnham plays calming music with his guitar (@mimizee and @kingkillmonger). In “Welcome to the Internet”, Burnham

uses upbeat circus-like music in the background as he sings about how there's endless content on the internet, and explores the dichotomy of the internet by mentioning the type of content that's found. Since the internet tries to commodify the attention of the masses, there's a niche for everyone to fit into, making the internet extremely addictive (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:56:31 - 01:01:05). The chorus of the song aptly describes the impact of the internet, since it has a monopoly over the minds of people and plays a major role in shaping people's beliefs and ideas. When Burnham says "Apathy's a tragedy and boredom is a crime" in the chorus, he refers to how the internet has essentially killed any room for boredom and has desensitised people to sensitive news, thereby creating a sense of apathy and nihilism in the minds of millennials and Generation Z (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:58:16 - 00:58:19). The song "Don't Wanna Know" has the lyric, "Am I on in the background? Are you on the phone?", which acknowledges the passive consumption of media as a means of keeping our minds stimulated (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:50:12 - 00:50:16).. The video that follows this song, which shows Burnham emulating a typical Twitch streamer's game review, not only shows a huge part of internet culture, but it also alludes to his mental health and his daily routine during the pandemic (Cveticanin; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:50:42 - 00:53:30). Twitch, is a American video live streaming service that focuses on video game live streaming that saw a rise in viewership and streamers during the pandemic (Stephen). Apart from these songs, songs such as "White Woman's Instagram" and "Sexting" captures the zeitgeist of the age of the pandemic, which makes the content relatable to an average millennial or someone from Generation Z (*Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:20:23 - 00:24:25 ; *Bo Burnham: Inside* 00:31:30 - 00:34:46). Overall, the

entire film is hyper-self-reflexive and uses a double frame: the outer frame constantly establishes that it is a special that is shot in the confines of one of Bo Burnham's rooms, and the inner frame being the messages that the various songs attempt to convey.

Furthermore, some of these songs, such as "Bezos I", "Bezos II", "Welcome to the Internet" and "Look Who's Inside Again", have gone viral on social media for their song's pacing, which adds appeal in the eyes of the youth ("yahoolife"). Although viral audio may not be used to convey the context of the audio, it does get a good fraction of the people curious to know its origins. This is evident since the special received widespread fame and garnered several accolades, without the use of promotional material apart from his social media posts. Through the American record label Republic Records, Burnham released the songs from the special as an album called *Inside (The Songs)*, which reached the top ten on the Official Album Charts and was certified Gold because of its extensive sales. Burnham became the first individual to win three Emmy awards for his directing, writing and musical direction. The song "All Eyes on Me", which became the first comedy song to enter Billboard Global 200 charts, proceeded to win the Best Song Written for Visual Media at the 2022 Grammy Awards.

With *Bo Burnham: Inside* having leftist undertones, it not only reflects the majority views of Generation Z and Millennials, but it also promotes a more favourable outlook for leftist ideology. Social media is one of Gen Z's biggest sources of information, and it helps in getting various demographics to interact with each other (Taylor). Social media such as Reddit has countless

‘subreddits’ or communities discussing the lyricism, music production and the most important of all, the social commentary on the era of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Music has been an integral part of humanity since time immemorial, serving as a form of entertainment, expression, and communication. It has the power to evoke emotions and has the power to divide and unify the masses. More importantly, it acts as a medium for social commentary. As discussed in the previous chapter, music has become an increasingly popular tool for artists to express their views on social, cultural, and political issues that plague the world.

With its release, *Bo Burnham: Inside* (2021) has caused a paradigm shift in how we perceive and document culture. Apart from the cinematography, production and editing, *Bo Burnham: Inside*'s music production and writing is the main highlight of the special. Arguably, the visuals, monologues, editing and other aspects of the special help in amplifying the message that the music tries to convey. The meta-commentary by Burnham mostly discusses his music or is related to the discussion that is put forth by his music. By using music to express his thoughts and emotions on a wide range of topics, spanning from the pandemic and social media to mental health, he connects with his audience by raising points of discussion and making them introspect.

Chapter One delved into an explanation of metamodernism by beginning with an explanation of the different types of media and the phenomenon of media convergence, which occurred after the advent of the internet. It went on to correlate various forms of media with Modernism,

Postmodernism and Post-Postmodernism, after which it defined metamodernism using Vermeulen and van den Akker's definition. This was further expounded upon by Linda Ceriello and Greg Dember, who proposed a list of eleven non-exhaustive methods that often appear in metamodern work, which are hyper-self-reflexivity, the narrative double frame (Eshelman's performatism), oscillation between opposites, quirky, the tiny (metamodern minimalism), the epic (metamodern maximalism), constructive pastiche, ironesty, normcore, overprojection (anthropomorphizing), and Meta-Cute and dove into these eleven methods with examples.

Chapter Two broke down the world of *Bo Burnham: Inside* by stating how the film is structured with visuals and monologues revolving around the music. The chapter discussed *Bo Burnham: Inside* so that it is made clear that this special doesn't deal with coping with complex emotions, but rather addressing that they exist. Burnham gets people to introspect and slowly attempts to temporarily desensitise people by addressing and making people aware of their apathy and nihilism in subtle ways through his music. By doing so, Bo slowly sensitises people to problems of the world that people are already aware of. At the same time, he also tries to encapsulate the overwhelming nature of the digital age with imagery of what one can expect to come across on the internet and music production, while also building a sense of community by conveying that it is a universal experience. The chapter also showed how his monologues and parodies reinforce the messages put forth by his music.

Chapter Three analysed the special and highlights the metamodern elements of various segments in the film, while also analysing the music according to various talking points that have been taken into consideration. The first point of discussion was isolation during the era of the pandemic, which gave rise to self-reflection and introspection among the masses, while also witnessing the horrific state of the world. This was further elaborated in the songs “Content”, “FaceTime with My Mom (Tonight)”, “Sexting” and “Look Who’s Inside Again”. The second point of discussion was about performativity and Burnham’s relationship with it, with the songs “Content”, “Comedy”, “That Funny Feeling”, “White Woman’s Instagram”, “All Eyes on Me” and “Goodbye” discussing Burnham’s evolution as an artist and his relationship with performing. Mental health is the next point of discussion and it discussed Burnham’s mental health issues in a way that it seemed not just in a way that evokes sympathy, but also in a way that it makes it relatable by conveying the collective apprehensions of the generation. Lyrics from the songs “30”, “Don’t Wanna Know” and “Shit” are analysed to substantiate the statements made. The next topic discussed how social commentary is a very important part of the age of the internet, and how songs such as “How the World Works”, “Unpaid Intern”, “Bezos I” and “Bezos II” talk about the injustices and inequalities of the world which is upheld by the capitalist economic system. Furthermore, the nuances and the nature of the digital age is discussed with songs like “That Funny Feeling”, “Welcome to the Internet”, “Don’t Wanna Know”, “White Woman’s Instagram” and “Sexting” that talk about the peculiarities of the age, the commodification of attention, desensitisation of people to sensitive media and passive consumption. Lastly,

it discussed the songs from the special with respect to its impact on the masses and its reception by the listeners. All the songs in the special capture the essence of the zeitgeist of the age of the pandemic

Overall, *Bo Burnham: Inside* is not only a cultural touchstone for the COVID-19 era, but also an exemplary work of art that proves that music and visuals convey a narrative. It captures the anxiety, loneliness, and absurdity of our current moment, while also providing a powerful commentary on the ways in which technology has shaped our lives. The show's relevance and resonance make it a must-see for anyone looking to understand the cultural moment in which we are living.

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