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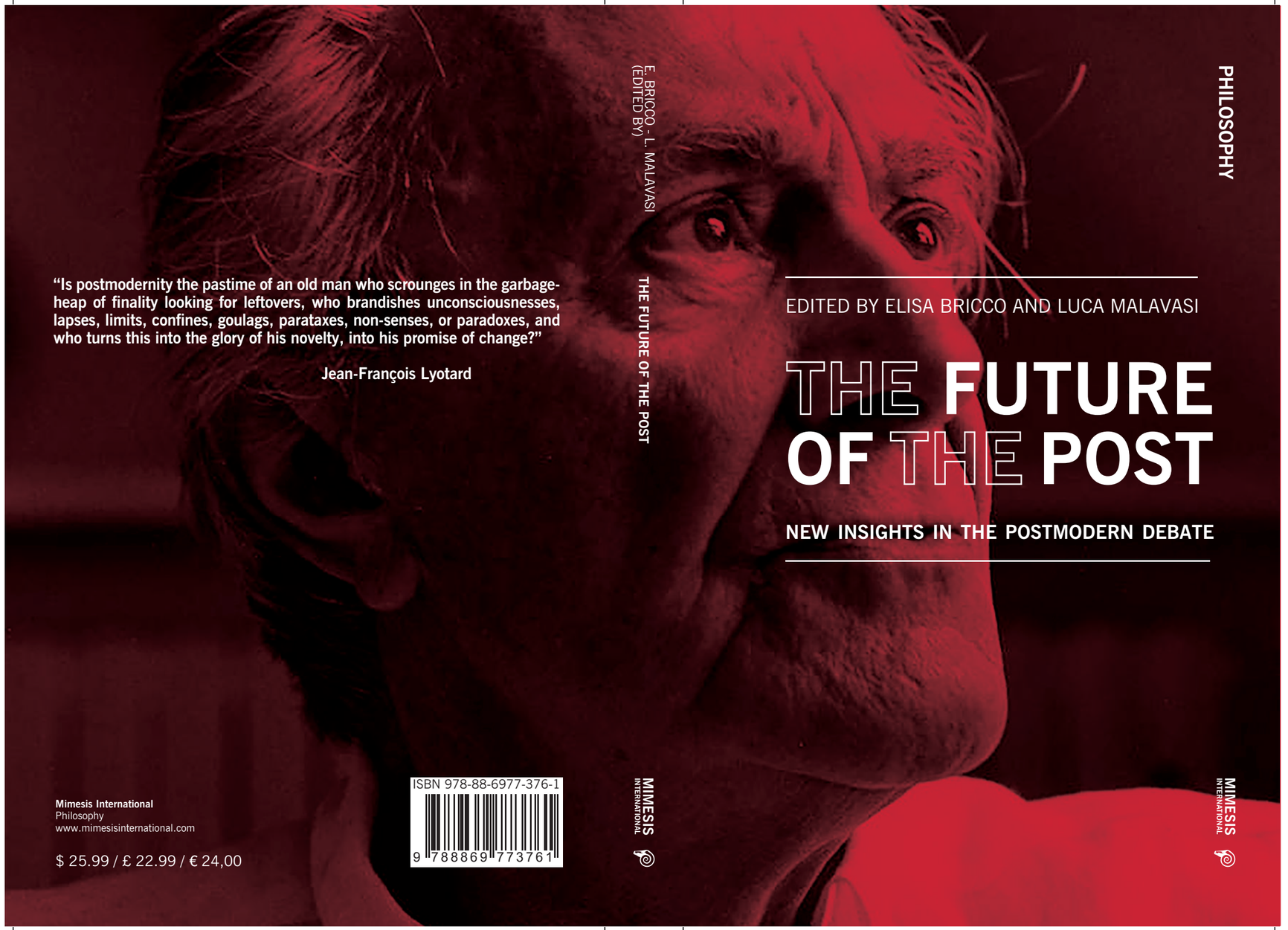

"Is postmodernity the pastime of an old man who scrounges in the garbage-heap of finality looking for leftovers, who brandishes unconsciousnesses, lapses, limits, confines, goulags, parataxes, non-senses, or paradoxes, and who turns this into the glory of his novelty, into his promise of change?"

Jean-François Lyotard

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THE FUTURE OF THE POST

MIMESIS INTERNATIONAL

PHILOSOPHY

EDITED BY ELISA BRICCO AND LUCA MALAVASI

THE FUTURE OF THE POST

NEW INSIGHTS IN THE POSTMODERN DEBATE

MIMESIS INTERNATIONAL

This book collects the proceedings of the International conference *The Postmodern Condition: Forty Years Later* held at University of Genova on December 2019. The conference took advantage of the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Jean-François Lyotard as a "trigger" to relaunch the still actual and ongoing debate about the meaning of postmodernity, the end of postmodernism and the advent of new aesthetics, philosophy and social "structure of feelings" that have overcome (or tried to) the postmodern paradigm. The book aims at interweaving the two main faces of the problem: on the one hand, the analysis of the vitality, legacy, topicality and historicizing process of postmodernity and postmodernism; on the other, the analysis of the debate on the crisis of postmodern paradigm and of the advent of new conceptual frames, often born as a direct refusal of postmodern critical discourse and philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION
The Future Of The Post

The Post of The Future

For at least thirty years, postmodernism, postmodernisation, postmodernity have been the watchwords of the contemporary, no matter whether one was involved – outside or inside universities, in the United States or in Europe, writing books or reviews or articles –, in economics or politics, in architecture or religion, in cinema, art, or philosophy. Everything, at some point, had become postmodern. For someone, indeed, postmodern was the name with which to relabel *all* the contemporary: not a style or a phase of capitalism, but a real age, whose history would be contradictorily intertwined with that of modernity: "Let's cancel, at least in scientific terms, the term "contemporary" and replace it with "postmodern". Let's reason therefore on two great blocks: the great modern cycle and the great postmodern cycle".[1] With the difference that if the founding fathers of modernity had to make a serious effort to give life to their project, rejecting the tradition of the ancients and imperatively imposing the new model ("Il faut être absolument moderne", Arthur Rimbaud, 1873), for the postmodernists everything simply seemed to *happen*: without too much choosing or deciding or planning, *everything* was postmodern, dragged along – as the vulgate version of the theory suggests – by a series of socioeconomic, political, media and cultural changes that, also original in their transversality, intensity and concausality, introduced Western societies (starting with the United States) to a new paradigm.

For at least thirty years, postmodernism has been, in short, the term used both to indicate a plurality of original phenomena, and to define their belonging to a common horizon. Hence, the very strong meta-theoretical coefficient of postmodernism, and the incessant definitional movement between "local" phenomena – since, in the end, there are (have been) as

1 Renato Barilli, *Attorno alla galassia elettronica*, in AA.VV. *Incontro con il postmoderno* (Milano: Nuove edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta,1984), p. 19.

many postmodernisms as the areas of knowledge and human action – and the general framework, always looking for a definition that could speak for everything, and about everything. Hence, also, the difficulty of considering the phenomenon today, tempted, in a symmetrical but basically opposite way, to close what happened in a single formula – which could testify of the existence of a "great cycle" – and, together, to consider the multitude of facets that have made the Western society and its culture postmodern. Taking for granted, of course, that that cycle and that season are now a closed chapter, and that *the postmodern condition* now belongs to the past.

The forty years since the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's essay – a reference that the Genoa conference (December 2019) indicated explicitly in its title, *The Postmodern Condition: Forty Years Later* –, do not represent, in fact, just a symbolic date: these four decades are, on the contrary, the first useful distance from which to try to focus on the most influential phenomenon, within and outside academia, of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Thirty years of globalized popularity that now seem to have passed, just as the generalized and often indiscriminate use of the ideas and labels of postmodernism, postmodernity and postmodernism. Which, of course, is not to say that postmodernism is over – or completely over. On the contrary, the fact that somewhere it still exists or resists, or that it has simply entered a temporary dormant condition or, again, that it has changed face just enough so that the rush to get rid of it prevents us from recognizing the disguise, is revealed by the intensity of the abjuration to which terms and concepts have been subjected during the last ten or fifteen years. To give just one example, we can quote what Richard Ingersoll wrote in 2001: "For over a decade the term [postmodernism] and the corresponding stenographic style have been anathema to architectural magazines […] One senses currently among architects a stigma associated with the term to the point that it would be difficult to find anyone who would identify themselves as such".[2] And it is worth remembering that the term obtained its first official recognition in the field of architecture, even if, immediately afterwards, it was the literary production (mainly American, novelistic but also poetic), before the cinematographic one, that made postmodernism *the* style of contemporaneity. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in the literary sphere the process of elaboration of the end – in an oppositional key – started already at the beginning of the 1990s, the decade that, in fact, popularized (and vulgarized) postmodernism. Could be sufficient remember the publication, in 1993, of the famous *E Unibus*

2 Richard Ingersoll, 'Post-postmodernism', *Architecture*, 90, May 2001, p. 109.

Pluram by David Foster Wallace[3] in the "Review of Contemporary Fiction": a violent accusation against a style that is much more than a style. In fact, according to the writer – on whose essay insists Josh Toth's *Metafiction and Plasticity, or the Dehiscing Wound of Postmodernism* –, we need to oppose to postmodernism a completely "new sensibility", under the sign of sincerity and the refusal of the role of ironic spectators and artificiality: only doing so we could be able to embrace a series of principles without double meanings and to deal with the *untrendy* problems and emotions of everyday life with respect and conviction.

The history of postmodernism (and therefore its identity) is, in fact, also this: the history of its long *ending*, partly a process of inevitable extinction, partly a *forced end*. In this regard, we can add a few more facts to previews quotations: in 1989, four years before the intervention of David Foster Wallace, *Against Postmodernism* by Alex Callinicos appeared, an essay against *all* postmodernism, of which the author rereads and dismantles, in Marxist perspective, both the philosophical and the cultural and socio-economic assumptions;[4] a violent double uncoordinated attack dates back to 1990: the interventions by Christopher Norris (*What's Wrong With Postmodernism?*) and by John Frow (*What Was Postmodernism?* (an explicit reference to Harry Levin's *What Was Modernism?,* published just thirty years earlier), although dedicated to different aspects (i.e. the French philosophical production and its reception in the United States, and the dynamics of exchange between cultural processes and socio-economic transformations), aim equally – and with arguments often similar to those of Callinicos – to show weaknesses and errors of postmodernism and to resize its historical scope and its real autonomy from the modern. Moreover, according to Raymond Federman, postmodernism officially dies on December 22, 1989, the day in which "Samuel Beckett changed time (*tense)*, from the present to the past, joining the angels [...] Postmodernism is dead because Godot has never arrived...".[5] In 1991, the first international seminar dedicated to

3 David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13, 2, Summer 1993, 151–194.

4 Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism. A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge-Oxford: Polity Press, 1989). The book also explicitly targets what Callinicos considers the prophets of postmodernism, in particular, Lyotard and Baudrillard, who are accused of "gloating while Rome burns" (p. 174), that is, of accepting the present crisis rather than engaging in its solution (which for Callinicos should pass through a social transformation of a global order capable of establishing a new democratic and collective control of the planet's resources).

5 Raymond Federman, *Aunt Rachel's Fur* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), p. 245. However, 1989 is also the year of Richard Harvey's *The*

Cultural Studies (organized in Stuttgart) seemed to prove him right: it was attended by early postmodernists such as Ihab Hassan, John Barth, Heide Ziegler, Raymond Federman, William Gass and Malcolm Bradbury, and the title was unequivocal: *The End of Postmodernism: New Directions*.

The pivot points that articulate and "dramatize" the progressive crisis of postmodernism and the slow but inexorable exit from postmodernity increased throughout the nineties: in 1996, for example, the essay *Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*, the first act, was published in the form of a parody, of the very serious deconstructive work of Alan Sokal (professor of physics at New York University), which will continue in the following years, keeping firm the main objectives of that first intervention: to denounce the abuse of scientific concepts and terminology (especially mathematics and physics) by contemporary thinkers and philosophers (Kristeva, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Virilio... that is, all the reference points of postmodern thought) and, even more importantly, as we read in *Impostures intellectuelles* (a book-length development of the essay's theses), the "cognitive relativism" of their arguments, that is, the idea that "factual" statements, whether traditional myths or modern scientific theories, cannot be considered as true or false except "in relation to a certain culture".[6] Also in 1996, then, the first edition of *The Illusions of Postmodernism* appears, a violent indictment (also in this case the start of a reflection destined to continue in the future) of one of the main opponents of postmodernism, Terry Eagleton, who analyzes the failure of the *future* imagined by postmodernism, whose responsibility he divides equally between the politics of the New Left, the French philosophers and the American "anti-foundationalists"; of the latter two categories, not unlike Sokal, denounces, among other things, the fact that postmodernism, "like any brand of epistemological anti-realism, consistently denies the possibility of describing the way the world is […] Then, somewhat later in the day, we stumble on a postmodern subject whose 'freedom' consists in a kind of miming of the fact that there are no longer any foundations at all,

Condition of Postmodernity, the first study (which has remained fundamental) in which the different dimensions of the phenomenon are profitably brought into dialogue in the description of a real historical era. Which, according to Harvey, began in the early 1970s and in 1989 could not be said to have ended.

6 Alan Sokal, Jean Bricmont, *Impostures intellectuelles* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1997), pp. 15–16.

and who is therefore at liberty to drift, either anxiously or deliriously, in a universe which is itself arbitrary. contingent, aleatory".[7]

It would be enough to kill anyone. And yet, in the second half of the nineties, postmodernism is still there, more dispersed than finished, perhaps by now too "high culture" and institutional[8] (it can already boast its own stories) to be able to represent anything really new, although those who are starting now (see the Young British Artists) often start from there, assuring them new forms of life and worldly popularity. As the case of cinema (and, more generally, of audiovisuals) reveals, postmodernism continues to be – at least in the field of cultural production – half hegemonic, half driving, defended by a critical-theoretical version of it that is still in fairly good health, although already routine. The reason why, summarizing a bit, seems to depend on three main factors: first, in this kind of interventions (obviously many more than our synthetic chronology), a vigorous *pars denstruens* is rarely followed by an equally convincing *pars construens*, something akin to a proposal that could realistically undermine postmodernism (Marxism and Enlightenment, amidst the "anorexic ruins"[9] littered by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the outbreak of the First Gulf War, seem to turn out to be narratives that are as out of date as ever and no less theoretical than postmodernism itself); second, this deconstructive critique is more often directed at postmodern theory than at the phenomena it points to and defines: for lack of better (see previous point), term and concepts thus remain an acceptable compromise with which to indicate the contemporary; third, the latter still resembles too much (and this is not a superficial

7 Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 28, 41–42.

8 In the chronology of Steven Connor, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–19, the nineties of postmodernism would coincide in part (beginning of the decade) with a phase of "synthesis", thanks mainly to the contributions of Fredric Jameson (phase sealed by the publication, in 1995, of *The Idea of Postmodern. A History* by Hans Bertens); in part (second half), with a phase of "autonomy": "At this point, the argument about whether there really was such a thing as postmodernism, which had driven earlier discussions of the subject, started to evaporate, since the mere fact that there was discourse at all about the subject was now sufficient proof of the existence of postmodernism - but as idiom rather than actuality", p. 4.

9 Jean Baudrillard, *The Anorexic Ruins*, in David Antal (ed.), *Looking Back on the End of the World* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 29–45. The image of the *anorexic ruins*, used as the title of an essay of 1989, synthesizes a recurring idea in Baudrillard, that of the *non-historicity* of events, whose occurrence now appears "frozen" by contemporary hyperreality, i.e. deprived of any possibility of establishing a real change, in terms of value or meaning.

resemblance) the condition to which the label of postmodernity was first attributed, so much so that the attempt made by many of the lecturers present at the Stuttgart seminar to make the end of the Cold War a possible *deadline* of postmodernism (or a first version of it), reading it as a response to the paranoia and paradoxes of that period, remains without consequence. Much more convincing will be, shortly thereafter, the reading of the First Gulf War (1990-1991) as an *exemplary* postmodern conflict (and not only by Baurdillard). As historians teach us, in order to sustain the existence of something new, it is necessary to be able to indicate, *at some point in history,* the emergence of a profound and real discontinuity. All the more so during the war on postmodernism, which has always been blamed for celebrating a substantial divorce between discursive constructions and the principle of reality. A bit like the source of its youth.

If in this chronology of the extinction of postmodernity, the tragedy of September 11 has rapidly assumed such a powerful meaning and role, it is precisely because it – further strengthened, in its symbolic value as well, by the double passage of century and millennium – represents this kind of discontinuity, from which to restart in order to sanction with greater force the end of (or the need to put an end to) what theory, up to that moment, has only been able to scratch or weaken, and almost always in local battles. As Roger Rosenblatt wrote in the "Times" on September 24, 2001, a few days after the attack: "At least one good thing can come from this horror: it can mean the death of the age of irony".[10]

The Future of the Post

The essays collected in this volume often start precisely from the more or less peaceful observation of the passage of Western society to *another* condition, and of the possible assimilation of postmodernism, on a historical and cultural level, as an expressive style (one style among others). In even more general terms, and beyond the level of uses, there is no scholar who does not feel obliged, today, to handle the concepts of postmodernity and postmodernism with great historiographic caution. Some interventions, such as the one by Roberto Mordacci – put, not by chance, at the opening of the volume –, are also placed explicitly in the furrow of the "second

10 A long and interesting journalistic and then essayistic debate followed, impossible to document here: *This Is a Picture and Not the World* by Joseph Natoli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) cleverly picks up the mood, rather than the story.

time" of history (of the end), within an international debate marked by a double effort: the overcoming of postmodernism and its valorization in the framework of a reflection on the meaning of "post". Thus, in Mordacci's essay, postmodernism is seen both as a fundamental instrument of positive re-elaboration – in an anti-dogmatic key – of modernity (intended first as a philosophical project), and as a failed attempt to continue the project:

> Postmodernism deprives itself of the only possible bases for every sensible attempt to realize emancipation. In the name of what can one criticize the oppressive structures of late modernity, if it is not a more autonomous subjectivity, a knowledge more aware of one's own finiteness, and a vision of history in which another world is possible? If, on the other hand, we need to abandon the subject, reject reason, and reject any idea of the future, as if we were dealing with letting ourselves go to an impersonal, prerational world devoid of possible destinations, it is certain that the technical-capitalist system will have its easiest victory.[11]

In the same way, but with reference to the field of media and images, in his essay, Ruggero Eugeni rethinks postmodernity both to better focus on the "genealogical" link with the development of "new media environments [that] exasperate the contrast between media experience and real experience", and to better understand the nature of the gap that, well beyond the purely technological dimension, distances contemporary digital and algorithmic media from the recent analogue past. According to Eugeni, "the shift from postmodern to post-postmodern trends" is above all a question that touches "the epistemic status of images":

> the last phase of electric media is marked by a tendential scepticism towards images, while digital electronic media introduce a renewed confidence in their ability to render the real and operate on it - yet no longer directly but through the visualization and manipulation of data structures that constitute world models and that can actually operate within and on the world. This renewed trust in the relationship between images and reality helps explain the new climate of realism and the ethical and political commitments that characterize the "post-postmodern" trends.[12]

In addition to defining a horizon of questions and a general approach to the problem of post-postmodernism that function as a background for many of the essays included in the volume, the interventions of Roberto

11 Infra p. 31.
12 Infra p. 166.

Mordacci and Ruggero Eugeni, in outlining some characteristics of "post" – in the first case also introducing a new "label", the one of neomodernity –, are inserted therefore in the widest debate that, in the course of the last twenty years or so, has worked, as said, both to rethink the postmodern starting from its ashes (sometimes still smoking), and to accredit new "isms" (among others: Hypermodernism, Altermodernism, Stuckism, Post-postmodernism...). A narrative *from the end* whose main advantage, from the point of view of the process of historicization of postmodernism, is to help bring out the dominant characters, durable and specific of a phenomenon that, since the eighties, while it was told in the present, seemed to engulf in itself, ambiguously and contradictorily, everything or almost.[13] This is often a "negative" portrait, driven by the need to support, not just certify, change (and a new movement), but there is no doubt that the slow receding of postmodernism under the pressure of new interpretative perspectives disseminates very valuable evidence and clues.

Thus, to give just one example – and to call into question a term that runs through a number of the essays in this collection in different forms –, starting from the new millennium the word *realism* began to circulate in all or almost all sectors of scientific research as a sort of necessity (often accompanied by the specification "new"), while unbridled post-modern relativism began to be pointed out as *the* problem, to then become, more recently, the error not to be repeated by western society. Something to fight openly, of which to specify the etiology and treat the symptoms. The "new realists" are well aware that it is not enough to decree the end of postmodernism in order to remove it *sic et simpliciter* from the horizon of possibilities, and that, despite the extent of recent historical and social changes, it would still be naive not to take into account even just some unreflective forms of persistence of a postmodern reading of the contemporary (see, for example, the "cynical" philosophy of a thinker like Byung-Chul Han). This, indeed, would seem to fit perfectly to describe and interpret the digital society of the *network,* which seems to have amplified (to limit ourselves to two aspects) both the disappearance of reality and its contemporary replacement with a virtual horizon of doubles and simulacra (Steven Saulnier-Sinan deals with some aspects of this in his speech). Postmodern anti-realism, in short, would have an even easier time today – not to mention the dehumanization conducted by an increasingly despotic government of Technology. But, according to the new realists, to continue along the path traced by

13 Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London-New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 181–182.

postmodern theory would today be tantamount to subscribing to a guilty participation.

Even before the proposal of any (neo)realist thought, in fact, it is reality itself that has imposed the need for a *different* outlook and interpretation: from September 11, 2001 to the economic crisis of 2008, from the Second Gulf War (2003-2011) to the War on terror to the rise of new political, nationalistic and religious fundamentalisms, the most dramatic historical events of the last fifteen years or so have progressively invalidated the resilience of some crucial aspects of postmodernism in the interpretation of social change (i.e., the primacy of a purely deconstructionist interpretation, the exaltation of anti-categorical difference over authority, the defense of an anti-ideological political and cultural *laissez-faire,* etc.), as much as they have not pointed to the fact that the postmodernism of the last decade has not been able to take into account the political and cultural differences of the past.), as much as they did not point to a precise responsibility – almost an unexpected but far from unpredictable filiation. Egleton had already pointed this out in 1998, with reference to the then recent revolutionary events in Eastern Europe: "It ought to be something of an embarrassment to postmodernism that, just as it was discarding the concepts of political revolution, collective subjects and epochal transformations as so much metaphysical claptrap. these things broke out where they had been least anticipated".[14] The very war declared by Islamic fundamentalism against the West (a "symbolic" war par excellence, which completely puts into play the very idea of the West) would be an exemplary testimony of this guilty failure of postmodern thought. On the one hand, in fact, "by concentrating all its attention on "micropolitical" issues, or on short-term, single-issue politics, the very real large-scale political structures that govern our everyday lives are disregarded and left uncontested to the enemy, which simply translates into covert support for, or actual complicity with, the status quo";[15] as if to say that not only postmodernism did not see the change coming (and the trauma of September 11 lies, at least in part, in this cultural unpreparedness), but it also unwittingly became an accomplice to the disaster; on the other hand, "a culture organized itself around this liberal-pluralist, 'anything goes' ideology without the political muscle to back it up against those who, quite simply, are too different from ourselves, and

14 Eagleton, p. 43.

15 Iain Hamilton Grant, *Postmodernism and Politics*, in Stuart Sims (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 31.

who view Western liberalism […] as pathologically weak and misguided"[16] finds itself today trapped in a political, ethical and ideological *cul-de-sac:* how to deal with those who are *so different* that they deny the value of difference? Can one continue to sustain a radical skepticism towards any form of authority that acts on a level other than the "micro" one of differential subjectivity?

In short, to use the words of Maurizio Ferraris, the main promoter of the philosophical "nuovo realismo ("new realism"), "le necessità reali, le vite e le morti reali, che non sopportano di essere ridotte a interpretazioni, hanno fatto valere i loro diritti, confermando l'idea che il realismo (così come il suo contrario) possieda delle implicazioni non semplicemente conoscitive, ma anche etiche e politiche".[17] More generally, one could observe that recent history has not simply "betrayed" some of the main postulates of postmodern thought; it has also pulverized, revealing its fragility, the thick theoretical layer through which postmodernism has progressively shielded itself against the *inemendability* – to use another term dear to Ferraris – of the real (inemendability: "Il fatto che ciò che ci sta di fronte non può essere corretto o trasformato attraverso il mero ricorso a schemi concettuali"; "l'inemendabilità ci segnala infatti l'esistenza di un mondo esterno, non rispetto al nostro corpo […] bensì rispetto alla nostra mente"[18]). And it is worth noting that the effects of this debate have ended up arming even the (not new) critique of the postmodern vision of cultural difference with new offensive resources: no one, not even among the detractors of the first hour, denies that one of the great merits of postmodernism has been that of recovering entire more or less neglected sectors of cultural production, problematizing in this case another type of authority, that of the (Western) "canon",[19] while on another level the same principle has allowed "to reviled and humiliated groups [...] to recover something of their history and selfhood".[20] On the other hand, before being overwhelmed by the most diverse (and often simplifying) interpretations, the Lyotardian idea of postmodernism as the end of the great narratives (and metanarratives)

16 Grant, p. 31.

17 Maurizio Ferraris, *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2012), p. xi ('Real needs, real lives and real deaths, which cannot bear to be reduced to interpretations, have asserted their rights, confirming the idea that realism (as well as its opposite) has implications that are not only cognitive, but also ethical and political').

18 Ferraris, p. 48.

19 See Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002).

20 Eagleton, p. 121.

contained, not even too implicitly if read within the political path of its author, a shade of "resistance" towards them and, in particular, towards their nature of cultural dominants oriented to preserve the subject (and, in particular, the "other") in a condition of subordination.

Echoes or direct hints of this debate run through the essays by Dario Tomasello, Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf, Nancy Murzilli, Leonardo Gandini, Annalisa Pellino, Giacomo Fuk. In the latter, in particular, it is the problem of art that drags the reflection: art as a space of inclusion and elaboration of the postmodern condition, as revealed by Pellino's analysis of *Documenta 11* (2002); but, also, art as a space of contraction of many contradictions of postmodern thought: in his analysis of Donald Judd's thought, Giacomo Fuk brings out positions of great skepticism towards some classic postmodernist practices-from pastiche to citationism to trans-historical contamination of styles-that are certainly not unique to the American sculptor who died in 1994, when postmodernism was experiencing its last moment of global popularity. Above all, Judd challenges the very legitimacy of a modern/postmodern scan - a challenge that can be usefully related to Stanley Cavell's thought, analyzed by Raffaele Ariano: "Jean-François Lyotard described the "postmodern condition" as the end of grand narratives (*grands récits*). But the idea of a postmodernity following a uniform modernity - perhaps separated by a dynamite blast - can become just another *grand récit*. Judd opposed to it a rigorous empiricism".

Postmodernism has lived on "grand narratives" – including those of its end. Success stories, like some of its slogans, like some of its formulas. The essays that complete the volume explore some of them, starting from the notion of simulacrum introduced in the Seventies in the debate on images by Jean Baudrillard (and, subsequently, by Slavoj Žižek): Krešimir Purgar deals with it in particular, taking stock of some fundamental issues of postmodern visual culture that are also present, in part, in the contributions by Samuel Antichi and Lorenzo Donghi, deeply aligned in the search for a postmodern "philosophy" of the image, between repetition and documentary. The dialectic between reality and visual representations is, in fact, one of the junctions of postmodern thought, in which crucial issues such as the government of technology and the relationship between human and non-human, biological and technological, still enter today. On these questions, Purgar underlines, postmodern thinkers have been able not only to grasp the essence of the transformations in progress but also to anticipate the general physiognomy of their contemporary development (even if certain notions, starting from the notion of simulacrum, appear today less functional to describe our relationship with the visual). It would

suffice to think – to close on the author who inspired the conference and, consequently, this publication – of *Lex Immatériaux*, half exhibition, half experiment of writing at the time of computers (delivered in the first volume of the catalog, *Épreuves d'écriture*) that Jean-François Lyotard curated in 1985 at the Centre Pompidou. A project that explores the theme of the immaterial through five key words (*maternité*, *matière*, *matrice*, *matériau*, *matériel*) and confronts itself, without prejudice, with the new existential and communicative horizon of the technical society. The five terms, in fact, question, respectively, the origin of messages, their referentiality, the code according to which they can be deciphered, the support on which they travel and the process of transmission, and the "open" investigation led by Lyotard together with a pool of scientists, computer scientists and philosophers aims, among other things, to problematize precisely the relationship between language and referent: matter is no longer, necessarily, something that is in *front of* us, but a surface, a substance that affects us in sensible terms and whose structure, language and code it seems necessary to interrogate. As the embodiments of the immaterial of algorithms, the microscopic images of chemical fibers, the data streams of calculators, the invisible currents of the stock market demonstrate, where before language could designate matter from the outside, as the referent of its sentence, now it is messages that generate matter.[21] But all this is demonstrated, in an even more immediate and "popular" way, by the images spread by the media: "The "coverage" of events confused with events. A feeling that has no external reality, no Other if not representation. Messages endlessly referring to other messages. *Simulacra*, never the thing itself. Between it and us, the veil of analogy. Even more: the filter of digitalization".[22] Which a few years later would begin to cloak our lives.

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POSTMODERNITY AND PHILOSOPHY

Roberto Mordacci

FROM POSTMODERNISM TO NEOMODERNITY

1. *Modernity and the Question of Meaning*

In many ways, the question posed in our time is unheard of. Of course, the ultimate questions are the same in every age, and one would even dare to say that they are the same at every latitude: "Why being rather than nothing?" (in the Leibnizian formula); "What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? What is man?" (in the incisive Kantian synthesis); and "How should we live?" (the motto that Socrates offers as an introduction not only to ethics and politics, but to the whole metaphysical construction of the Republic).

And yet, the present time seems to require a further effort; it presents more serious obstacles to understanding our direction and our place in the cosmos, not to mention our destiny. The awareness of many roads taken and of many failed attempts, the historical conscience made heavy by time, the perception — confused but unavoidable — of the limitedness of our gaze, and the need to find globally acceptable answers seem to undermine our trust in our cultural resources. Moreover, the speed of change we face — that progressive acceleration of time that, as Hartmut Rosa underlines,[1] ends up generating a new sense of individual and social alienation — is a warning to every ambition to determine something stable and lasting and is even a threat to the availability of time to create solid constructions. These characteristic elements of the contemporary world seem to make difficult, if not impossible, the task of thinking again, of embarking on the presumptuous adventure of seeking to understand ourselves and the reality in which we are living. We are hopelessly less innocent than our forefathers when it comes to those fundamental questions, as we are besieged by the "historical disease" that Nietzsche already understood in 1874 when he published

1 Hartmut Rosa, *Acceleration and Alienation. Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (Copenhagen: NSU Press, 2010).

the second essay of *Untimely Meditations* (entitled, not by chance, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life").

The question of meaning, and of the resources to find it or create it, is certainly perennial, but the weight of historical experience and the effort of thought in the labyrinths of the philosophical tradition make the question immensely complicated to the contemporary mind.

Faced with this challenge, when its depth is recognised, at least two general types of response in contemporary culture, two philosophical attitudes, contend for the field. The first is marked by the refusal to accept the question itself: the search for meaning, truth, justice, good, and beauty does not take place; indeed, it is itself a violence, a *hybris*, a germ of contradiction that has had most pernicious effects. In particular, the typical claim of modernity to take upon itself the weight of this question and to carry it out with its own means — that is, reason and experience — is declared bankrupt and dangerous: this search — it is said — contains its own condemnation, often identified with the demon of technology, which will in the end destroy everything if we do not reject the form of thought and therefore the concrete forms of living on which the whole "Western" tradition has been built (assuming that we can speak, in general, of something called "the West").

Prophets such as Spengler declare the sunset of this form of life unstoppable and even desirable in order to leave room for a different form of thought, for a *différant* relationship with reality, as Derrida hopes,[2] for a liberation from modern and calculating reason, a reason capable, according to Heidegger and his followers, only of a thought of the entity and not of a word speaking the being.

This philosophical attitude, which dominated much of the twentieth century, has been called postmodernism. The denomination is in some ways reductive (although in other ways it is very appropriate) because in the work of many postmodern authors (Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, to cite a few examples), the object of criticism is much larger than what we call modernity. Already Horkheimer and Adorno — in a certain sense, precursors of postmodernism — trace the "dialectic of enlightenment" (in a work of that title) back to the Homeric poems: the germ of contradiction resides in the separation of subject and object, in the breaking of the original unity of humans and nature. In this perspective, Odysseus, whose strategy is to listen to the Sirens using his deaf companions to power

2 Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972).

his ship's movement, becomes an *ante litteram* emblem of enlightenment and anticipates the bourgeois conscience and capitalist exploitation.[3]

Criticism of objectifying, or instrumental, or calculating thought became a commonplace in the philosophy of the twentieth century, often turning into rejection of every form of rationality and into the proposal to abandon any theory of history, every possible ontology, every conception of the subject, every paradigm of art, every theory of justice. The postmodern attitude thus became a general form of cultural self-understanding at the end of the millennium, thanks also to expressions and evocative metaphors of a "postmodern condition". Thus, for example, Lyotard spoke of the end of the great narratives (of the *métarécits*),[4] Bauman told of the "liquidity" of society and of life (according to his felicitous but too reiterated metaphor),[5] Fukuyama theorised the end of history (recalled, albeit with other intentions),[6] Hegelians wrote of the death of art, Vattimo contends the unmasking of the subject and the farewell to the truth.[7] I will come back to this shortly, noting the main criticisms of modernity but also pointing out the limits of postmodernism.

The second type of response that can be advanced against the crisis of contemporary culture does not dispose of the question of meaning, dealt with more often in attempts to advance discussion within philosophical disciplines than in public debate. In this case, it is not a question of tracing the theoretical or cultural move that is projected behind or beyond the alleged error of modernity, but rather a question of resuming the typical quest of modernity, without, however, claiming the absoluteness and conclusiveness that is attributed to the moderns and that in reality, as we will see, is only true of a certain variety of modernity. Of this response, which is both critical and constructive, there is testimony in philosophy no less than in the arts and in ideas for social innovation, although these are only sporadic attempts and not a continuous trend. This answer is a sort of revival of the modern instinct for rational and experiential investigation but with an awareness of limits and dead ends. In particular, this perspective is based

3 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Hamburg: Zerschlagt das Bürgerliche Verlag, 1947).

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

5 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

6 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

7 Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità* (Milano: Garzanti, 1985); Id., *Addio alla verità* (Roma: Meltemi, 2009).

on the critical ideal of knowledge. It refuses to be dogmatic but does not renounce the construction of moral and political theories (see the resumption of normative ethics and normative political thought after Rawls)[8]; in fact, it formulates social and economic proposals (such as the basic income, the research on sustainability, and the launch of innovative social programmes) and creates visions of humanity that integrate scientific discoveries (particularly in the field of neuroscience and genetics) into philosophical understanding. It is a question not of elaborating the great systems that characterised nineteenth-century philosophy, but rather of sketching forms of rationality and subjectivity that are able to withstand the complication of the current scenario. As we shall see, it is to this second perspective that we would do well to dedicate our efforts, especially in view of the role that Western culture can play in the contemporary globalised landscape.

2. *The Reasons of Postmodernism*

Postmodernism — that is, the sociological and philosophical theory based on the diagnosis that modernity is at its end — has addressed to it essentially three radical criticisms. First, modernity was based on the idea of a human *subject* who is sure of himself. By virtue of the famous Cartesian formula (*Ego cogito, ergo sum*), philosophy, and modern culture with it, has attributed to the subject — that is, the ego — an ontologically ultimate status. The modern subject, it is said, is no longer one of the degrees of being that lead to the metaphysical fullness of God, but rather a dense and insuperable substance. The Cartesian subject can even split itself into two separate dimensions (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) without this affecting the original and therefore irreducible certainty of the ego's unity, of the solidity of its consciousness, and, through it, of the body itself. Now, this substance, constituted by the self-certain self, cannot but be egocentric and devoid of essential relations with other consciousnesses, with the world, and with God himself. Hence comes modern individualism and the inability to think of morality and politics if not in terms of abstract relations derived from the rock-hard certainty of the self. From this point of view, solipsism is a logical implication of the *cogito*, its application in a moral and political field. The postmodernist critique objects that this solipsism is vain and above all illusory: after four centuries of attempts, the subject

8 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

has by no means proven solid, the ideas are neither clear nor distinct, and individuals live fragmented and solitary lives.

Second, the modern conception of *rationality* is instrumental and absolutist. Human reason is the ultimate and definitive court of knowledge, and knowledge can be based exclusively on those clear and distinct ideas that appear incontrovertible to the subject. This "absolute conception of knowledge", as Bernard Williams defines it in relation to Descartes,[9] is naturally the basis of the modern scientific enterprise, which is driven by an intrinsically reductionist impulse: all that falls beyond the range of scientific methods (logical, experimental, or both) not only fails to be knowledge, but literally does not exist. Knowledge is the real, and knowledge is what can be known with certainty through the analytical-geometric method and sensible experiences. Or, according to the idealistic version, knowledge is all that is part of the self-awareness of the spirit and therefore nothing falls outside of it; that is, nothing falls outside the transcendental and trans-historical Subject. The scientific constructions, no less than the idealistic ones, are in this perspective the simple development of this conception, although they ended up opposing each other in the most radical of the cultural clashes of modernity, that between the "natural" sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the "historical" or "human" sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Postmodernism here argues that the cathedrals of knowledge have collapsed, that the scientific methods have shattered into a multiplicity of incomprehensible languages (the language-games by Wittgenstein, as quoted by Lyotard), and above all that the absolutist claim of knowledge and reason has assumed a totalitarian face, both in the definition of acceptable forms of subjectivation (the subjection of which Foucault speaks) and in the social structures of oppression and inequality generated by the capitalist system.

Third, modernity has placed itself, already in its opposition to the Middle Ages and in giving itself the name of "modern", in a conception of *finalistic history* marked by necessity. We are modern because we are those who live now (the Latin *modo* — from which the word *modernus* comes — means "now") and who (this is the decisive move) find themselves "one step ahead" of those who have preceded them in a direction (the "magnificent and progressive fates" that Leopardi mocked) that promises to realise a bright and happy destiny. The sense of an immanent dynamism of history, guaranteed by the unstoppable development of reason and knowledge, is inscribed in the conception of the self of the modern human, in his confi-

9 Bernard Williams, *Descartes. The Project of Pure Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 1978).

dence in himself and in his means. Science (according to the positivists) or the spirit (according to the idealists) will necessarily complete their path of self-transparency, up to an absolute knowledge that will conclude the dynamics of history: it will not be possible to go beyond certain forms of knowledge, state, and morality, and these will be the forms that will be imposed everywhere. It is in this perspective that Fukuyama's thesis about the end of history arises: one cannot go beyond liberal democracy, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and liberal democracy will be the definitive form of political and economic life, one that will also dominate outside the Western world.

This "colonialist" inclination of reason, which was one of the self-justifying mechanisms of European colonialism, is motivated precisely by the philosophy of history based on the idea of progress,[10] at the head of which is the absolutist reason mentioned above. Postmodernism intends here to show, on the one hand, that the promise of happiness in the philosophy of modern history has too often turned out to be fallacious and, on the other hand, that that promise is a distorted dream of domination over other forms of knowledge and other conceptions of history. To this claim postmodernism responds with the declaration and indeed the hope that history is at its end in a sense opposite to the too triumphalist one proposed by Fukuyama, or it responds by renouncing the claim of the modern subject to high domination. This subject, in this idea of a necessary development of history towards a fulfilment is paradoxically completely dethroned, removed from its initial centrality, and reduced to a mere appearance — a particle of a much more substantial spirit in which individuals are nothing but stages of the self-consciousness of the absolute (as happens according to a certain reading of Hegel).

Now, these points, if we apply them not to the whole of modernity but specifically to nineteenth-century philosophies, are indeed appropriate. The opposing systems of scientistic positivism and historicist idealism seem to effectively be based on different versions of these assumptions: in both cases, a subject capable of unshakeable self-evidence constitutes the foundation of knowledge that is certain and cumulative and corresponds to a progression in the stages of knowledge no less than in the epochs of history. It matters little that, in the case of positivism, the only subject capable of advancing that knowledge and therefore history is the scientific and empiricist individual, while for idealism it is a trans-individual, a spiritual

10 Amy Allen, *The End of Progress. Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press 2016).

and communal subject, whose self-awareness passes through the objective forms of society and the state. In both cases, the subject is the foundation, knowledge is cumulative, and above all the historical process is necessary, guaranteed by the scientific method or by the logic of the concept. In any case, history is inevitable, and therefore it is also right and justifies even the most radical sacrifices.

Now, against this view, we can take a closer look at what modernity really has been. In modernity, and in particular from the sixteenth century to the Enlightenment, one can trace the genealogy of concepts of the subject, of knowledge, and of history that do not embody these criticisms. I can only cite a few examples here. Already in Descartes, the moral subject is much less certain of itself than is imagined by postmodernist critics, and it dares to outline a merely temporary morality; in Montaigne, the ego is constituted by putting itself in a radical crisis, through a serene but merciless reflection, which leads to a subjectivity that is anything but triumphant; in Locke, both knowledge and morality are subjected to the scrutiny of experience (and, for this reason, of intersubjectivity), to the comparison between perspectives, none of which can be considered absolute (and hence the basis of tolerance), although some are clearly false; in Kant, cognitive and practical faculties are critically scrutinised to define precisely their proper and misplaced uses, and freedom as autonomy is placed in an intrinsic relationship with all persons (as seen in the third formula of categorical imperative, that of the realm of ends).

There is a certain continuity between the subject of the first modernity and that of the Enlightenment, united by a critical awareness and a practical orientation in which certainties are probable elements — materials for building revisable buildings of knowledge and coexistence — and history appears as a possibility of progress, not a destiny or a deterministic development. If it is freedom as a distinctive element of the human being that one finds in modern anthropology, compared to the essentialist visions of the past it is a freedom with criteria. It is animated both by an internal validation criterion and by an external limit: that of the comparison between reasons, or between subjects bearing a common critical capacity and the ability to define the forms and rules of a humane sustainable cohabitation.

Postmodernist criticism unites, in a single summary judgement, elements that are too different from each other. Moreover, it addresses objections to the first modernity and Enlightenment that appear appropriate only if they refer to backward projections of typical features of nineteenth-century philosophical systems, whose effects were prolonged and fully manifested in the twentieth century. But there is a profound discontinuity

between these systems and those elements of the modern that we have summarised above — namely, the elements of *finite subjectivity*, the *critical ideal of knowledge*, and the *open conception of history*. The last of these, in particular, contrasted with a providential vision in which every decisive role was denied to human freedom. In the authentically modern conception, history tends to progress but does not necessarily do so. Progress is always possible but always threatened since it is always exposed to the contradictions of individuals' wills and to the short circuits of social dynamics. Therefore, the comprehensive rejection of modernity advocated by postmodernism appears as both a reductive and distorted vision of the modern and as a pernicious renunciation of what precisely in the modern can constitute an element of redemption for today. Indeed, the *practical conception of the subject*, the *critical vision of knowledge*, and the *open idea of history* appear as paths that have not been completely explored, because they have been obscured in the second modernity — that is, starting from the nineteenth century — by more absolutist and more totalitarian visions.

3. *The Modern Vocation: The Critique of Dogmatism*

However, there is an element that not even postmodernism intends to erase and that played a decisive role at the beginning of modernity. This is *the rejection of dogmatism*. The Cartesian move, as well as Montaigne's scepticism and Locke's criticism of innatism, must be interpreted primarily as a step away from visions of crystallised knowledge, politics, and history, in which subjectivity plays a secondary or passive role. It must be remembered that, more than being a sign of an egocentric *hybris*, Descartes's criticism of the scholastic education he had received in La Flèche was born of a sense of frustration, a sense of the immobility of the system, of the perception that certain theses were now only repeated and not really known.

A similar refusal is in some way echoed in postmodernist critiques of modernity. A certain vision of reason, knowledge, and social coexistence finally imposed itself, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the common conscience, generating among other things more trouble than solutions to the problems posed by the increase in complexity. Postmodernism reacts to what we may call *late modern dogmatism* — that is, to the counterposed certainties of positivist science on the one hand and idealist metaphysics on the other — claiming a more vivid historical awareness and a more radical self-critical capacity. Moreover, in another

trait that undoubtedly recalls the spirit of the modern, the postmodernist campaign has as its declared objective a more effective *emancipation* of individuals and groups from the meshes of a social structure considered (in many ways rightly) oppressive and unfair. One of the recurring features of postmodernism is the aspiration to overthrow or abandon (not to say overcome) those forms of associated life that, through the play of subjections and "non-negotiable" truths, put the subjects in pre-established and often invisible cages. The economic-political status quo has become the late modern dogma, especially when it has been declared definitively successful or everlasting.

From this point of view, the postmodernist diagnosis appears erroneous because it accuses the (first) modernity of faults that it does not have, but the emancipatory need is unquestionably the heir of the best spirit of modernity. In this sense, postmodernism does not want to leave modernity at all, because it wants to carry out its liberation project, albeit on different grounds.

However, it is precisely here that we must distance ourselves from its criticism. Postmodernism deprives itself of the only possible bases for every sensible attempt to realise emancipation. In the name of what can one criticise the oppressive structures of late modernity, if it is not a more autonomous subjectivity, a knowledge more aware of one's own finiteness, and a vision of history in which another world is possible? If, on the other hand, we need to abandon the subject, reject reason, and reject any idea of the future, as if we were dealing with letting ourselves go to an impersonal, prerational world devoid of possible destinations, it is certain that the technical-capitalist system will have its easiest victory. Fragmentary subjects, weak thoughts, and stories without perspectives are the best ally of the status quo and from such a self-understanding of contemporary culture nothing innovative can arise. As Jürgen Habermas has written, postmodernism reveals itself as an essentially neoconservative movement.[11] Depriving us of the basis of criticism — namely, reasonableness and subjectivity — postmodernism risks putting contemporary culture in the hands of every form of dogmatism: religious, cultural, political, and ethnic. It is in this sense that we cannot fail to call ourselves (neo)modern — that is, engaged in the attempt to define more suitable canons for the current situation and to seek the foundations for a shared knowledge and a more harmonious coexistence beyond the nineteenth-century categories and from the perspective

11 Jürgen Habermas, *Moderno, postmoderno e neoconservatorismo,* in Gaetano Chiurazzi (a cura di), *Il postmoderno* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2002).

of free subjects, in the spirit of the critical (and non-absolutist) ideal of reason, and from the perspective of an open history.

4. *The Unfinished Subject; or, Return to Utopia*

One of the traits that seem to announce the reiteration of themes typical of early modernity is a certain return of utopian thought. Utopia has been, since the coining of the name in the work of Thomas More,[12] one of the ways in which the modern has ventured to think of a just and tolerant society and of a methodical but open and shared body of knowledge (as in *The New Atlantis*, by Bacon). However strange and often unacceptable are some of the solutions proposed by the utopians (rigid education, the project of eugenic population control), the "spirit of utopia" — as Ernst Bloch called it[13] — aims essentially at a *liberated* society: liberated from the yoke of servile labour, political conflicts, inequality, superstition, and conflict. The abolition of private property, often advocated by utopian projects, seems perhaps a too radical measure to contemporary eyes, but it is certainly a measure that aims to remove one of the factors (certainly not the only one) underlying inequality and social injustice. Today there are proposals, such as a universal and unconditional basic income (proposed by Van Parijs and Vanderborght),[14] that, without going that far, aim at a rebalancing of opportunities and a mutual recognition between individuals unbound from economic status and unlimited competition.

Characteristic of utopian thought is the attempt to offer a concrete image of society, conceived in the projective reality of an actual, living social body. More's Utopia is not a future or unreal country. It is nonexistent — not present in the usual geographical space — but nothing suggests that it is not *possible*. The only way to describe it is not to imagine it but to recount it, as the eyewitness Raphael Hythlodaeus does in More's work. Utopian thought consciously ventures hypotheses, skipping the too precise delimitations of theory (and in fact *Utopia* is a narrative, not a treatise) and

12 Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)*,* critical edition: Thomas More, *Utopia. Latin Text and English Translation,* ed. by G. M. Logan, R. M. Adams and C. H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

13 Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (München und Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1923).

14 Philippe Van Parijs P., Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income. A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

creates a practical attitude: the projections of Cabet, Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, and others were inspired both by completely new community projects and by proposals for radical social reform, which produced real effects in the world.

In the contemporary context, the need to think outside the usual patterns — that is to say, beyond late modern dogmatism — forces us to attempt a utopian attempt: the hazard of a thought that seeks justice and freedom in original forms, at the height of times and able to attract adhesions beyond the disintegration. Postmodernist thought is profoundly anti-utopian: it does not believe in the possibility of an alternative social thought; rather, it immediately sees a dystopian nightmare, a total deformation. But such a nightmare is not necessary at all. Utopian thought is a provocation, and it is a source of unique ideas, innovative insights, and projections that are often less unrealistic than one might think. Despite appearances, utopian thought has no systemic spirit; it is rather a critical exercise (let us not forget that the first part of *Utopia* was a bitter denunciation of the economic and social injustices of English society) that is not limited to a *pars destruens* but accepts the challenge of building and working positively. The irony of declaring Utopia a nonexisting place is precisely the critical awareness of the rational instance, which warns us not to take any social form as definitive and immutable. The non-existing place is a *possible* place (it is in fact the *not-yet-existing place*), but the concrete and specific traits of the just society will depend on the circumstances in which real people will live their real lives, here and elsewhere. The exploration of this *neomodern space* is the task facing us, and it requires us to undertake a totally new journey.

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RECONCILING SELF-REFLEXIVENESS WITH COMMONALITY
Modernism, Postmodernism, and Perfectionism in Stanley Cavell

Introduction

In Stanley Cavell's work, no systematic treatment of the concept of postmodernism can be found. However, on occasion of his reflections on modernism in the arts and philosophy, and in some cursory derogatory remarks on pop art and what he calls the "modernizers", Cavell discusses notions of formal experimentation, self-reflexiveness, and irony that are relevant to postmodernist practices. The aim of my article will be to analyse Cavell's notion of modernism, as well as the idea of postmodernism that can be extrapolated from it, against the backdrop of his more general conception of philosophy, literature, and the arts as means for a shared humanistic cultural conversation. Cavell's position on the modern, as I will show, is ambivalent. Nevertheless, far from amounting to a simply ambiguous or contradictory stance, such ambivalence, I will argue, is deeply motivated by the humanistic ideal that Cavell's early writings frame in terms of "therapy" and "education", only to be later reformulated through the concept of "perfectionism".

The burden of modernism and its avoidance

The interest in avant-garde art and the category of modernism has early roots in Stanley Cavell's intellectual upbringing. His major contributions to the debate were mainly published between 1965 ("Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy") [1] and 1971 (*The World Viewed*) [2] under the influ-

1 Collected in Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say. Updated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, originally published in 1969), 68–90.

2 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film. Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, originally published in

ence of his personal friendship with art critic and historian Michael Fried, whom he met in the early 60s.[3] However, his work was also a response to that of critics such as Clement Greenberg and Lionel Trilling, of which he had been ostensibly aware since, in around 1947, he became a committed reader of *Partisan Review* and other journals of the so-called "Anti-Stalinist Left" of New York.[4]

A first aspect of Cavell's approach that makes it quite germane to the topic of the present volume is that for him modernism is, in a sense, a *condition*, a situation in which practitioners of an art or more generally of a discipline find themselves. Although Cavell makes no attempt to use the historical and social sciences to situate modernist artistic practices within a wider social, cultural, and economic context, there is, in his reading of the phenomenon, a sense of ineluctability. He quotes Wölfflin's "not everything is possible in every period",[5] describes atonal music as a new "form of life" in Wittgenstein's sense, and goes as far as to evoke the Hegelian conception of a development of the Spirit.[6] Elsewhere, Cavell describes the innovation of atonal music as "*necessitated* by a crisis of composition".[7] Past a certain threshold, it proves impossible not to become modernists for those wanting to continue doing what Cavell, in *Must We Mean What We Say*, repeatedly calls "serious art". It is a threshold whose timing and inner dynamic is different depending on whether the object of discussion is painting, sculpture, theatre, or film. However, some sense of determinism seems to recur in Cavell's analysis, and is registered by his choice to sometimes call modernism a "burden".[8]

On analysing Cavell's 1969 collection *Must We Mean What We Say*, together with his 1971 *The World Viewed*, we can identify at least four traits of this modernist predicament. It entails: 1) a sense of inevitable exhaustion of traditional conventions (in *The World Viewed* Cavell also calls them "automatisms" and "media"), 2) a re-focusing of the practice on the

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1971).

3 See Stanley Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 406–7.

4 See Giovanna Borradori, *Conversazioni americane* (Roma-Bari, Laterza 1991), p. 151. See also *Little Did I Know*, p. 231. For the intellectual environment of New York"s Anti-Stalinist Left, see Alan Maynard Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

5 See 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', p. 68.

6 'Aesthetic problems of Modern Philosophy', 78–9.

7 'Music Discomposed', in *Must We Mean*, 167–196 (p. 179). Italics are mine.

8 'Music Discomposed', p. 173.

defining traits of the medium itself, 3) a tendency to problematize or even "defeat" the audience, and 4) a constant and anxious attempt to avoid what Cavell calls the "threat of fraudulence".

Cox remarked that for Cavell a modernist situation entails an "existential crisis", affecting artists, critics, and audiences at the same time.[9] What happens to music composers like John Cage and Ernst Křenek,[10] a playwright like Samuel Beckett,[11] a painter like Jackson Pollock,[12] or a film director like Jean-Luc Godard,[13] is that, at some point, for some reason, they feel they have to problematize their whole relationship with both their audiences and the past tradition of their practice. The conventions of the tradition are not enough to say what they have to say;[14] to continue adhering to them would not only determine a lack of originality but, more radically, push their production outside the realm of (serious) art altogether. It would make their art "philistine"[15]– we are not far from Greenberg's reflection on "kitsch".[16]

This change in artistic practices, Cavell argues, also prompts a substantial redefinition of the tasks of art criticism. Evaluation and classification, in fact, collapse onto one another.[17] Critics can no longer simply take for granted that a certain piece of work is a work of art (a painting, a poem, a symphony, etc.) and focus on its evaluation, on passing a judgment on its quality, and on its author's degree of artistry. Rather, the task of evaluation becomes indistinguishable from that of classifying a certain object as a genuine instance of a certain art form, and declaring that this artist's redefinition of the procedures of the medium used has actually produced a new exemplar of that art form (a painting, a poem, etc.), which is accepted as such rather than as a fraudulent imitation of it.[18] In an essay on Kierkegaard, which can be also seen as reminiscent of Lionel Trilling"s

9 Franklin Cox, 'Stanley Cavell on Modern Music: 'Music Discomposed' and 'A Matter of Meaning It' after Forty Years', *Journal of Music Theory*, 54, 1, Spring 2010, 37–60 (40).
10 See 'Music Discomposed'.
11 See 'Ending the waiting game: A reading of Beckett's Endgame', *Must We Mean,* 107–150.
12 See *Excursus: Some Modernist Painting*, *The World Viewed,* 108–118.
13 *The World Viewed*, pp. 96-101.
14 'Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*', *Must We Mean*, 151–166 (p. 164).
15 'Music Discomposed', p. 190
16 Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Gard and Kitsch', *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3–21.
17 'A Matter of Meaning It', in *Must We Mean*, 197–219 (pp. 199–200).
18 'Music discomposed', p. 175.

intuitions on the spiritual undertone of modern art,[19] Cavell draws a parallel between the modernist crisis and the loss of authority and faith in a religious context. The threat of fraudulence that haunts artists, audiences and critics repeats the religious anxiety of having to discriminate between false and true prophets, between real and fraudulent revelation, between those, that is, who "give to the age what the age needs" and those who give it "what it demands".[20]

Following closely Clement Greenberg's essay, "Modernist Painting", from 1961,[21] Cavell identifies a very specific process for this modernist re-creation of conventions. It is true that every avant-garde movement, possibly every individual artist, will have to radically re-invent the procedures of the art it works with. But the aim of such a re-invention is not to cut all ties with the medium and its tradition, but to re-discover it.[22] By focusing on the medium-specific traits of the art form (on the flat delimited surface of the canvas for painting, on the mere existence of time and sound in music, etc.), the modernist artist will discover, as if for the first time, what the medium had been from the beginning, its essence, the "idea of [its] art as such".[23] In other words, modernist works are self-reflexive, their research has an intrinsically ontological penchant.[24]

Against the backdrop of this conception of modernism we can understand Cavell's stance towards those whom he calls, in a derogatory sense, the "modernizers".[25] As anticipated, this is as close an analysis of postmodernism as can be found in his work. "Modernizers" are exemplified by pop art, which Cavell discusses in a page of his 1967 essay "A Matter of Meaning It". Pop art, unlike modernist art, shows no commitment to painting *as an art*, it does not

> struggle with the history which makes it an art, continuing and countering the conventions and intentions and responses which comprise that history. It

19 See Lionel Trilling, 'Art and Neurosis', in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: New York Review Books, 1950); see also 'On the Teaching of Modern Literature' and 'The Fate of Pleasure', in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning*, London: Penguin Books, 1965).

20 'Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*', p. 163.

21 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' [1961], reprinted in Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds.), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

22 *The World Viewed*, 101–118.

23 *The World Viewed*, p. 106.

24 *The World Viewed*, 118–26.

25 *Must We Mean*, xxxiv-xxxv.

> may be that the history of a given art has come to an end. […] But it is] as if the various anti-art movements claim to know this has happened and to provide us with distraction, […] while at the same time they claim the respect due only to those whose seriousness they cannot share and they receive it, because of our frightened confusion.[26]

Cavell, it seems, faults pop art because of its lack of interest in the continuation of tradition. Its playfulness and irony, its allusions to the kitsch products of popular culture are a mere distraction, a complacent yielding to a crisis to which modernism, on the contrary, seeks – tragically, we might say – to respond.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to think that Cavell's perception of modernism is entirely positive. Upon analysing both his essay on music and his later book on the ontology of film, we find a clear strain of scepticism towards modernism itself, rather than solely towards the "pop" modernizers.

In "Music Discomposed" Cavell analyses two journals specialized in the theory and analysis of modern music, the German-language *Die Reihe*, originally edited by Stockhausen, and the American journal *Perspectives of New Music*. He finds them obsessed with "new-ness itself", prey to an "intimidating technicality and arcane apparatus[es]", characterized by a total "absence of humane music criticism",[27] that is, a criticism able to open the music art-form to the understanding of an audience other than that of modern music composers themselves. Such journals, Cavell argues, reflect the situation of an art in which the "procedures and problems it now seems necessary to composers to employ and confront to make a work of art at all *themselves* insure that their work will not be comprehensible to an audience".[28] Thus, modern music instances the burden of modernism at its most dramatic. It shows the dangers and contradictions of an art which "has today withdrawn from, or is required to defeat, its audience";[29] an art apparently "forced to defeat the commonality […] in order to remain art at all".[30]

Ideas of audiences and lost commonality are a central aspect of the undercurrent of suspicion towards the modern that runs through *The World Viewed*. Cavell's 1971 book on film, despite being published in the roar-

26 'A Matter of Meaning It', in *Must We Mean*, p. 205.
27 'Music Discomposed', pp. 171–2.
28 'Music Discomposed', p. 173.
29 'Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*', p. 164.
30 'Music discomposed', p. 190.

ing years of European art cinema and the American New Wave, seems permeated by a nostalgia for classical Hollywood. In its opening pages, Cavell laments that the cinema of the 60s – which, interestingly, he seems to interpret as the mass entry of the medium onto a modernist stage – has broken his "natural relation to film".[31] A few pages later, he declares that his book will be devoted to understanding how for so long film could have "avoided the fate of modernism", and have remained the one art able to "be taken seriously without having to assume the burden of seriousness".[32] It is then interesting–for reasons to which I will come back later–that, in the same introductory pages, Cavell declares his book on film to be "an autobiography of companions",[33] also declaring that the first spark of his interest in bringing films into philosophical reflection was prompted by the pedagogical advantages they showed in the context of a college seminar.[34]

Philosophy as inherently modernist

A consideration of other moments in his writing on modernism would, however, dispel the impression that Cavell was simply an opponent of it. Pages could be mentioned, for instance, in which Cavell argues against too quick a dismissal of James Joyce's deconstruction of language in that it too may at some point become necessary in order to defend reason.[35] Along similar lines runs his defence of Samuel Beckett against critics – among them György Lukács –who, in Cavell's opinion, either failed to see the epochal problems to which Beckett's practice was responding, or to see it as a positive solution to those problems.[36] Moreover, Cavell's whole solution, in *The World Viewed*, to the "enigma" of film could be interpreted as appreciative of modernism. If cinema avoided the burden of high modernism during those same decades during which virtually every other art in the Western world embraced it, it is because cinema, due to its peculiar "Bazinian" ontology, that is, its mechanical and physical photographic base,[37] is inherently and from its very beginning self-reflexive.[38] To put it

31 *The World Viewed*, p. xix.
32 *The World Viewed*, pp. 14–15.
33 *The World Viewed*, pp. 3–15.
34 *The World Viewed*, p. xx.
35 'Aesthetic problems of Modern Philosophy', p. 76.
36 'Ending the Waiting Game', pp. 107–8.
37 *The World Viewed*, pp. 16–25, 68–73.
38 *The World Viewed*, pp. 122–125.

differently, film resisted the fate of modernism for the very good reason that, in a sense, it was *born* modernist.

In any case, nowhere is Cavell's interest in and even allegiance to the modern testified as clearly as in his reflections on the link between modernism and the practice of philosophy. In the Foreword to *Must We Mean What We Say,* written around 1969 and quite significantly entitled "An Audience for Philosophy", Cavell claims that philosophy too was undergoing a modernist crisis.[39] Like theatre, painting, and music, philosophy was no longer sure of what it should say and how it should say it. It had lost certainty of its aims and methods, of how it should be written and taught; of whether its mission concerned society as a whole or whether it had no mission at all; of whether it should become a science or conceive of itself as one of the humanities; of whether it could take its tradition for granted or should cut all ties with it. Philosophy lives in what in his masterwork, *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell calls "divided states":[40] the Anglo-American (often called "analytical") strain and the French-German ("continental") line shunning one another, each accusing the other of fraudulence, trying to rule the other out of the philosophical world altogether. The first looks to the hard sciences and the rigour of mathematics as its model; the second maintains its avenues with literature, theology, and traditional metaphysics.

A crucial aspect of this existential crisis is that philosophy no longer knows whether it has an audience or not.[41] Science, argues Cavell, is indifferent to the existence of an audience, or to be more precise, in principle it has no audience at all. The results achieved by scientists can be certainly "popularized", sometimes even usefully so. Strictly speaking, however, they are addressed solely to the community of experts and only have meaning in the context of the Kuhnian "paradigms" shared within it.[42] Of the arts, on the other hand, it is in some sense analytically true to say that they have an audience–and this is why the burden of modernism can affect them so immensely. In this respect, the status of philosophy is not clear. Born, ever since Plato's *Republic*, out of the desire to mould the just citizen of the

39 *Must We Mean*, pp. xxx–xl.

40 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. xiii. See also Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981 [originally published in 1972]), p. xvi.

41 *Must We Mean*, pp. xxxviii-ix.

42 For Kuhn"s influence on Cavell, see *Little Did I Know*, pp. 352–7.

just city,[43] philosophy is described by Cavell as "education of grownups.[44] For him, philosophy has a dimension which is unavoidably pedagogical, or even, to put it in words closer to his sustained interest in the late Wittgenstein, "therapeutic".[45] In this perspective, there should be no question that philosophy does have an audience, that its practice is inherently relational. However, this cannot be taken for granted in the present state of professionalized academic philosophy – by "present" meaning both the time of Cavell's philosophical coming of age in the logical-positivism-inclined UCLA, Berkeley and Harvard of the 50s and 60s, and, indeed, our own time. For a philosophy more and more specialized on the model of the natural sciences; increasingly written and communicated in the impersonal literary genre of the academic article; and gradually more distant from the human concerns that usually bring young men and women to choose it as a subject for their higher education and sometimes as a career, it cannot be taken for granted that an audience exists apart from that of other academics. "Philosophy", writes Cavell, "inspires much unhappy love".[46]

In his *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (1989), Cavell rejects the solution offered by Richard Rorty.[47] To Cavell's worries about the present irrelevance of philosophy in the public sphere, Rorty answered that the solution was for philosophy to stop worrying about its tradition, about its epistemic status, and possibly about truth itself.[48] Philosophy, rather, should become the kind of ironic "post-philosophical" cultural conversation described by Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* through the opposition of "hermeneutics" and "epistemology": while epistemology seeks to systematize and ground an objective knowledge, the aim of hermeneutics is to fluidify ideas and practices, to engage others in a conversa-

43 See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1990), pp. 6–7; Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letter on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge MA: Havard University Press, 2004), pp. 313–39, 445–6.

44 *The Claim of Reason*, p. 125.

45 See 'The Availability of Wittgenstein"s Later Philosophy', in *Must We Mean*, pp. 41–67.

46 *Must We Mean*, p. xxxiv.

47 Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 3–4, 72.

48 See also Rorty's Review of *The Claim of Reason* in Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays: 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 176–190.

tion that will help them "out of their self-enclosed practices".[49] This conception of philosophy is put to the service of an idea of education – Rorty calls it "edification"[50] – not unlike Cavell's. Nevertheless, Cavell seems to be at pains to disentangle his perspective from Rorty's. Although Cavell is never entirely explicit on the subject, it can be surmised that to him Rorty's suggestion was bound to appear analogous to the work of the pop "modernizers" discussed above. In lieu of an ironic, anti-artistic stance, we would find an anti-philosophical stance in which – and I paraphrase the previous quote by Cavell – "it is as if the various anti-philosophy movements claim to know the end of philosophy has happened and to provide us with distraction, […] while at the same time they claim the respect due only to those whose seriousness they cannot share". An analogous coldness, albeit ambivalent and sometimes even tinged with admiration, can be sensed in Cavell's cursory responses to a post-epistemic movement like French poststructuralism.[51] But this topic would require a separate discussion.

If Cavell seeks an alternative to Rorty's post-philosophical stance, it is because for him it is crucial to preserve a continuity for philosophy. Cavell sometimes calls it the problem of the "inheritance of philosophy", also adding that in some moments it might become "philosophy's only necessary business".[52] The problem of inheritance was stated as early as 1972 when, in his book on David Henry Thoreau, Cavell asked: "Why has America never expressed itself philosophically?"[53] And Cavell interprets all of his major philosophical points of reference as concerned with this, as trying to determine how and to what extent they can inherit philosophy, therein rethinking and at the same time continuing it. For American transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, this meant inheriting Europe; for Heidegger, inheriting the problem of Being in the time of Europe's demise; for the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, inheriting our own words, leading them home as if out of the metaphysical exile of which philosophy is at the same time the cause and the cure; and for Freud, inheriting the therapeutic task of philosophy in the form of psychoanalysis.[54]

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49 See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 317.

50 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 357–94.

51 See for example Stanley Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Blackwell 1995), 42–103.

52 *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 72.

53 *The Senses of Walden*, p. 33.

54 See *Cities of Words*, 282–300.

If Cavell does not consider this insistence on continuity and inheritance to be conservative, the reason is–to return to my main topic – that for him philosophy, like film, *was born modernist*. The aim of what John Dewey called a "reconstruction in philosophy" is shared by virtually all of the major thinkers of the last few centuries. Going backwards, it is at the core of Wittgenstein's idea of philosophy as language therapy, Nietzsche's abused "philosophizing with a hammer", Hegel's dialectic, Kant's notion of critique, and Descartes" methodical doubt. But following Cavell, we could argue that a "modernist" penchant – a concept now stretched to its limits – can be traced back as far as Plato's *Republic* and its founding myth, or allegory, of philosophy: the cave where prisoners are kept in darkness and ignorance, which can be escaped by freeing oneself from the bondage of traditional education, only to go back, when ready, to help the others and collaborate with them in the construction of a new tradition, a new education, and a new community[55]. That philosophy was born modernist, then, means that philosophy was born self-critical and self-reflexive; that the first question of philosophy has always been the meta-philosophical question (what is philosophy?), while its second question concerns the relationship between philosophy and its time–*its audience*.

A synthesis: perfectionism and the humanistic educational ideal

A precise ethical and political stance can be seen as lying at the root of everything Cavell has stated on modernism and modernizers, in both the arts and philosophy and in both suspicion and appreciation. Such an ethical and political stance is never formulated as clearly as in the books devoted to what Cavell labels "Emersonian perfectionism", namely in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* and *Cities of Words*.[56] The first of these texts was published in 1990, around twenty years after Cavell's dealings with modernism. However, as first argued by Stanley Bates[57] and acknowledged

55 *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome,* pp. 6–7; *Cities of Words,* pp. 313–39, 445–6.

56 Anticipations on the topic can be found also in Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

57 Stanley Bates, 'Stanley Cavell and Ethics', in Richard Eldridge (ed.), *Stanley Cavell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15–47. A similar idea seems to be at the core of the fifth chapter of Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Skepticism, Subjectivity, and the Ordinary* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 119–147.

on several occasions by Cavell himself,[58] the core insights of what would become his idea of perfectionism can already be found in the third and genetically oldest part of *The Claim of Reason*, submitted as part of his PhD dissertation in 1961.[59] Moreover, *Conditions* and *Cities of Words* are more or less explicitly presented by Cavell as a synthesis and reformulation of all his major philosophical concerns. It is thus legitimate to go slightly beyond what Cavell states explicitly, to "fill in the blanks" and interpret his stance towards modernism through the lenses of his later concept of perfectionism, which means–in other words–through the lenses of his more general therapeutic idea of philosophy. In this concept, as I hope to make clear in my closing remarks, all the ideas of audiences, self-criticism, and education mentioned so far seem to find a point of convergence.

When the arts reach the condition of modernism–which means when the arts start to "exist in the condition of philosophy"[60] – they are faced, we might say, with one of philosophy's most ancient dilemmas. It is again Plato who allegorized it in his founding myth. When the freeman goes back to the cave, his eyes are not used to darkness anymore, he stammers; his old fellow inmates seem unable to understand what he has to say. And so, arises the temptation to renounce the other and turn away from social conversation. When he talks about the modernist music of John Cage and Ernst Křenek, Cavell calls this the risk of "defeat[ing] the commonality".[61] Elsewhere, while discussing Wittgenstein's idea of language as something inherently shared and communal, in opposition to any fantasized "private language" and in connection with the old Lockean notion of "social contract",[62] Cavell writes:

> If I am to have my own voice […] I must be speaking for others and allow others to speak for me. The alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for someone else"s consent) is not: speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute.[63]

Instead of this defeatist and solipsistic attitude, what the best philosophy does, as well as the best of modernist and – we might argue, to compensate for Cavell's virtual neglect of it – even post-modernist art, is to

58 *Little Did I Know*, pp. 377–8.
59 *The Claim of Reason*, p. xxii.
60 *The World Viewed*, p. 14.
61 'Music discomposed', p. 190.
62 *The Claim of Reason*, pp. 22–28.
63 *The Claim of Reason*, p. 28.

try to reconcile self-reflexiveness with commonality, and complexity with communication. They reconcile the need to put each and every one of our words and practices under scrutiny, to reinvent them for our own present purposes, with the other, equally as important need, to make them part of a (renewed) social conversation. Every practice and speech-act, whether in philosophy, in the arts, or in our everyday life, is, in Cavell's Wittgensteinan perspective, at the same time an act of creation and a "claim to reason" which amounts to a "claim to community", to a world we share in common.[64]

In carrying the "ancient" burden of modernism, philosophy and the arts are equally called to this act of responsibility. In a page of his *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Cavell seems to be building something like a Western "canon" in the vein of Harold Bloom. Its subject is the tradition of philosophical perfectionism. Interestingly, however, Cavell's list includes not only philosophers, but also novelists, playwrights, poets, religious thinkers, and film directors. It goes from Plato and Aristotle to Frank Capra and Howard Hawks.[65] Differences between media and genres seem to be completely erased. Cavell is realizing something here he had theorized ever since the early stages of his production: in order to free philosophy from its self-imposed irrelevance, it is necessary to problematize its separation from literature,[66] music and the visual arts,[67] theatre,[68] and film.[69] This overriding of generic boundaries could indeed legitimately be seen as close to some postmodernist practices. A difference, however, can be identified by once more contrasting Cavell's strategy with that of his "twin" philosopher, Richard Rorty. In an essay on Derrida, Rorty "the ironist" conceives philosophy as a literary genre,[70] as if dissolving it into literary waters. Cavell "the romantic", on the contrary, seems willing to bring philosophy, literature, and the other expressive forms mentioned above together in a

64 *The Claim of Reason*, p. 20.
65 *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 5.
66 See *The Senses of Walden*.
67 See *Must We Mean*, pp. xxx–xl.
68 See Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambrdige MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
69 Together with *Pursuits of Happiness*, see Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1996).
70 See R. Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida', in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. 90-109.

higher unity,[71] as if to take the humanistic educational ideal – "*Bildung*" as the German Romantics called it – back to its Platonic source.

The idea of "Perfectionism", which Cavell also called "Emersonian perfectionism" in a conscious attempt to grant the term a vagueness congenial to Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance", is a synthesis of the reasons behind this cross-disciplinary strategy. In Cavell's work, unlike other Anglo-American philosophers, "perfectionism" is not a technical term within the academic debate of moral philosophy, but rather another word for "philosophy" itself, or at least, for the pedagogical and therapeutic aspect of philosophy that Cavell champions while adducing the example of such figures as Emerson, Thoreau, Freud, and Wittgenstein. Philosophy and the other disciplines and practices concurring to the humanistic educational ideal partake in a shared cultural conversation that assumes the perfectionist form of education; a conversation, that is, in which what is at stake for the individual is the imagination of a new self, as connected to the project of a new constitution for the political community. It thus becomes clear why cinema plays such a crucial role in Cavell's oeuvre: the popular character of film, its being the one art widely shared by the entire population in our democracies, is not only not an "objection to the serious, humanistic study" of it,[72] but rather an incentive. From here comes the spur, within American academia, to add something called the "philosophy of film" to the previously existing philosophical field of "film theory".

To conclude, it can be argued that it is within the boundaries of this perfectionist educational project that for Cavell modernism, including its antagonistic stance towards audiences, should be channelled, and encouraged. It can be surmised, at the same time, that within these same boundaries a Cavellian framework might accommodate, and maybe even justify, a postmodernist playfulness that aims at reflexive self-awareness rather than at a Protagorean post-philosophic relativism.

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71 By using the labels of "ironist" and "romantic" for Rorty and Cavell, I am referring to the fortunate Áine Mahon, *The Ironist and the Romantic: Reading Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell* (London: Bloomsbury 2014).

72 See Stanley Cavell, 'Appendix: Film in the University', in *Pursuits of Happiness*, p. 265.

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Nancy Murzilli

POSTMODERNE, OÙ EST LA SORTIE ?
Vers une réinstitution des formes de critique sociale par l'art

L'idée que je vais défendre ici n'est pas qu'il faudrait sortir d'une situation historique que l'on pourrait qualifier de postmoderne, mais d'un discours postmoderne sur les fins qui entrave l'action critique, sociale, politique. L'idée que je proposerai est que la critique avant-gardiste remise au goût du jour pourrait être un modèle d'action possible.

1. *Sortir de l'historicisation du présent*

Postmoderne, où est la sortie ? La question peut paraître en soi douteuse, car on pourrait se demander tout d'abord si l'on y est seulement entrés dans le post-moderne, cette situation considérée comme sans précédent par ses adeptes : celle de l'émancipation de la domination de la raison, celle de la fin des grands récits – récit de l'Être, de la métaphysique, de la philosophie, etc. Lionel Ruffel déclare dans *Brouhaha. Les mondes du contemporain*, publié en 2016 : "Nous n'avons jamais été post-modernes",[1] en écho au livre de Bruno Latour, sorti en 1991, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*.[2] Selon Latour, nous n'avons jamais fonctionné dans la pratique selon le système de représentation du monde "moderne", qui oppose radicalement nature et culture, car nous n'avons jamais cessé de créer des objets hybrides que le modernisme s'est refusé à penser. Si nous n'avons jamais été modernes, nous n'avons jamais non plus été post-modernes. Chez Ruffel comme chez Latour on trouve une même critique du modernisme et du postmodernisme, et une même défiance à l'égard du post- comme marqueur historique :

> Penser avec le post-, c'est penser comme un moderne, c'est-à-dire penser le temps comme une suite, avec des avant et des après, des séquences, des

1 Lionel Ruffel, *Brouhaha. Les mondes du contemporain* (Paris : Verdier, 2016).
2 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris : La Découverte, 1991).

> ruptures et des frontières. Être postmoderne, ce n'est rien de plus qu'être un moderne fatigué de s'appeler ainsi.[3]

Le postmoderne se situe toujours en dialectique avec le moderne, dont il serait l'après. C'est ce que soutient Latour :

> Les postmodernes conservent le cadre moderne mais dispersent les éléments que les modernisateurs groupaient en un peloton bien ordonné. Les posmodernes ont raison sur la dispersion – toute assemblée contemporaine est polytemporelle –, mais ils ont tort de conserver le cadre et de croire encore à l'exigence de nouveauté continuelle dont se réclame le modernisme.[4]

Latour préfère au terme "postmoderne" ceux de "non moderne" ou "amoderne", qui ne signalent pas l'entrée dans une nouvelle ère.[5] Le postmodernisme n'échappe pas à une forme d'historicisation du présent. Dans *L'homme probable,* Jacques Bouveresse évoque, à propos de Robert Musil, sa critique de l'application d'un type historique de pensée au présent, ainsi que son aggravation par "une conception "héroïque" de l'histoire des idées comme constituée par une série de révolutions ou de ruptures plus ou moins spectaculaires qui, en principe, interdisent toute espèce de retour à des solutions ou à des problèmes antérieurs".[6] On peut penser que la conception postmoderniste de la fin procède d'une même logique. Une telle conception qui se prononce en faveur de quelque "fin" que ce soit, possède également un caractère héroïque : le commencement étant attribué à un geste philosophique fondateur, la "fin" présumée est reçue comme une révélation par un penseur qui en aurait exceptionnellement saisi l'accomplissement. Dans *L'homme sans qualités*, Robert Musil – qui a pourtant pu être considéré par certains comme un postmoderne avant l'heure, son œuvre n'étant autre qu'un récit de la mort des grands récits – offrait "une

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3 Lionel Ruffel, *op. cit.*

4 Bruno Latour, *op. cit*., p. 101.

5 'Nous n'entrons pas dans une nouvelle ère ; nous ne continuons plus la fuite éperdue des post-post-post-modernistes ; nous ne nous accrochons plus à l'avant-garde de l'avant-garde ; nous ne cherchons plus à être encore plus malins, encore plus critiques, à creuser encore un peu davantage l'ère du soupçon. Non, nous nous apercevons que nous n'avons jamais commencé d'entrer dans l'ère moderne. Cette attitude rétrospective qui déploie au lieu de dévoiler, qui ajoute au lieu de retrancher, qui fraternise au lieu de dénoncer, qui trie au lieu de s'indigner, je la caractérise par l'expression non moderne (ou amoderne)', Bruno Latour, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

6 Jacques Bouveresse*, L'homme probable: Robert Musil, le hasard, la moyenne et l'escargot de l'histoire* (Paris : L'Éclat, 1993), p. 19.

protestation passionnée contre les maux et les calamités de toute espèce que les grandes idées et l'idéalisme verbeux qui se nourrit de leur absence de contenu et de substance ont infligé à l'humanité au cours des siècles",[7] en même temps qu'il proposait une réelle tentative pour aborder cependant les "nouvelles possibilités d'être homme", à contre-courant des idéologies du déclin qui régnaient à son époque.[8] C'est sans doute ce qui fait qu'il n'était pas plus postmoderne que ne l'était, d'un certain point de vue, quelques décennies plus tard Richard Rorty. Pour l'un comme pour l'autre, il n'existe peut-être ni qualités, ni progrès, ni sens historique, mais l'idée pragmatiste d'un espoir social.

Le modernisme, comme le postmodernisme, relève d'une forme d'héroïsme intellectuel dont se défend Rorty dans son livre *Science et solidarité*. Il y reproche aux philosophes français et allemands de juger naturel de tenir les modifications des conceptions philosophiques pour solidaires des crises historiques qui se produisent dans le monde. Il s'y oppose à Derrida lorsque celui-ci suggère que le logocentrisme a autant ébranlé la littérature et la science que la philosophie et que sa fin est appelée à se propager dans la culture :

> La philosophie ne me paraît pas tout à fait posséder ce pouvoir. La fin du logocentrisme, si on entend par là l'abandon des positions essentialistes, réalistes et représentationnalistes qui ont marqué la métaphysique, la théorie de la connaissance et la philosophie du langage, ne peut pas être sans effet sur la culture. Mais je doute que son impact débouche sur une transformation. Je me sens parfaitement incapable de détecter le genre de raz-de-marée que Lyotard et d'autres ont annoncé lorsque nous sommes devenus postmodernes (*terme qui ne me paraît pas d'un grand intérêt*).[9]

Comment donc en finir avec le logocentrisme et échapper au paradoxe sur lequel achoppent les philosophes postmodernes : "comment évincer la

7 Ibidem.

8 'Il existe chez Musil un "grand récit" de la mort des "grands récits", et […] à défaut de sonner le glas de la modernité à la façon de Joyce, ce "grand récit" pourrait sans doute témoigner — horribile dictu — du secret de Polichinelle qu'a dévoilé récemment Bruno Latour en intitulant joyeusement un de ses livres *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* ! Postmoderne, l'"absence de qualités" renverrait moins au passé […] qu'elle ne s'inscrirait *transversalement* à l'histoire.' Daniel Charles, 'Pour une esthétique sans privilèges', *Philosophiques*, XXIII, 1, 1996, 125-130, p. 126.

9 Richard Rorty, *Science et solidarité. La vérité sans le pouvoir*, trad. Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris : L'Éclat, 1990), p. 11. Je souligne.

théorie et la raison sans théoriser et raisonner plus avant" ?[10] La réponse de l'ironiste de Rorty – puisque le langage ne constitue pas le noyau commun de l'expérience humaine et de la raison universelle, puisqu'il ne repose sur aucune vérité essentielle – serait de privatiser la philosophie, de remplacer la raison et les essences universelles par des récit personnels autocréatifs qui ne revendiquent aucune autorité sur le langage des autres. Mais même si Rorty, pour éviter l'objection wittgensteinienne de l'impossibilité d'un langage privé,[11] distingue entre un emploi public et un emploi privé du langage qui peut être suffisamment ancré dans le langage commun pour pouvoir être partagé, il n'en reste pas moins, comme le souligne justement Shusterman, que cette distinction est intenable "dans la mesure où le moi privé et le langage sur lequel il se construit dans l'autocréation sont toujours déjà socialement constitués et structurés par un champ public".[12]

J'en reviens donc à ma question initiale : "postmoderne, où est la sortie ?". Les arguments qui précèdent nous enseignent que pour y répondre il ne s'agit peut-être pas tant de se demander comment élaborer un discours sur la fin des discours sur la fin, comment construire un nouveau paradigme philosophique qui serait mieux adapté pour faire face aux nouveaux défis posés par la société d'aujourd'hui, que de sortir d'une pensée historiciste et héroïque. Le paradoxe d'un discours sur la fin des discours sur la fin, à compter que celui-ci soit possible et souhaitable, tient sans doute dans le fait que les défenseurs de la postmodernité partagent à leur insu une conception globalisante de l'histoire avec ceux dont ils proclament la fin des idéaux.

2. *Forger des sociétés de recherche-création*

Alors comment en sortir sans être reconduits à la construction d'un nouveau méta-récit ?

Jacques Bouveresse, dans *Rationalité et cynisme*, considère que la tendance de François Lyotard est de "penser la situation du philosophe d'aujourd'hui uniquement en fonction du modèle de la transgression représenté

10 Richard Shusterman, 'La raison et l'esthétique, entre modernité et posmodernité', *De Richard Rorty à Jürgen Habermas. La modernité en questions*, éd. par Françoise Gaillard, Jacques Poulain et Richard Shusterman (Paris : Cerf, 1998) 279-291, p. 284.

11 Voir, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Recherches philosophiques*, trad. Françoise Dastur et al. (Paris : Gallimard, 2005), § 243 et suivants.

12 Richard Shusterman, p. 286.

par l'artiste d'avant-garde".[13] Le modèle proposé à la philosophie est celui des avant-gardes littéraires et artistiques où la légitimité consiste souvent, pour l'essentiel, dans le désaccord avec ce qui a précédé, le simple fait de proposer "autre chose", qui diffère aussi radicalement que possible de ce qu'on faisait avant.

La signification politique que les postmodernes associent à leur propre démarche n'a en effet pas grand-chose à voir avec une philosophie du consensus, telle que Habermas la conçoit. Cela explique son désaccord avec Lyotard qui, lui, considère au contraire que "l'invention se fait toujours dans le dissentiment".[14] Comme le remarque Jean-Pierre Cometti dans *Philosopher avec Wittgenstein* :

> La conviction qui l'emporte chez eux [les postmodernes] est celle qui voit dans la seule mise à nu des oppositions, des tensions ou des stigmates de métaphysique, de pouvoir ou de logocentrisme qui marquent un texte, l'expression d'un acte critique tout à fait indispensable, non pas seulement pour une meilleure compréhension des textes ou une interprétation plus originale, mais pour l'émancipation de l'humanité. Dans cette perspective la lecture serrée (*close reading*) devient un principe politique à part entière.[15]

Mais, a-t-on envie de dire, où est l'action ? Faut-il rappeler, avec Bruno Latour, que "le discours n'est pas un monde en soi mais une population d'actants qui se mêlent aux choses comme aux sociétés, qui font tenir les unes et les autres et qui les tiennent" ?[16] La critique de Jean-Pierre Cometti rejoint celle de Richard Rorty, à savoir que même si la fréquentation des textes philosophique ou littéraires permet sans aucun doute de développer des facultés critiques et interprétatives qui influeront sur notre comportement social et politique, la pratique interprétative de ces textes ne garantit pas naturellement un prolongement social, politique ou moral de cette activité, à compter que ce prolongement soit lui-même souhaitable, ce qui, là non plus, ne va pas nécessairement de soi. L'idéologie textualiste qui s'est développée contre les positions logocentristes, essentialistes et la recherche de fondements métaphysiques a conduit les philosophies de la

13 Jacques Bouveresse, *Rationalité et cynisme* (Paris : Minuit, 1985), p. 127.
14 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 8.
15 Jean-Pierre Cometti, *Philosopher avec Wittgenstein* (Paris : PUF, 1996), pp. 41-42.
16 Bruno Latour, p. 124.

"postmodernité" dans l'impasse du "linguocentrisme"[17], qui tend à surestimer les ressources du discours. Comme le souligne Jean-Pierre Cometti, citant Vincent Descombes, une telle forme de pensée nous donnera la satisfaction de croire que nous aurons toujours raison *contre* les criminels, ce qui ne signifie pas que nous *en* aurons raison, mais nous privera d'une véritable réflexion sur les conditions de l'action politique.[18]

Une solution pour en sortir pourrait alors être, plutôt que de théoriser une nouvelle conception épochale, de construire des agendas[19] au sens étymologique du terme, à savoir des "choses à faire" à travers lesquelles la critique et la théorie, d'interprétatives, deviennent praxis et action critique, si ce n'est politique. Cela suppose d'interroger de nouvelles formes d'agentivité qui reconnecteraient les pratiques humaines non à l'idée d'un progrès ou d'un sens historique, mais à l'idée pragmatiste d'un espoir social dans lequel, pour reprendre Rorty, "la volonté de vérité n'est pas la tendance à dominer, mais comme chez Dewey la tendance à créer, afin de 'réaliser une harmonie active entre des désirs différents'".[20] Le modèle ne se trouve donc plus dans la transgression, chère à Lyotard, représentée par l'artiste d'avant-garde, mais peut-être précisément dans une reconsidération du concept d'avant-garde, tel qu'il a été théorisé par Peter Bürger dans sa *Théorie de l'avant-garde*, en 1974,[21] et réactualisé de façon originale par Olivier Quintyn dans *Valences de l'avant-garde*, publié en 2015, qu'une issue est envisageable. La critique avant-gardiste pour Olivier Quintyn n'est "pas seulement une critique interne ou locale, enclose dans l'immanence de l'institution Art, mais elle porte sur le fonctionnement global de cette dernière, à la fois sociologique et politique, et, plus largement sur la

17 L'expression est utilisée par Richard Shusterman, *Le style à l'état vif. Somaesthétique, art populaire et art de vivre. Performing Live*, trad. Thomas Mondémé (Paris : Questions théoriques, 2015), p. 206

18 Jean-Pierre Cometti, p. 44.

19 Voir Olivier Quintyn, *Valences de l'avant-garde. Essai sur l'avant-garde, l'art contemporain et l'institution*, (Paris : Questions théoriques, 2015).

20 Richard Rorty, *Conséquences du pragmatisme*, trad. Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris : Seuil, 1993), p. 370. Le postmodernisme de Rorty tient dans le fait qu'il ne considère plus le langage comme l'incarnation du logos, mais comme un outil de création de soi et de construction de nos sociétés par leur redescription dans des récits et avec des vocabulaires différents. Il s'agit pour Rorty de "surmonter l'autorité des narrations et des vocabulaires hérités en créant un moi et une histoire selon ses termes à soi sans pour autant revendiquer l'autorité sur le langage des autres", Richard Shusterman, p. 284.

21 Peter Bürger, *Théorie de l'avant-garde*, trad. Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris : Questions théoriques, 2013).

construction bourgeoise de la réalité sociale à laquelle l'art participe".[22] La critique avant-gardiste contribue de façon décisive à une théorie critique de l'art contemporain en permettant d'adopter un point de vue progressiste et non pas conservateur. Les théories de la postmodernité et de la fin de l'art font obstacle à une théorie actuelle de l'avant-garde en faisant de l'art une forme soustraite à toute normativité sociale ou politique, où les œuvres n'ont pour condition que de réaliser une essence interprétative de l'art.

Comme le note Yves Citton dans un article publié en 2012 intitulé "Ufologies littéraires et ovnis politiques" :

> Tout l'art moderne (et postmoderne) nous invite à pratiquer une "stase esthétique" : il exige du lecteur (spectateur, auditeur) de suspendre ses modes habituels de perception et de jugement, de prendre la distance et le temps de la réflexion, de revenir sur l'œuvre pour en construire une interprétation qui reconfigure son partage du sensible au sein d'une nouvelle intelligibilité réfléchie. Cette posture interprétative implique une vacuole protectrice qui nous détache des réalités pratiques […] ; elle tend à considérer l'œuvre comme intransitive, comme valant par elle-même, sans servir à autre chose qu'à exhiber sa singularité.[23]

Mais il existe des œuvres, que l'on peut considérer d'avant-garde au sens qu'Olivier Quintyn donne à ce terme, qui se situent non tant au-delà qu'en-deçà du paradigme interprétatif et qui interviennent dans la communication sur le mode transitif de l'action directe. Ces œuvres sont des dispositifs permettant d'"effectuer des opérations", d'"activer certaines formes d'interaction" qui viennent "s'implanter dans une forme de vie donnée".[24] Ces œuvres relèvent le défi d'un art critique qui serait à même d'être "activé dans la vie pratique sur un tout autre modèle que celui de la fusion utopique de l'art et de la vie, par exemple en produisant des représentations utiles ou des outils réinstituants à effets pragmatiques locaux".[25] De tels dispositifs instrumentaux ont par exemple pour effet de désinvisibiliser des problèmes publics en mettant expérimentalement en crise des concepts impliqués dans la fabrique du social, tels que la politique, la valeur ou la justice.

Le modèle devient alors celui de l'expérimentation par l'art de formes de vie à venir, dont on trouve aujourd'hui des applications dans le phénomène émergent de la recherche-création. L'art, disait Dewey est le modèle

22 Olivier Quintyn, p. 50.
23 Yves Citton, 'Ufologies littéraires et ovnis politiques', *Revue des livres*, 6 (2012), 50-59, p. 51.
24 Olivier Quintyn.
25 p. 56.

de l'expérience, la recherche-création pourrait, selon l'hypothèse d'Yves Citton, représenter le futur de nos sociétés :

> Les sociétés de recherche-création, dont les linéaments sont en train d'émerger comme tels aux confins des campus universitaires et des centres d'art contemporain, constituent notre horizon d'avenir, dans la mesure où nous ne pouvons plus nous permettre de déléguer à un petit nombre d'entre nous les tâches essentielles de comprendre nos enchevêtrements de causalités et l'imaginer des alternatives possibles. Ce n'est plus seulement à l'échelle des grands laboratoires universitaires ou des prestigieuses écoles d'art que ces tâches doivent être pratiquées. C'est sur chaque terrain de nos relations sociales et de nos co-dépendances environnementales qu'elles doivent être quotidiennement pratiquées.[26]

3. *Développer des pratiques critiques transinstitutionnelles*

Je voudrais maintenant présenter l'unes de ces formes d'agentivité artistique émergentes. Il s'agit d'un projet de recherche-création "Évaluation générale. L'Agence de notation comme dispositif artistique", qui expérimente certaines formes poétiques que l'on peut désigner comme de la poésie action.[27] Ce projet, que je porte dans le cadre de l'Ecole universitaire de recherche ArTeC à l'Université Paris 8 en collaboration avec Christophe Hanna, concepteur de l'Agence de notation, se propose de répondre à l'injonction du tout évaluer auquel sont confrontées nos sociétés néolibérales. Des notes d'examens à l'évaluation professionnelle, du rendement des institutions publiques ou privées aux services uberisés, du dernier ouvrage acheté en ligne à la propreté des toilettes publiques, outre les divers rapports d'évaluation que connaissent bien les enseignants-chercheurs depuis quelques décennies, nous sommes conduits à nous faire les acteurs et les promoteurs des pratiques d'évaluation de la moindre de nos activités, salariée ou non.[28]

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26 Yves Citton, 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de recherche-création', Postface à Erin Manning et Brian Massumi, *Pensée en acte, vingt propositions pour la recherche-création*, trad. Armelle Chrétien, éd. Yves Citton (Paris : Les Presses du réel, 2018), 97–123, p. 106.

27 La présentation détaillée du projet et les activités réalisées dans le cadre de ce projet (journées d'études, performances, ateliers) sont archivées sur son site sous forme de comptes rendus écrits, dessinés ou de captations vidéo et audio, à l'adresse suivante : https://evalge.hypotheses.org/604.

28 Sur la façon dont les pratiques d'évaluation promues par une économie capitaliste de l'attention conditionnent ce à quoi nous faisons attention, voir Yves Citton,

"Évaluation générale" associe des artistes et des chercheurs dans le but de mener des enquêtes et de fabriquer des outils alternatifs pour interroger nos divers comportements évaluatifs. On y conduit une recherche sur des objets, des pratiques et des usages en vue de mesurer l'agentivité d'une critique de l'évaluation pratiquée au sein des institutions publiques ou privées au moyen d'un dispositif de recherche-création adapté. Cette recherche se constitue autour et au travers des activités de l'Agence de notation, dispositif artistique inspiré du modèle des agences de notation financières, qui se propose d'investir de façon spectaculaire et critique les espaces qui n'offrent pas encore de formes d'évaluation instituées (zones d'ignorance, d'indifférence ou d'intouchabilité des institutions) et de les soumettre à une évaluation d'un autre genre, de façon spectaculaire, sous la forme de performances en public. Ce dispositif, plutôt que de nous tendre un miroir parodique de l'"évaluationite" contemporaine, prend la forme d'enquêtes évaluatives alternatives qui mettent au jour des valences sous-jacentes que l'on essaie d'épouser, de comprendre, voire de modifier. L'Agence de notation part de l'idée qu'une critique de l'évaluation n'est possible que de l'intérieur des pratiques d'évaluation. Elle cherche à inventer des manières nouvelles d'occuper les espaces institutionnels, de dialoguer et de négocier avec leurs représentants, d'investiguer et de produire des documents ad hoc à partir desquels d'autres formes d'appréciation et de critique des mécanismes institutionnels pourraient s'exprimer, avant de rendre publique son évaluation en toute transparence en offrant le spectacle final d'une évaluation par un jury de non experts. Elle a par exemple évalué en septembre 2019 certaines fonctions et activités du Centre Pompidou dans le cadre d'Extra! Le festival de la littérature vivante, comme le bureau de l'ancien président du Centre, Serge Lasvignes, le vernissage VIP de l'exposition "Bacon en toutes lettres", la notion de littérature vivante selon les membres du Jury du prix Bernard Heidsieck, l'intelligence artistique du public du Centre Pompidou, le livre d'or du festival Extra! Elle a également noté à l'Université Paris 8 le dispositif d'évaluation de soutenances de projets de thèse.

En pratique, le travail de l'Agence consiste d'abord à négocier son intervention dans l'espace des institutions ou organismes avec représentants de ces insitutions ou organismes, puis à rassembler quelques personnes volontaires formant un jury acceptable selon des critères ordinaires et de produire des documents "spectaculaires" pour constituer un dossier d'évaluation qui sera visionné par le jury en même temps que par le public. Sur

Pour une écologie de l'attention (Paris : Seuil, 2014).

la base de ce dossier chaque membre du jury produira une évaluation qui sera communiquée aux principaux intéressés. Il justifiera cette évaluation sur la base d'une notation (A, B, C ou D) et d'une appréciation écrite, et adressera des conseils aux "évalués". Le président du jury, dont la fonction est généralement assumée par Christophe Hanna, négocie les notes et les appréciations avec chacun des membres du jury. La reformulation synthétique des appréciations du jury dans un "bulletin de notes' projeté en direct et les réactions du jury à ce que Christophe Hanna lui "fait" dire relève de ce qu'il nomme un "tour de force poétique"[29]. Ce moment fait saillir des prises de positions spontanées, des critères d'évaluation larvés ou inhabituels, qui "redispose[nt] ce qui est sous nos yeux et qu'on ignore en l'état de liaison *donné*".[30] L'ensemble du dispositif d'évaluation fait l'objet de captations vidéo qui sont diffusées durant la performance, créant une relation entre ce qui est évalué et la façon dont c'est évalué. Les réactions du public font intégralement partie de la performance.

Le dispositif repose sur un principe de transparence et a pour objectif de faire la lumière tant sur le protocole d'évaluation adopté par le jury que sur les conditions selon lesquelles tel ou tel aspect d'un fonctionnement social peut être rendu évaluable. L'Agence, par la position de participation observante qu'elle occupe au sein des institutions, constitue en effet un terrain d'observation interne de processus d'évaluation et de conflits de valeur. Le statut logique ambivalent de son discours critique, à la fois "sérieux" et théâtral, lui permet d'analyser et de rendre visibles les aspects négligés du fonctionnement d'une institution en lui offrant le spectacle de leur évaluation.

Loin des formes de critique cloisonnées dans des "vacuoles protectrices", la critique sociale produite par un tel dispositif se fait transitive et opérante, en se livrant à ce qu'Olivier Quintyn nomme des "pratiques critiques transinstitutionnelles", où l'art "sort délibérément de sa nature instituée pour devenir un laboratoire de formes de critique sociale réinstituante".[31]

29 Christophe Hanna, Nancy Murzilli, 'Évaluation et critique institutionnelle. Notations sur l'Agence de notation', *Réarmements critiques dans la littérature française contemporaine*, éd. par Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Frédéric Claisse et Justine Huppe (Liège : Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2021).

30 Christophe Hanna, 'Assez vu', préface à Jean-Marie Gleize, *Sorties* (Paris : Questions théoriques, 2009), p. XI.

31 Olivier Quintyn, quatrième de couverture.

Conclusion

Il existe bien sûr d'autres pratiques artistiques qui, comme l'Agence de notation, traversent, testent, instrumentalisent, à défaut de dépasser, leur nature institutionnelle. Je n'en citerai que quelques-unes en guise de conclusion. The Yes Men,[32] connus sous les pseudonymes de Andy Bichlbaum et Mike Bonanno, en se faisant passer pour des intervenants de l'OMC, ont entre autres prononcé des discours sur la privatisation du marché des votes et sur l'apologie de l'esclavage à domicile, lesquels n'ont pas suscité de réaction particulière de la part des spectateurs et participants présents, si ce n'est des remerciements. Leurs interventions mettent à l'épreuve les institutions néolibérales devant des propositions moralement indéfendables. Bureaudetudes.org,[33] composé de deux artistes parisiens, Léonore Bonaccini et Xavier Fourt, produit des cartographies des systèmes politiques, sociaux et économiques contemporains. Leur analyse visuelle du capitalisme transnational repose sur des recherches poussées et est généralement présentée sous la forme de peintures murales de grande taille. "Gouverner par les réseaux", par exemple, un graphique produit en 2003, illustre les implications et les dépendances mutuelles au sein des conglomérats de médias mondiaux. Bureaudetudes.org révèle ce qui reste normalement invisible et contextualise des éléments apparemment séparés au sein d'un tout plus grand, en produisant des visualisations d'intérêts et de coopérations qui représentent l'invisible et le caché. Ces travaux pourraient être apparentés à ceux de Mark Lombardi, qui composait des diagrammes destinés à cartographier certains flux financiers dont il notait les dates et les montants issus des pages financières de grands quotidiens. Un agent du FBI, juste après le 11 septembre 2001, avait repéré ses dessins exposés au Whitney Museum. Ils lui ont semblé offrir une intéressante vue synthétique pour dépister le réseau financier d'Oussama ben Laden. Franck Leibovici, réalise des "œuvres-enquêtes" que son travail artistique, poétique et documental constitue comme des outils disponibles pour d'autres. Son cycle sur les "écologies de l'œuvre d'art", montre comment les œuvres sont indissociables des milieux dans lesquelles elles évoluent, des collectifs qui s'en occupent, des pratiques situées par lesquelles elles prennent forme, en investissant à chaque fois un aspect distinct de la vie des œuvres : la production, la conservation, l'évaluation, la réception. Le projet de recherche-création *Des récits ordinaires* mené en collaboration avec la

32 https://theyesmen.org/
33 https://bureaudetudes.org/

chercheuse Yaël Kréplak et le commissaire d'exposition Grégory Castéra, tente de montrer au moyen de diagrammes construits à partir des méthodes de l'analyse conversationnelle comment nos récits sur les œuvres peuvent être un de leurs modes d'existence et en constituent une forme d'activation. Jean Gilbert s'est infiltré sur un site de rencontres en ligne en devenant camboy dans le but de comprendre et de mettre au jour les conditions de travail et les pratiques des usagers de la plateforme. *xx.com*[34] est le fruit de ses échanges virtuels avec une camgirl durant une année.

Toutes ces pratiques artistiques sont une manière de dépasser une interprétation postmoderne du capitalisme, où la fusion entre art, culture et économie laisse faussement croire à un dépassement de l'autonomie de l'art.[35] Elles usent des formes de recherche artistiques, pour mener des enquêtes et expérimenter des manières de rendre la critique sociale opérante et activable, pour sortir de la stérilité des récits sur la fin des grands récits, pour renouveler de l'intérieur en les réarticulant autrement les interactions sociales entre acteurs et institutions au sein de contextes sociaux particuliers, dans un rapport au temps ne tenant pas de la rupture contre la linéarité, de ce qui sera ou devra être contre ce qui fut, mais s'inscrivant dans une spatialité réticulaire où se creusent des sillons dans lesquels s'éprouvent des alternatives possibles.

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34 Jean Gilbert, *xx.com* (Paris :Questions théoriques, 2020).

35 Voir Jean-Pierre Cometti, *La nouvelle aura. Economies de l'art et de la culture* (Paris : Questions théoriques, 2016).

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Alexandru Matei

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD EN ROUMANIE À LA FIN DES ANNÉES 1980
Morales francophones en Roumanie

> Qu'est-ce qu'on appelle la postmodemité ?
> Je ne suis pas au courant.
>
> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, IV

On a énormément écrit sur le "postmodernisme".[1] On en a tant écrit, de sorte que toute nouvelle approche d'un quelconque concept du "postmoderne" n'est possible qu'au prix d'ignorer un "Great Unread"[2] sur lequel les analyses quantitatives pourraient très bien porter leur attention exhaustive. Ce texte ne prétendra par conséquent pas définir le postmoderne, avec ou contre les tenants du "post-" ; il ne tentera pas non plus de cerner le lieu que la version lyotardienne de la "postmodernité" occupe dans les débats autour du postmoderne des années 1980-1990. Le propos de notre intervention se voudrait plus ponctuelle. Elle considérera le débat roumain autour du postmoderne/postmodernisme/postmodernité, à la charnière des années 1990, d'un point de vue particulier qui relève plutôt du domaine des "transferts culturels"[3] et, plus largement, d'une version wallersteinienne et morettienne de la "World Literature".[4] Notre hypothèse est la suivante : après plus d'un demi-siècle de débats sur la modernisation culturelle en

1 Ce texte est publié dans le cadre du projet 21-AUF/01.03.2019, financé par l'AUF par l'IFA, 'Transferts culturels et champs intellectuels internationaux sous le régime communiste. Modernité et antimodernité à l'Est et à l'Ouest: France, Roumanie, Serbie.'

2 Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), p. 54.

3 Michel Espagne, 'La Notion de transfert culturel', *Revue Sciences/Lettres*, 1 (2013). https://journals.openedition.org/rsl/219.

4 Je me permets de renvoyer à mon texte qui résume cette version, tout en l'appliquant aux 'media studies', Alexandru Matei, 'Périphérie' et 'semi-périphérie', du système de l'économie-monde a l'histoire de la télévision', *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, 61 (2017) No 1, 203-212.

Roumanie selon la théorie du "synchronisme" avec un Occident fantasmé en tant que nom du centre homogène du monde, une crise est survenue dans la conception même du centre. Il y eut, tout à coup, plusieurs "centres", ou bien le centre s'est retrouvé morcelé. Au-delà de ses enjeux épistémologiques, *La Condition postmoderne* de Jean-François Lyotard met en question les termes les plus fondamentaux des processus de modernisation culturelle qui avaient lieu dans la périphérie est-européenne : l'idée des "valeurs occidentales", l'idée de l'intellectuel directeur des consciences, le partage entre culture humaniste et culture scientifique et, par-dessus tout, ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'aléthique moderne, les critères de validation du vrai. Si, depuis, les sciences humaines ont trouvé d'autres valeurs et appelé à d'autres types d'engagements – dont notamment celui écologique – le compte-rendu de la "condition postmoderne" réalisé per Lyotard en 1979 est devenu monnaie courante, notamment en ce qui concerne les rapprochements de plus en plus complexes entre "culture humaniste" et "culture scientifique".

Dans le cas de la Roumanie, le processus de modernisation culturelle est lié au nom du critique et théoricien Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943). Dans l'Entre-Deux-Guerres, tout en s'efforçant de donner une description individualisante et valorisante, en contexte inter-national, de la culture roumaine, il développe la théorie du "synchronisme" (ou bien de "l'interdépendance"). Selon cette hypothèse, c'était sous l'influence du *saeculum*, selon une tendance "irréversible" d'"uniformisation" des sociétés modernes, que la culture roumaine se serait dirigée vers les "valeurs occidentales".[5] L'idée qu'il y aurait conflit au sein des "valeurs occidentales" était sans doute absente d'une telle théorie, d'autant plus qu'à l'époque, dans les années 1920-1930, alors qu'elle était en train de s'élaborer, les États-Unis ne faisaient pas encore partie de l'axiologie de l'Occident culturel, pour ne plus parler du peu de prestige qu'avait l'anglais auprès des personnalités de la culture roumaine. Cette théorie a gardé sa validité après 1945, en Roumanie, et notamment dans les années 1960-1970, après la parenthèse du régime stalinien et son totalitarisme idéologique ayant imposé une forme brutale de réalisme socialiste. Cette parenthèse a entraîné une mythologisation de la Roumanie pré-communiste, ne serait-ce que parce que c'est avant 1945 que s'étaient affirmés les deux plus grands critiques littéraires roumains,

5 Je reprends ici Teodora Dumitru, 'Eugen Lovinescu', dans Eugen Simion, *Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române* (Bucuresti: Editura MLR, 2017), p. 830.

G. Calinescu et Tudor Vianu (disparus respectivement en 1965 et en 1964)[6] et que s'était configuré le caractère national de la culture roumaine. Tous ces remous qui traversent la littérature roumaine dès 1945 et jusqu'à la fin des années 1970 laissent intacte l'image du "centre" occidental. À preuve, avant tout, l'emploi du terme "Occident" pour renvoyer à un ensemble de discours et de traditions culturelles, française, allemande, italienne et nord-américaine, dans l'ouvrage de référence qu'est *La Critique dans les tranchées* de Alex Goldis. On peut y lire le titre de chapitre suivant : "Entre le mirage barthésien et le contexte picardien : la syntaxe des renouvellements occidentaux"[7] où la référence "française" est supprimée car étendue aux dimensions imaginées de l'Occident.

C'est précisément dans les années 1980 que l'Occident en vient à montrer un visage moins uni autour du postmoderne. Si les "valeurs occidentales" réclamées par Lovinescu étaient surtout françaises, l'engouement autour du postmodernisme, en Roumanie, peut être revisité, aujourd'hui, moins seulement en termes de "synchronisme" qu'en tant qu'écho périphérique d'une mutation en train de se produire au sein du centre. Si la "condition postmoderne" est un syntagme signé par Jean-François Lyotard, ce qu'il vise dépasse les frontières de la culture française. Plus précisément, la "condition postmoderne" ne renvoie pas à la culture en termes nationaux. D'abord, parce qu'il s'agit d'une commande passée par une organisation universitaire québécoise. Ensuite, parce que la plupart des références et avant tout le monde référentiel, "les sociétés les plus développées",[8] sont situés dans l'Amérique du Nord. Toutefois, les intellectuels de l'Europe du Sud et de l'Est devaient se sentir visés ne serait-ce qu'en vertu du sentiment d'appartenance à un "esprit européen".[9] Ce qui pose un problème majeur, toutefois, à la réception de ce texte en Europe "continentale", c'est peut-être un décalage entre ce que le philosophe et ce que les intellectuels de l'Est comprennent par "société développée" et ce qu'elle est censée signifier dans la perspective postmoderne proposée par l'ouvrage de Lyotard. Certes, des deux côtés on pense également au développement économique, aux conditions de la vie matérielle. Cela dit, la "condition postmoderne" lue depuis le point de vue d'un intellectuel "global" de l'année 2021, est en

6 Alex Goldis, *Critica in transee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului*. (Iasi : Cartea Romaneasca), pp. 64-65.
7 Ibidem, p. 171.
8 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 7.
9 Antoine Compagnon, *L'Esprit de l'Europe. Dates et lieux. Un repérage historique et géographique de ce qui constitue l'identité européenne* (Paris : Flammarion, 1993).

premier lieu une condition "post-politique" qui ne fait plus l'impasse sur le partage du monde en blocs idéologiques. Qui plus est, la société "développée" de Lyotard est une société où le partage des tâches constitutives des sociétés, entre compétences "humanistes" et compétences "scientifiques", n'est plus de mise.

Or, le terme même de "postmoderne" était voué, en Europe de l'Est, à une réception plutôt esthétique, afin de contourner la censure idéologique.[10] C'étaient les littéraires, et puis les philosophes, qui pouvaient s'en charger. Mettre ensemble culture humaniste et culture scientifique représentait ainsi le premier obstacle à la réception du "postmoderne" lyotardien dans les pays de l'Est, d'autant plus que l'ouvrage ne renvoie jamais au postmodernisme en termes d'histoire littéraire. C'est un livre d'épistémologie pragmatique qui définit la condition postmoderne en termes de "savoir", et non de "philosophie" ou bien de "pensée". L'œuvre de Michel Foucault avait déjà rencontré un tel obstacle. Aucun titre n'en avait été traduit avant 1990. Pour faire entrer Foucault et Lyotard en Roumanie, il fallait avant tout mettre en question une théorie de l'histoire qui se trouvait à la base de l'idéologie officielle. Il fallait en découdre avec un certain marxisme simpliste, progressiste sans réserve. Chez Lyotard, à l'absence des références littéraires s'ajoutaient des références qui avaient peu à voir avec une bibliographie française : la cybernétique, la pragmatique et la "Systemtheorie" venaient en effet des États-Unis et d'Allemagne. Le lecteur de *La Condition postmoderne* n'y retrouve aucune occurrence de Foucault ou Derrida, une seule de Barthes et de Deleuze, et une de Bruno Latour (déjà !). En revanche, figurent seize occurrences de Habermas, sept de Wittgenstein, six de Kuhn et de Nietzsche. Les dix-huit références à Marx sont toutes polémiques : il s'agissait, pour Lyotard, de dénoncer un "modèle critique" de concevoir la société en voie de péremption.

En second lieu, si Lyotard parlait de "condition postmoderne" notamment par rapport à la société états-unienne, il faisait un emprunt terminologique : le "postmoderne" est, chez Lyotard, un vocable déjà en vogue sur le continent nord-américain, dans des débats qui en revanche n'intéressaient pas le philosophe. Ihab Hassan y est cité en tout début de l'ouvrage non parce que Lyotard eût voulu engager un débat sur le terrain des études littéraires, mais parce que le critique littéraire américain avait inséré le mot "postmoderne" dans le titre de son livre de 1971 : *The Dismemberment of*

10 Pour une discussion plus ample à ce propos je renvoie à mon texte sur la réception de Roland Barthes en Roumanie : Alexandru Matei, 'Lire Barthes en Roumanie socialiste : Les enjeux du pouvoir et leur neutralisation', *Littérature*, 186 (2017), pp. 66-81.

Orpheus: Toward a Post Modern Literature. Les deux autres occurrences de son nom dans *La Condition*… sont anecdotiques.[11]

Ce qui distingue la "postmodernité" à la Lyotard du "postmodernisme" tel que déjà élaboré aux États-Unis, ce n'est toutefois pas la proposition d'une épistémologie nouvelle contre celle d'un nouveau paradigme littéraire, mais plutôt ce qui sépare deux historicités différentes. Pour le dire vite, chez Lyotard, la "condition postmoderne" est le *terminus ad quem* d'une époque, l'autre nom d'un malaise ressenti en France notamment, alors que le "postmodernisme" nord-américain se donne comme le germe, de provenances multiples, d'une nouvelle époque dont les intellectuels sont appelés à célébrer l'aurore. Pour une culture littéraire francophone comme c'était la culture roumaine à l'époque[12] – cette confusion d'historicités ne pouvait manquer de rendre perplexe.

Quand, en mai 1980, Antoine Compagnon renvoie nommément à Lyotard et à sa *Condition postmoderne*, le terme "postmoderne" lui semble insignifiant : ainsi se contente-t-il de citer ce titre en note de bas de page, comme si "postmoderne" n'était qu'une version anodine de la "crise de l'énergie" fossile que traversait l'Europe en ce moment :

> La leçon de Cioran fut longtemps minoritaire, sinon solitaire, à une époque qui connut l'installation des systèmes et des lois, l'apparente accélération de l'histoire. Les valeurs furent l'engagement, le compagnonnage, le militantisme, entre, pour fixer les idées, la Libération et la crise d'énergie. Celle-ci n'est sans doute [pas][13] qu'un remous superficiel, mais le symptôme de la faillite de toutes les tentatives de restauration d'un sens, de la désuétude sans recours à des narrations et des légitimations dont le siècle se soutenait naguère.[14]

L'argument de la fin d'une époque formulé en termes de physio-psychologie (fatigue, déprime, désillusion) n'était pourtant pas l'apanage de Compagnon, qui devait avoir lu de Lyotard plus que sa *Condition postmoderne*. En 1977, "Apathie de la théorie" est le titre du premier chapitre d'un autre ouvrage de Lyotard, *Rudiments païens*[15], un recueil d'articles qui avaient paru notamment dans *Critique*, entre 1974 et 1976.

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11 Jean-François Lyotard, p.63, p.89.

12 Une culture francophone en train d'apprendre l'anglais. voir Mircea Martin, 'D'un postmodernisme sans rivage ou d'un postmodernisme sans postmodernité', *Euresis*, 1-2 (1995), 3-13, p.9.

13 Ici manque sans doute, à notre avis, un "pas" dont l'absence dérange le sens de la phrase.

14 Antoine Compagnon, 'Eloge des sirènes', *Critique*, 396 (1980), 457-473, p. 457-8.

15 Jean-François Lyotard, *Rudiments païens* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1977).

Le registre "pathétique" dans lequel la "postmodernité" était définie en France, à l'époque, était lui-même le symptôme d'un malaise. Quand ils écrivent sur la réédition de *La Société de consommation* (qui reparaît chez Gallimard en 1974), Pascal Bruckner et Alain Finkielkraut en arrivent à ce même vocabulaire. Par-delà des phrases tranchantes telles que "la passion surgit dans son autonomie hors des objets qui la suscitent parce que tout, avec l'argent, peut devenir l'objet de passion"[16], leur texte exprime le constat irréfutable du désordre du réel par indifférenciation et par indifférence, geste antipolitique par excellence, car l'argent incarné en objets de consommation a pour effet un "égalitarisme généralisé". Bruckner et Finkielkraut en arrivent à y trouver de quoi battre en brèche "l'exigence de l'identité"[17] moderne, remplacée par les "passions de l'indifférence" dirigées contre les pouvoirs constitués. En 1979, ils sont en train d'emboîter le pas à Roland Barthes qui parlait, à la même époque, du caractère "actif" du Neutre, de sa "force".[18]

Cette approche du postmoderne, en termes d'affects, semble appropriée aussi longtemps que la question des valeurs reste centrale : si les valeurs de l'Histoire étaient en train de se muer en fausse monnaie, à quoi pouvait-on croire encore, à quoi d'autre pouvait-on s'attacher ? On pourrait parler ainsi d'un "minimalisme" postmoderne, si le social et le politique peuvent être réduits à leurs composantes affectives individuelles. Devenu un problème de "foi", le postmoderne s'interdit toute conceptualisation, du moins du côté des sciences humaines. C'est précisément pourquoi Lyotard tente d'éviter ce piège, notamment à travers la critique de la figure de l'intellectuel humaniste, celui qui, depuis Julien Benda, se rapporte au monde exclusivement en termes de valeur.

Les "métarécits" et leur contexte

Cette critique de la position "intellectuelle",[19] qui ne cesse de se renouveler selon les époques, a le mieux pénétré le champ des débats au sein de

16 Pascal Bruckner, Alain Finkielkraut, 'Passions de l'indifférence', *Critique*, 336 (1975), p.473.

17 Ibidem, p. 477.

18 Roland Barthes, *Le Neutre. Cours au collège de France (1977-1978)* (Paris : Seuil/IMEC, 2002), pp.119-120

19 Pour une critique récente de cette position, voir Isabelle Stengers, 'Penser à partir du ravage écologique', dans Emilie Hache, *De l'Univers clos au monde infini* (Paris : Dehors, 2014), p. 189.

la culture "humaniste" à travers le concept de *métarécit*. Là encore, en dépit de son succès, ce terme est discuté dans la plupart des cas à l'extérieur du contexte dans lequel le place Lyotard, notamment dans deux ouvrages qui paraissent à la même époque que *La Condition postmoderne* : *Instructions païennes* (1977) et les articles parus sous le titre *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (réunis en 1984). Présent dès la première page de l'ouvrage, il met en discussion la prétendue distinction entre "histoire" et "littérature" : il y a des métarécits, voilà tout, qu'on a l'habitude d'appeler parfois "philosophies de l'histoire", plus ou moins vraisemblables – mais jamais "vrais". Ce qui représentait, en revanche, le vrai problème des sociétés développées, c'était le capitalisme :

> On entend dire partout que le grand problème de la société d'aujourd'hui est celui de l'État. C'est une méprise, et grave. Le problème qui surplombe tous les autres, y compris celui de l'État contemporain, c'est celui du capital. (…) Le capitalisme (…) est devenu une figure qui n'est pas "économique", pas "sociologique", mais métaphysique. (…) Or le capitalisme est plutôt une figure. Comme système, la source chaude n'est pas la force du travail, c'est l'énergie en général, physique. Comme figure, sa force provient de l'idée d'Infini.[20]

Cette réponse à une enquête sur la postmodernité, publiée par la revue *Babylone* en 1983, laisse voir pourquoi une telle approche transdisciplinaire était peu lisible pour un spécialiste de littérature, notamment dans les pays de l'Est. Il était évident qu'il y eût des "effets de la pénétration du capitalisme dans le langage",[21] qui s'employait à démanteler la cohésion des métarécits modernes, mais il était bien trop tôt pour que les littéraires pussent en rendre compte. Cependant, au cœur de la réflexion lyotardienne sur les sociétés occidentales contemporaines il y a bien le "récit", autrement dit le langage. Le moment postmoderne serait celui où une nouvelle pragmatique s'empare des "récits" dont on avait l'habitude de mesurer les rapports avec la Nature et avec l'Histoire. Puisque Nature et Histoire ne sont plus désormais que deux mythes, le premier déconstruit, le second sur le seuil de l'être, il fallait trouver un autre moyen pour évaluer le langage, pour y distinguer le "vrai" et le "faux". Tout récit vaut désormais, à condition qu'il soit efficace : "soyez opératoires",[22] enjoint-il, sans sembler se soucier de la "valeur de vérité" des discours, du moment qu'ils sont tous

20 Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris : Galilée, 1984), pp. 79-81.
21 Ibidem, p. 82.
22 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p. 8.

des récits plus ou moins bien performés. Lyotard renvoie ainsi à une sorte de fourmilière discursive dépourvue du "signifiant transcendantal" de la paix perpétuelle, comme chez Kant ou chez Habermas.

Parmi les effets de cette "agonistique" diégétique, Lyotard choisit d'en discuter un qui était très actuel à la fin des années 1970 : la morale. La compétition des récits tendait à en rendre visibles les atours esthétiques plutôt que la portée éthique. On le sait, les récits, textes de "plaisir" ou de "jouissance", sont à la fois "impies", "païens" et "séducteurs" :

> Gorgias disait que dans l'art tragique, il est plus juste de séduire que de ne pas séduire, et plus sage d'être séduit que de ne pas l'être. Séduire se dit *apatan*. Imaginez un monde où la justice (et la justesse) consiste d'abord à traiter la parole comme un art, où le discours de vérité est une grossièreté inconnue.[23]

De tels éloges faits aux vertus esthétiques des discours, à l'imagination qui en régit les figures, ont pu enchanter les intellectuels de l'Est qui cherchaient de nouvelles justifications à la littérature, au moment où la littérature semblait elle aussi devenir la victime d'une désaffection post-moderne, notamment après la chute des régimes socialistes, alors que la politique semblait être de retour en tant que valeur forte. Mircea Cărtărescu, l'écrivain roumain le plus connu à l'étranger, et l'un des plus assidus promoteurs du postmodernisme littéraire en Roumanie, y insiste, en 1996 : "Il y a chez Lyotard une qualité traditionnelle 'humaniste' qui garde son rôle dans la nouvelle société. Il s'agit de l'imagination".[24] Mais Lyotard remarque que la séduction ne reste pas cantonnée dans le règne de l'esthétique. La maximisation de l'efficacité joue aussi en faveur de la maximisation de la justice sociale dont les énoncés des récits sont porteurs.[25] Cette idée, qui allait être interprétée à travers le concept de "*empowerment*"[26] des individus qui ont droit à produire et diffuser *leurs propres* récits, devait subir une torsion majeure : c'est de plus en plus souvent à partir de leur portée justicière que la "valeur" esthétique des textes est aujourd'hui discutée dans différents

23 Lyotard, *Instructions païennes* (Paris : Galilée, 1977) : 44.

24 Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc* (București : Humanitas, 1996), p. 41.

25 *Instructions païennes*, p. 76. Lyotard s'appuie ici sur le sociologue allemand Niklas Luhman.

26 Le mot, traduit par "encapacitation", est utilisé par Yves Citton dans bien des ouvrages, notamment dans *Lire, interpréter, actualiser : pourquoi les études littéraires ?* (Paris : Éditions Amsterdam, 2007).

débats sur les évolutions contemporaines de l'idée de littérature.[27] C'est le pressentiment de cette torsion que Lyotard a lorsqu'il invite les faiseurs des récits à prendre leur sort en main : "détruisez les monopoles narratifs, détruisez-les comme thèmes exclusifs (de partis), et comme pragmatiques exclusives (de partis et de marchés). […] Luttez plutôt pour l'inclusion des métarécits, des théories et des doctrines, politiques notamment, dans les récits."[28]

L'injonction à détruire les "monopoles narratifs", dirigée tous azimuts contre les métarécits émancipateurs défaillants, et contre le récit capitaliste, n'a malheureusement pas été saisi en Europe de l'Est, où ce qui avait lieu au début des années 1990 n'était que le remplacement d'un monopole par un autre. Tout au long de *La Condition postmoderne*, non seulement les références littéraires sont rares, mais aussi les renvois à l'actualité politique. Le philosophe s'y appesantit davantage dans *Instructions païennes*, texte qu'il rédige sous forme de dialogue philosophique autour de l'affaire des "nouveaux philosophes", elle-même liée à l'écho de la parution en français du témoignage d'Aleksander Soljenitsyne livré sous forme de roman, *L'Archipel du Goulag* (1973). Dans l'un des rares articles consacrés à cet opuscule, Cecile Lindsay remarque l'influence de Nietzsche, mais elle passe sous silence précisément le contexte de sa parution. Or, le début du dialogue imaginé renvoie aux élections législatives françaises qui allaient avoir lieu en mars 1978. L'imprévisibilité des positions des partis politiques français recensées à travers les propos échangés se justifie, selon Lyotard, par une désertion lexicale : le parti communiste s'interdit désormais l'usage de "grands noms" qui faisaient le noyau dur du discours communiste, puisque les intellectuels "renâclent à raconter et à justifier le récit marxiste"[29]. L'affaire des "nouveaux philosophes" y est une référence explicite. Les "nouveaux philosophes" sont ceux qui, dans le désarroi idéologique général, se sont saisi d'un nouveau récit, à savoir le témoignage de Soljenitsyne, pour le capitaliser dans un récit "anti-pouvoir" dont ils s'emparent et qui les "encapacite". Dans ce dialogue philosophique, le rôle de l'ignorant appartient au porte-parole de la doxa anti-nouveaux philosophes. Il accuse ces derniers d'avoir monté "une opération marketing", mais son interlocuteur, qui joue le Socrate, coupe court : "de très bonnes choses nous sont venues sous l'aspect de la marchandise, pourquoi pas

27 Alexandre Gefen, *L'idée de littérature : de l'art pour l'art aux écritures d'intervention* (Paris : José Corti, 2021).

28 Lyotard, *Instructions*, p. 87

29 *Instructions*, p 11.

des idées ?".[30] Ainsi, le "sage", figuré par Lyotard, montre que le seul rôle qu'un intellectuel humaniste peut désormais prétendre endosser, c'est le rôle de celui qui tente de déjouer les subterfuges du pouvoir. À l'instar du dernier Barthes, il défait ce qui s'empâte (des récits devenus métarécits), sans rien proposer en échange.

Les intellectuels sont morts, et Lyotard en fait le "tombeau",[31] car ils sont prêts à être pris de court par l'"explosion narrative" qui se prépare[32]. Là encore, se glissent des allusions à l'actualité politique européenne : l'explosion narrative en question a partie liée à l'épuisement du pouvoir des régimes socialistes, mais le pouvoir capitaliste devrait être ébranlé aussi. Certes, dans le capitalisme, "on peut faire jouer n'importe quelle histoire",[33] mais cette liberté n'est permise qu'à condition d'indexer à un nom, celui de narrateur, la valeur de sa narration qui assimile narrataires et "narrés". Le récit capitaliste capitalise auprès de l'auteur ; il est un "pouvoir" qui rejette la "puissance" du peuple qui raconte ses histoires "sans droit d'auteur".[34]

Les échos roumains du moment postmoderne (et la fin du "métarécit" culturel français)

On comprend bien que *La Condition postmoderne* ait eu du mal à être comprise dans ses enjeux fondamentaux, notamment dans les pays de l'Europe de l'Est. La critique de la culture humaniste ne pouvait pas passer dans un système culturel régi par la séparation des enjeux que portaient les "humanistes" et les "scientifiques". L'idée d'une guerre entre plusieurs narrations, dépourvue de chefs, ou encore celle de la collusion entre l'exigence justicière et la séduction généralisée servaient mal les opposants aux régimes politiques officiels et tous ceux qui voulaient voir dans le monde occidental moins la manifestation du capitalisme que les effets vertueux de la démocratie. La libération des narrations est sans doute la seule promesse que pourrait embrasser l'intellectuel (humaniste) de l'Est, mais l'agonistique qui en résulte devait lui faire peur. Enfin, l'enracinement dans l'actualité des "nouveaux philosophes" et de leur militantisme antitotalitaire, auquel procèdent les *Instructions païennes*, ne pouvait être repris à Bucarest

30 *Instructions*, p. 12 et p. 13.
31 Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel.*
32 Lyotard, *Instructions…,* p.26.
33 *Instructions*, p.55.
34 *Instructions*, p.68.

ou à Moscou, là où on ne pouvait débattre d'un courant d'idée occidental qu'à la seule condition de ne pas transgresser la frontière entre sciences du langage (et critique littéraire) et sciences du réel (sciences dures mais aussi sciences politiques).

Bien que les termes de "postmodernité" et "postmodernisme" aient engendré, dès le milieu des années 1980, un des plus importants débats intellectuels en Roumanie depuis le rejet du "réalisme socialiste" au début des années 1960, ce ne fut pas dans le sillage de *La Condition postmoderne.* Le livre a été traduit tard, en 1993, et a été publié par une petite maison,[35] alors que le contexte français de la parution du livre avait complètement changé. La perspective de relecture qui nous semble la plus intéressante, c'est celle qui fait de l'ouvrage de Lyotard un maillon entre les lieux de référence de "la condition postmoderne" (notamment les États-Unis) et le champ littéraire roumain encore largement francophone. Pour un intellectuel roumain de la "génération 1980", né dans les années 1950 et formé pendant la culture média occidentale dont l'entrée en Roumanie avait été permise par le dégel post-stalinien, il était bien plus commode d'aller directement sur le terrain des débats américains qui précédaient l'ouvrage de Lyotard. Le modèle institutionnel américain, dans lequel les universités et les pouvoirs politiques évoluent en parallèle, l'arrangeait bien plus que le modèle institutionnel français où culture, politique et médias participent du même réseau de pouvoir (les choses ont quelque peu changé depuis).

Bien que moins connu, il y eut en Roumanie une voie philosophique de la réception du postmodernisme, à distance égale du ciel pur des discussions littéraires et du terrain escarpé de la politique : il s'agit des prises de position dans le débat qui opposait d'une part les théories de Lyotard qui insistaient sur l'image d'un monde atomisé et irréconciliable et l'idée de la "modernité inachevée" de Habermas, qui les contestait. L'objet essentiel dans leur dispute était sans doute l'Histoire – avec un grand H : pouvait-on encore y faire confiance, ou bien fallait-il qu'on se rabatte sur l'image, peu optimiste au premier abord, d'une explosion narrative sans espoir de consensus ? La querelle Lyotard-Habermas,[36] pouvait être importée en Roumanie en tant que controverse idéologique entre les tenants d'un marxisme *soft*, représenté par Habermas, et ceux d'un courant heideggérien "irrationaliste" dans lequel s'inscrivait Lyotard. Évidemment, la position que pouvait occuper dans ce débat un intellectuel de l'Est était

35 Jean-François Lyotard, *Condiţia postmodernă*. Trad. Ciprian Mihali (Bucuresti: Babel, 1993). Une nouvelle édition voit le jour en 2003 (Cluj, Idea).

36 Garba Oumarou, *Communication ou différend. Le grand débat Habermas-Lyotard* (Paris : Harmattan, 2019)

donnée d'avance, il ne pouvait que soutenir Habermas contre Lyotard. La "condition postmoderne" était par conséquent intenable en tant que telle, du point de vue idéologique et épistémologique. C'est sans doute la raison pour laquelle le postmodernisme littéraire et celui philosophique ne sont pas entrés en dialogue, en Roumanie, avant 1990. Une fois qu'on opérait au sein même de cette "condition" une rupture entre ce point de vue et la perspective esthétique dans sa version américaine, le terme "postmoderne" acquérait miraculeusement une valeur acceptable à l'Est : le postmoderne pouvait incarner désormais la "liberté" opposée au "dogmatisme" (moderne), l'optimisme devant un nouveau monde qu'on pouvait encore espérer (selon le discours officiel) communiste. Bref, il s'agissait d'un postmodernisme quasi-révolutionnaire, apte à mobiliser les consciences créatrices, tout ignorant des débats idéologiques menées des deux côtés de l'Atlantique, et qui s'énonçait en anglais.

Le Postmodernisme philosophique

La porte d'entrée philosophique du "postmodernisme" en Roumanie est extrêmement réductive : elle fait du "postmodernisme" une sorte de rengaine rancunière, *dark*, sans fondement. La dispute Lyotard-Habermas y est récupérée à distance, à travers des commentaires suscités par la parution d'un ouvrage philosophique américain : *Consequences of Pragmatism*, de Richard Rorty (1982). Les deux philosophes roumains qui y font écho sont les premiers à nommer l'ennemi : le "post-" ou "néo-structuralisme" français. Ce sont Ludwig Grunberg (1933-1995), philosophe marxiste marginal, qui enseignait à l'époque à l'Académie des Sciences Économiques de Bucarest, et Andrei Marga (né en 1946), philosophe pragmatiste, qui enseignait à Cluj (retraité à présent). *Consequences of Pragmatism* est un ouvrage qui posait de manière aigue le problème de la survivance de la métaphysique (ne serait-ce que dans sa version de philosophie de l'histoire) dans le monde contemporain. À la fin de son ouvrage – qui est une collection d'essais – Rorty insère un chapitre sur "la philosophie en Amérique aujourd'hui" qui a suscité un intérêt particulier en Roumanie auprès d'une nouvelle génération d'intellectuels.

Ludwig Grunberg était un universitaire marxiste avec une thèse soutenue au début des années 1960 où il prenait position contre le personnalisme mounien. À la suite du dégel culturel des années 1960, il avait publié en 1981 un ouvrage issu de son enseignement, *Options philosophiques*

contemporaines,[37] et plus tard, en 1987, il allait faire paraître un long essai en trois parties, en trois livraisons de *Contemporanul*, sous le titre "Littérature et philosophie" (avec le sous-titre : "Philosophie comme style et littérature comme philosophie"). C'est ici qu'il s'insurge contre le "relativisme" philosophique contemporain qui mélange philosophie et littérature, enlevant à chacun de ces discours sa "spécificité" et minant notamment l'essence "esthétique" de la littérature.[38] Ainsi, qu'il le veuille ou non, il entérine la distinction entre "forme" et "contenu" qui fondait normativement le champ intellectuel roumain[39] et que la nouvelle donne médiatique – "le médium est le message" de McLuhan– avait changée depuis un bon moment. Le terme qu'il frappe de son anathème dans son article est "post-philosophie" : autant dire que la philosophie ne peut être que "moderne" pour subsister en tant que telle, séparée du discours littéraire.

Plus proche de l'espace allemand, Andrei Marga, également universitaire et docteur en philosophie avec une thèse sur l'École de Francfort,[40] publie un article portant un titre descriptif : "Moderne et postmoderne", en 1987,[41] où il prend dans le même débat une position résolument habermasienne qu'il ne quittera pas après 1989. Il voit dans la tentative de Habermas de surmonter le relativisme pragmatiste par le "dialogisme" le moyen de poursuivre l'idéal émancipatoire de la modernité. Dans son texte, Marga résume l'ouvrage de Lyotard et cite d'autres noms de philosophes français (notamment Derrida, mais aussi Foucault) aux théories desquelles s'oppose Habermas. Il s'insurge contre le "néo-structuralisme" (terme repris à Manfred Frank) et le "néo-conservatisme" qui caractérisaient, selon Habermas, la philosophie française "postmoderne".

Cette réception roumaine philosophique du post-modernisme est plutôt une occasion de remettre à jour, auprès du public roumain, les enjeux des débats philosophiques contemporains, depuis une perspective socialiste ou social-démocrate, et dans le souci – essentiel – de garder intactes les

37 Ludwig Grunberg, *Optiuni filozofice contemporane*, (Bucuresti : Politica, 1981)

38 *Contemporanul*, p. 6, 7 et 10 (1987).

39 Ceausescu l'avait rappelé : "Il va sans dire, camarades, que nous sommes les partisans d'une littérature militante et nous ne saurions pas concevoir un autre type de littérature. (…) Le problème des formes, de l'expression, des méthodes utilisées est différent de celui de la conception qui doit régir notre littérature, et à cet endroit nous sommes tout contre la diversité idéologique". Nicolae Ceausescu, dans Alina Pavelescu, Laura Dumitriu (coord.), *Arhivele nationale ale României, PCR si intelectualii* în *primii ani ai regimului Ceausescu (1965-1972)*, (București : Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2007), p. 118.

40 Andrei Marga, *Herbert Marcuse, Studiu critic* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1980)

41 Andrei Marga, 'Modern si postmodern', *Vatra*, 4 (1987).

frontières des genres discursifs, dont l'effacement aurait changé de fond en comble les rapports entre le politique et l'esthétique et aussi, en ligne de mire, les rapports entre vérité sensible et vérité scientifique. Il fallait que le discours de la littérature restât "littéraire", inséparable des valeurs esthétiques et à l'abri de toute "politique de la littérature", alors que la philosophie ne devait pas se laisser fourvoyer par des questions de style, aussi longtemps que son rôle était celui de découvrir des vérités universelles et humaines et d'expliciter les méthodes pour les atteindre. Ces débats restent, il faut le dire, très abstraits, non ancrés dans les réalités politiques, sociales économiques et plus largement matérielles sur l'étude desquelles Lyotard en était arrivé à définir la "condition postmoderne". Le message que transmettaient les échos roumains de ces débats était qu'il fallait poursuivre la voie moderne, rationaliste, d'envisager et de fonder le monde, une voie qui ne pouvait être que celle du socialisme.

Le Postmodernisme littéraire

Le débat postmoderne eu sein de la critique et théorie littéraire ne faisait aucune attention aux enjeux philosophiques. Les littéraires roumains étaient comme protégés par un "environnement esthétique". Il est toutefois vrai que certains des jeunes écrivains roumains qui s'intéressaient au postmodernisme y voyaient la promesse d'un "nouvel humanisme", qu'ils s'interdisaient de décliner autrement que sous sa dimension esthétique. Ainsi, la revue *Amfiteatru* consacre un numéro, en 1988, à "l'humanisme postmoderne",[42] geste moins théorique que tactique : en parler, c'était apaiser des autorités qui pourraient à tout moment crier au "danger" postmoderne, selon les interprétations philosophiques auxquelles le postmodernisme avait donné lieu. Dompté de la sorte, le postmodernisme pouvait poursuivre tranquillement sa publicité auprès des écrivains et des artistes.

Depuis le milieu des années 1980, et notamment à partir d'un numéro spécial consacré au postmodernisme par la revue *Caiete critice* (Bucarest) en 1986, le postmodernisme mobilise les esprits critiques sans pour autant quitter la seule scène où il pouvait être présenté : la scène de la langue et de l'esthétique. La seule référence d'ampleur à la *Condition postmo-*

42 'Débat : Pour un nouvel horizon de l'humain', dans la revue *Amfiteatru*, no 5 (1988). Le syntagme "humanisme postmoderne" appartient à l'essayiste Ioan Buduca. Le jeune romancier Mircea Nedelciu affirme, lors d'une enquête parue dans la presse culturelle, que désormais "écrire, c'est faire œuvre d'anthropologie" (revue *Ateneu*, no 2 (1986), p. 7).

derne y est le compte-rendu de Dan Ion Nasta. Son intitulé descriptif et précautionneux voile plus qu'il ne révèle les enjeux de Lyotard : "Jeux de langage et légitimations dans la perspective du postmodernisme".[43] Non seulement *La Condition postmoderne* avait du mal à être lue et discutée en Roumanie, non seulement elle avait déjà eu peu de chances de s'immiscer dans les débats culturels et idéologiques français de l'époque, mais elle restait marginale en tant que *référence française* dans un débat qui engageait davantage des lectures philosophiques en allemand (Habermas) en anglais (Rorty, pour la dimension philosophique, mais aussi Ihab Hassan) ou bien en italien (Umberto Eco).

Le peu d'intérêt suscité par *La Condition postmoderne* en Roumanie, alors qu'il s'agissait du seul ouvrage écrit en français et qu'il était devenu une référence dans n'importe quel débat sérieux autour du postmoderne, marque symboliquement le déclin du référentiel français et francophone dans le champ littéraire et humaniste en Roumanie. Lyotard fait entendre sa critique du discours des intellectuels "généralistes" au moment même où ceux-ci se trouvent engagés dans la querelle sans issue des "nouveaux philosophes", dont l'enjeu avait été survalorisé dans le contexte de la crise du système socialiste. Rétrospectivement, l'ouvrage de Lyotard, contemporain d'autres textes peu lus à l'époque, d'Isabelle Stengers, de Michel Serres, ou encore de Bruno Latour, a eu le mérite de présager l'avènement d'un nouveau type d'intellectuel qui devrait surmonter l'opposition entre sciences humaines et sciences dures depuis une perspective pragmatique qui traverse et défait le partage entre les deux types d'intellectuels que sont les humanistes et les scientifiques. C'était un philosophe français encore – mais un philosophe différent des théoriciens de la French Theory – qui expliquait le déclin des métarécits modernes et le délitement des socles sur lesquels étaient juchés leurs locuteurs : "Le texte qui suit est un écrit de circonstance. C'est un Rapport (…) Reste que le rapporteur est un philosophe, non un expert. Celui-ci sait ce qu'il sait et ce qu'il ne sait pas, celui-là non. L'un conclut, l'autre interroge, ce sont là deux jeux de langage."[44]

Cité dans *La Condition postmoderne*, il est vrai qu'une seule fois, Bruno Latour allait publier une dizaine d'années plus tard *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*,[45] la meilleure réponse au débat postmoderne ouvert par Lyotard qu'un intellectuel français ait apporté depuis. En 1991, Latour était pourtant encore un quasi-inconnu, sans doute pour les mêmes raisons qui

43 Dan Ion Nasta, 'Jocuri de limbaj şi legitimări în perspectiva postmodernismului', *Caiete critice*, 1-2 (1986), 92-105.

44 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p.9.

45 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris : La Découverte, 1991).

avaient fait du rapport de Lyotard un texte marginal. Isabelle Stengers est elle aussi présente dans l'ouvrage de Lyotard avec un article écrit avec Ilya Prigogine et publié dans un numéro spécial que la revue *Critique* consacrait à Michel Serres.[46] Somme toute, ils étaient peu nombreux à l'époque ceux qui avaient les moyens de comprendre comment une explosion narrative allait changer non seulement la poétique de la "littérature", mais plus encore la poétique "scientifique", et remettre en question la littérature comme discours de savoir.

Il est d'autant plus intéressant de remarquer comment, à cette époque même des "nouvelles alliances" entre sciences humaines et sciences quantitatives et naturelles, ce fut le champ littéraire américain qui, à travers l'épanouissement des études culturelles, a maintenu la séparation entre les unes et les autres et a pu par conséquent mieux passer dans les débats intellectuels de l'Europe de l'Est, avant et après 1989. Les enjeux des écrits de Serres, de Stengers, de Latour (que Lyotard faisait découvrir dans sa *Condition postmoderne*) ont devancé le moment où ceux-ci pouvaient enfin être saisis en Europe de l'Est, et quand un nouveau tournant – le tournant écologique – s'est enfin produit, autour de 2010, ni Serres, ni Stengers et ni Latour n'ont plus été lus en tant que théoriciens français ou francophones. C'était comme si, quoi qu'ils écrivent en français, ces trois théoriciens – tout comme le Lyotard de la *Condition postmoderne* – avaient quitté toute référence à une certaine "identité française".

Bien que publié voici déjà plus de quarante ans, l'ouvrage le plus connu de Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, devrait aujourd'hui être relu non pas dans l'esprit volage qu'on a pu attribuer à un certain postmodernisme désengagé professé par certains intellectuels "déçus par toute l'entreprise de la Critique et [qui] n'arrivent plus à croire aux promesses jointes du rationalisme et du socialisme. (...) Leur mélange d'amour, de haine ou d'indifférence pour les sciences prouve assez combien ils sont restés modernes."[47] Lyotard n'a jamais eu le profil incriminé par Latour au début des années 1990, celui d'un moderne désabusé, et il n'aura été évi-

46 Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, p. 91. *La Nouvelle alliance*, ouvrage que Prigogine et Stengers font paraître en 1978 est traduit en roumain dès 1984, traduction accompagnée et justifiée, il est vrai, par une préface où l'auteur insère des extraits des discours du président Nicolae Ceausescu.

47 Bruno Latour, 'Sommes-nous postmodernes ? Non, amodernes ! Etapes vers une anthropologie de la science', dans *La pensée métisse : Croyances africaines et rationalité occidentale en questions* [en ligne] (Genève : Graduate Institute Publications, 1990) (Consulté le 12 août 2021). DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/books.iheid.3220.

demment non plus le militant d'une post-modernité de la "conversation" sans tragique, "entre gens bien élevés, cela va de soi."[48] Le rapport sur le savoir qu'il rédige opère un renversement dont les conséquences sont majeures à la fois pour l'avenir des sciences humaines – un avenir devenu entre-temps notre passé récent –, et pour le sort de la *French Theory* par rapport à laquelle, nous venons de le voir, Lyotard prend ses distances. Il le fait notamment à travers deux virages théoriques : une critique de l'intellectuel humaniste qui va au-delà de l'opposition entre intellectuel universel et intellectuel spécifique[49] pour en finir avec l'idée de l'intellectuel "humaniste" tout court, et, respectivement, une critique des discours en général, concurrencés de plus en plus par d'autres langages que celui verbal, notamment celui computationnel de l'informatique. Depuis l'horizon du présent, on pourrait lui donner raison à chaque fois, ne serait-ce qu'à la vue de l'émergence du nouveau continent écologique au croisement des sciences humaines, naturelles et exactes, et à la vue de l'avènement des "humanités numériques".

Il n'en est pas moins vrai que Lyotard – au moins dans sa *Condition postmoderne* et dans les quelques essais qui l'accompagnent – aux côtés de Michel Serres, d'Isabelle Stengers et de Bruno Latour, pour nommer les noms les plus connus aujourd'hui d'un territoire théorique instable – refuse à la French Theory à laquelle il est parfois associé une postérité conséquente. C'est comme si la "condition postmoderne" présupposait une évasion quasi-totale de l'emprise de la *French Theory*, c'est-à-dire du post-structuralisme façonné notamment par Foucault et Derrida. Or, cette évasion fut aussi un éloignement d'un certain style que les intellectuels américains ont toujours rejeté comme "incohérent"[50]. Ni Latour ni Stengers ne sont plus lus avec une visée stylistique, bien que des propos sémiotiques ne manquent pas de leurs écrits. Ils n'écrivent pas dans une langue française marquée par un certain style identifiable par sa "francité", bien qu'ils fassent appel à différents procédés fictionnels. Les auteurs qu'ils citent sont en majorité des chercheurs qui écrivent en anglais, de sorte que l'intertexte où ils se placent ne renvoie plus à une filiation francophone ou bien

48 Isabelle Stengers, 'Penser à partir du ravage écologique', dans *De l'univers clos au monde infini*, éd.par Emilie Hache (Paris : Dehors, 2014), p. 153.

49 Pour un compte-rendu de cette opposition, voir Oulc'hen Hervé, 'La politique de la vérité de l'intellectuel. Entre Foucault et Sartre', dans *Usages de Foucault*, éd. par Hervé Oulc'Hen (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), pp. 293-318.

50 Voir sur ce point les propos de Arthur Danto rapporté par Sylvére Lotringer et Sande Cohen (éd.), *French Theory in America*, 'Introduction' (London : Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

franco-allemande, comme chez les Foucault et les Derrida qui les avaient précédés. Avant eux, déjà, le Lyotard de la *Condition postmoderne* semble vouloir faire comprendre que, désormais, la condition postmoderne est, du point de vue de la communication, une condition post-linguistique, de deux manières : d'une part, parce que les données peuvent être communiquées en deçà ou au-delà du langage verbal ; et d'autre part, parce que, régie par l'efficacité, la communication verbale devrait être détachée des spécificités des langues "nationales" qui en sont les supports.

Que les langues n'auraient été que des "bruits" accompagnant les données de plus en plus brutes que le monde fait circuler à travers images, chiffres et lettres, que ces vœux seront ou non réalisés, il ne nous appartient pas encore de le juger. Quand bien même nous ne serions plus post-modernes, l'enjeu de la langue ne nous semble pas sans importance.

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POSTMODERNISM AS STYLISTIC PARADIGM

Josh Toth

METAFICTION AND PLASTICITY
Or, the Dehiscing Wound of Postmodernism[1]

> [T]his virtuosity of an ironical artistic life apprehends itself as a divine creative genius for which anything and everything is only an unsubstantial creature, to which the creator, knowing himself to be disengaged and free from everything, is not bound, because he is just as able to destroy it as to create it.
>
> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*

> Socrates's position was, as infinite absolute negativity, irony. But… what his irony was demanding was the actuality of subjectivity, of ideality.
>
> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*

I

By the time Patricia Waugh published her seminal work on metafiction in 1984 – and the "paranoia that permeate[d] the… writings of the sixties and the seventies… [had given] way to celebration, to the discovery of new forms of the fantastic"[2] – postmodernism's cultural dominance had already been confirmed by a rapid proliferation of narrative self-reflexivity (in aesthetic forms both elite and popular): from Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) to Terry Gilliam's *Mounty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), Jim Henson's *The Muppet Movie* (1979), and Richard Rush's *The Stunt Man* (1980). And yet, somewhat surprisingly, this late-century spread of

1 The following, a slightly revised version of my conference presentation, was further developed into Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 of *Truth and Metafiction: Plasticity and Renewal in American Narrative* – published by Bloomsbury academic in 2021.

2 Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 9.

the overtly self-reflexive quickly became backdrop to a critical discussion about the waning, or failing efficacy, of postmodernism. By the early 2000s, postmodernism is, according to many, a dead episteme – and the proliferation of metafiction (especially in popular media) simply stands as the most obvious symptom of a cultural moment that has become, like Yeats's spiraling falcon, too distant or too dispersed from its roots to be of critical or political use.[3] Nevertheless, the production of metafiction continued, and continues, undaunted. In terms of American fiction (alone), a list of "new" metafictionists would certainly include Mark Z. Danielewski, Dave Eggers, David Foster Wallace, Mark Leyner, Gary Shteyngart, Percival Everett, Jennifer Egan, Junot Díaz, Salvador Plascencia, etc. And today's metafictional films and television shows are almost too numerous and varied to count. As proof let's consider, for a moment, Michael Jelenic and Aaron Horvath's *Teen Titans Go!*, an extremely popular children's program (which first aired in 2013).

Presented in bright and simplistic animation that might best be described as a parody of America's co-option of anime, *Teen Titans Go!* offers short segments (2 per 20-minute episode) detailing the exploits of the Teen Titans, a group of young superheroes first introduced in the pages of DC comics. In many respects, the show is a follow-up to the earlier *Teen Titans* (2003-2006) – a serious, if also animated, take on the DC heroes. *Teen Titans Go!*, however, is never anything other than a parody. The teenaged Titans – inclusive of Robin, Starfire, Beast Boy, Raven, and Cyborg – live free of parental supervision in a giant T-shaped tower on a small island outside Jump City. They spend the vast bulk of their time eating pizza, making fart jokes, making jokes about making fart jokes, and annoying one another. They often, also, break into song or musical numbers – with any number of absurd montages intruding upon the virtually non-existent narrative arcs. A running joke is that the Titans rarely, if ever, fight crime. Alongside these more implicit metafictional conceits (inclusive of satiric references to a larger and often contradictory DC universe and previous adaptations of the Titan characters), the series often takes more explicit metafictional turns.

Episode 5 of season 3 is, in fact, titled *The Fourth Wall* (2015), and concerns the Titans realizing (after watching, on *their* TV, the intro sequence we just watched) that they *are* an animated TV show, one that (because of

3 I track the history of this critical post-mortem in my *The Passing of Postmodernism: A Spectroanalysis of the Contemporary* (New York: Suny, 2010) – chapter one, especially.

its low-brow nature) is in danger of being rebooted. After attempting to become more mature (by getting their creators to draw and write them in a Victorian-esque manner), the Titans finally decide that they "have to be true to [them]selves, even if it means being rebooted". They thus decide to revolt by directing a "fart song" at *their* TV. The show suddenly reverts to its previous form, and Robin announces that the Titans are "proud of what [they] represent" and that, if they are to preserve their "truth", they must stop their broadcast by physically "break[ing] the fourth wall". To do so, Beast Boy transforms into a ram and runs at *our* screen. Once the other Titans join his attack, the screen breaks and the segment abruptly ends… only to be immediately replaced by the next segment ("40%, 40%, 20%"), in which we learn that Cyborg's strength is derived from a 90s-esque ambient love song that he plays on his internal speakers. After the other Titans are convinced of the song's power, they all transform into overly sexualized, or "serious", versions of themselves. They are also transported to a desert-like plain. Here, they ride a five-person motorcycle, the wind blows dramatically through their hair, a robotic hawk and horse travel alongside them, and an impossibly full moon (with the face of a wolf) looks down upon their adventures. The "lesson – as Cyborg, puts it –, is that music can transform you"; music is "its *own* reality".

Other explicitly metafictional segments include season 3's *The Art of Ninjutsu* (2016) – in which the Titans must use their Ninja skills to locate the "McGuffin" (which turns out to be an Egg McMuffin) – and, most notably, season 4's *The Self-Indulgent 200th Episode Spectacular* - Part 1 & Part 2 (2017), in which the Titans must locate and re-animate their own creators after being confronted by encroaching nothingness (which is the result of production that has halted under the weight of "a very aggressive schedule"). These latter segments end – after the Titans, with "real-life" photos in hand, track down and reprimand animated versions of Michael Jelenic and Aaron Horvath, learn the lesson that "make-believe becomes real if you believe in it enough", and wonder if "any of this matter[s]" – with a montage of Jelenic, Horvath, and the rest of the show's production crew dancing and working on new episodes. Over the montage is the song *Work on an Episode* – a portion of which is (since we've come *this far*) worth quoting: "Work on an episode / Everyday / Piling on your plate / Like a work buffet… / Get that money for your 401(k) / Invest in rental property then… / Work on an episode…".

It would be easy to disregard *Teen Titans Go!* as nothing other than a popular and diluted (to the point of infantilism) take on more rigorous forms of postmodern metafiction. In this sense, the show is merely a star-

tling example of how a certain strain, or sprit, of postmodernism has infected our everyday thinking. It's irresponsible lessons – in the form of contradictory messages about the infinite pliability of identity *and* the importance of fighting for one's integrity to the idea that "make-believe becomes real if you believe in it enough" and that history is never anterior to the form of its telling – now circulate, unchecked, before the eyes of our children. We can certainly, if too easily, draw a direct line between such messaging and the political consequences of a "post-truth" crisis. In this specific sense, the show can be viewed as the apotheosis of David Foster Wallace's nightmare (just think of all that flatulence!) – a nightmare he outlines in his most influential essay, *E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction*. As Wallace puts it, "television used to point beyond itself. Those of us born in like the sixties were trained to look where it pointed, usually at versions of "real life" made prettier, sweeter, better by succumbing to a product or temptation. Today's Audience is way better trained, and TV has discarded what's not needed. A dog, if you point at something, will look only at your finger".[4] For Wallace, metafiction is little more than the natural outgrowth of a society that has lost itself to the wonders of televisation, to watching and being watched. We know everything is a self-conscious performance, even if (or *when*) we "pretend" it's not. "What – then, Wallace asks – do we do when postmodern rebellion becomes a pop-cultural institution?".[5] His answer, of course, has become as influential as it is problematic: we must become "anti-rebels, born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue".[6] Significantly, and especially in light of his own inability to eschew irony as a narrative tool, Wallace's troublingly masculinist nostalgia (in the essay just cited) for "sincerity," "reverence," "authority," and "conviction" – predicated, as they are, on a dismissal of feckless "appearers" and a privileging of "doers" and "be-ers" and those artists who might heroically reverse "television's power to jettison connection and *castrate* protest"[7] – relies upon a potentially strategic confusion of "irony" and contemporary America's tendency and willingness to vacillate between belief and skeptical incredulity. Irony, in its strictest sense, denotes the sustainment *and* (via that

4 David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', *Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1993, 151–94 (p. 160).
5 Wallace, p. 184.
6 Wallace, pp. 192-193.
7 Wallace, p. 161, my emphasis.

sustainment) the radical *sublation* of contradictory positions.[8] Sublation should not, here, be confused with synthesis. As an English translation of Hegel's *Aufhebung*, "sublation" denotes a "holding to" *and* a "letting go", "preservation" *and* "abolishment". Synthesis is simply the effacement of difference, a return to depthlessness and *in*difference, a flattening of *ethical* distance. Synthesis is not, in fact, dissimilar from sincerity.

Whenever I make it possible for my audience to assume that what I say, or describe, is *exactly* the same as what I mean, or what is represented via my description, a troubling sense of depth or distance is negated, and the radical otherness of my meaning, or of the Thing in question, is laminated onto (or *as*) a given surface. Sincerity, like synthesis, is tantamount to a *flattening of affect*. However, irony holds together what is "real" and what is offered as its representation while, or *by*, keeping them at a distance. Irony *can* draw us toward an engagement with the irony of reality itself, with the in-itself as a radically split Thing. I mean here a kind of *uncanny irony*, an irony that is *essentially* indissoluble from a Lacanian / Žižekian Real (which gives *by barring* access), which sustains a connection to reality because it entails contradiction in the most philosophical of senses; its very nature frustrates Aristotle's *law of noncontradiction*. Wallace's problem is, in this sense, not irony (deployed with care, or in those texts he calls "complicated ironies")[9], but a tendency to eschew responsibility via recourse to the impossibility of laying claim to stable referents. Irony, in the strictest sense, makes both sincerity *and* insincerity impossible; the truly ironic claim necessarily bears the unmistakable traces of its own dissembling. A despot like Donald Trump, after all, lies so effectively because, when he lies most insidiously, he speaks with absolute sincerity. In the wake of postmodernism, then – or rather, *in the face of postmodernity's ongoing intensification* – today's "new sincerity" (to recall Adam Kelly's influential essay on Wallace[10]) cannot possibly bring us safely to the other side of postmodern irony. Nor should we aim for such refuge. In most cases, in fact, recent efforts to locate and endorse a *return* to "sincerity" in contemporary aesthetics simply and problematically encourage us to acquiesce to false belief, to the necessity of "pretend". What I want to suggest, however,

8 For an excellent and more robust discussion of irony as it relates to our ostensibly post-postmodern moment, see Lee Konstantinou's *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

9 Wallace, p.170.

10 Adam Kelly, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', in David Hering (ed.), *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays* (Austin/ Los Angeles: Sideshow, 2010), 131–46.

is that, to Wallace's central question – "If even the president lies to you, whom are you supposed to trust to deliver the real?"[11] – we would do well to respond, today, "the ironist!"

Such an answer might require more support than I can give it in this brief paper. But let's, for the moment, assume that irony, as a form of *sublated* dialectical tension (or contradiction), is far more complicated and far more politically and ethically efficacious than the ability to (in Wallace's words) "acquiesce for hours daily to the illusion that people on TV don't know they're being looked at, to the fantasy that we're transcending privacy and feeding on unselfconscious human activity".[12] In doing this – in doing it with the full, if repressed, knowledge that nothing is "real" (any longer), that reality itself is merely a matter of subjective and mutable faith – we are *not* behaving as ironists. We are simply acquiescing to a pattern of easy and irresponsible oscillation, toggling between belief and skepticism and thus circumventing the troubling manner in which something real must arrive as the consequence of its corruption, of its *essential and perpetual misplacement*. Wallace's "postmodern cool" simply denotes the position of a character like Lulu in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit form the Goon Squad* – who wantonly asserts that, "if I believe, I believe. Who are you to judge my reasons?".[13] Let's be clear, though: Wallace is, for the most part, correct in his assessment of late-90s American culture. For only a few years later, with the arrival of "reality TV," we see even more overtly a society's profound and troubling willingness to confuse sincerity with a barely believable lie. And, of course, in the case of reality TV, the viewers who watch in rapturous belief are always ready to tell you, at any moment (with eyes rolled), that they know it's *not* "real".

And so we find ourselves in a post-postmodern, or post-truth, crisis. As Gilles Lipovetsky puts it, while echoing Jürgen Habermas, "the heroic will to create a 'radiant future' has been replaced by managerial activism: a vast enthusiasm for change, reform and adaptation that is deprived of any confident horizon or grand historical vision".[14] The suggestion is that postmodernism has won – and, in winning, lost whatever efficacy it once had as an aesthetic movement. Jean-François Lyotard's once radical appeals to fragmentation, moral relativity, and endless narrative play (of so many conflicting little stories forestalling any recourse to a single grand

11 Wallace, p. 162.
12 Wallace, p. 154.
13 Jennifer Egan J, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), p. 320.
14 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 34.

narrative) now seem, for Lipovetsky, "vaguely old-fashioned".[15] But Lipovetsky – along with critics like Jeffery Nealon[16] – seems oddly uninterested in maintaining a clear line between a socio-economic infrastructure and its semi-autonomous cultural effect (the line, that is, that earlier thinkers like Habermas and Linda Hutcheon valiantly struggled to parse). Yet it is precisely the ever more tenuous nature of such a line that allows us to make sense of the seemingly contrary approaches to postmodernism's end, or apparent transmutation. How, after all, might we square Nealon and Lipovetsky's sense of postmodernism gone rampant with the various claims that we are now seeing an aesthetic return to truth, sincerity, ethics, etc.? Given these apparently opposed claims, we surely must concede that postmodernism's (aesthetic) death is paradoxically tied to its (societal) victory, to its omnipresence as contemporary society's ideological backdrop. That identity is merely an arbitrary discursive effect, or that one truth claim is just as contingent as any other, is simply ubiquitous (and endlessly confirmed every time we engage the world via unstable databases, anticipatory search engines, and social media).

This is not to suggest that society (*en masse*) finally "gets" postmodernism, that concepts like deconstruction, discursive power, performativity, schizoanalysis, the death of the author, etc., are being employed in popular culture and politics with nuance and care; it is to suggest, rather, that the more corrosive implications of postmodernism have fallen in line, or come to buttress, a socio-economic trend toward irresponsibility, hyper-individualism, and market-empowering uncertainty. The victory *as* death of postmodernism has come at the cost of its more subtle implications – its ethical efficacy, its effort to "politicize," as Linda Hutcheon once said, "[the historical and the factual] through [a] metafictional rethinking of the epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction".[17] Indeed, to carefully re-approach postmodern aesthetic and philosophical production is, more often than not, to re-approach the manner in which representation (of the self, of the past, of the other) entails responsibility for two interrelated tasks: 1) it must remain true to the outside limits of what cannot be denied and 2) it must signal, in a finite and always contingent construction, that the Thing represented (as in Kant's *das Ding*) necessar-

15 Lipovetsky, p. 30.

16 Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

17 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 121.

ily exceeds the formative moment of its expression.[18] What is lost on (or willfully overlooked by) any neo-postmodernist who would hope to weaponize postmodern irony as self-serving skepticism is the fact that there *is* an end to interpretative play, a point at which the real cannot be denied, or symbolically evaded – even if it must always be in excess of the frame that momentarily relates it. To counter the intensification of postmodernity (and thus the exhaustion of postmodernism's aesthetic efficacy) we must then shift the emphasis from the utter inescapability of the symbolic to the inescapability of a certain ontological gravity – that which necessarily governs, even as it is *effected by*, our endless failures to grasp it. Neither sincerity nor mere pretend can help us.

Let's go back to the utterly unbelievable *Teen Titans Go!* On some level it's difficult, if not impossible, to claim that *Teen Titans Go!* is not caught up in the kind of "irony" Wallace rails against – which is also, surely, that "*one tendency* of irony" Hegel associates, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*,[19] with the solipsistic "genius" of German Romanticism. Nothing is to be taken seriously; viewers are allowed, only, to invest themselves in the very lowest of narrative stakes. Moreover, its various metafictional flourishes often seem repetitive – to, at least, a viewer armed with a fair knowledge of postmodern media. However, and at the same time, we would be remiss if we simply conflated the metafiction of *Teen Tians Go!* with *every other* form of postmodern metafiction – just as we would be remiss to assume that *all* metafiction functions in precisely the same manner.

While it may still align more readily with our conception of a now stereotyped postmodernism, *Teen Titans Go!* also exemplifies the manner in which the function of metafiction can change from one text to another. *Teen*

18 It must therefore signal, as Levinas asserts, that the infinite is only ever accessible *in* the finite – for "the *in* of the Infinite signifie[s] at once the *non*-and the *within*", Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy', in Id., *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55–78 (p. 63). The more mundane implication, to borrow Žižek's phrasing, is that "fictions are a semblance which occludes reality, but if we renounce fictions, reality itself dissolves", Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 91. This does not mean that we can simply deny or ignore the real. Instead, the very experience, or trauma, of an epistemological failure signals a form of contact, a mode of knowing: "What at first appeared to be an epistemological obstacle turns out to be the very index of the fact that we have "touched the Truth", we are in the heart of the Thing-in-itself *by the very trait which appeared to bar access to it*", Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 177.

19 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 64, my emphasis.

Titans Go! is never particularly interested in *proving* that reality is merely the effect of intersubjective and endlessly intersecting discourses. It doesn't function in the same manner as, say, *Seinfeld* or *The Simpsons* – that is, popular narrative forms that work primarily to frustrate our ability to assert a clear line between *actual* reality and its subjectification. In *Teen Titans Go!*, the metafictional negation of a "real" anterior to its representation tends to be, itself, negated. In large part, this is due to the extreme absurdity of the show. The Titans may decide that "make-believe becomes real if you believe in it enough", but this trite assertion is sustained as possible only insofar as it is refused. The assertion, in fact, is associated with a sequence in which the Titans meet Aaron Horvath's son – who, since his dad is having a "poop", decides to fight the Titans by transforming himself (literarily) into a giant dinosaur. Likewise, "music" may be able to "transform" you, but the sheer absurdity of the transformations that ensue (including a scene in which Cyborg transforms into the Transformer Optimus Prime) stress the pure metaphoricity, and thus real-life limits, of such transformation. Finally, the Titans' free-styling rewrites of history point, à la postmodernism, to the manner in which historical accounts are invariably the consequence of bias, but *their* particular accounts cannot be likened to the slippery accounts we see in canonical works of historiographic metafiction – works like Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* or Woody Allen's *Zelig*. In these canonically postmodern texts, a reader or viewer is forced to accept the fact that actual and fictional history are impossible to disentangle. In *Teen Titans Go!*, however, even the youngest viewer is unlikely to believe Beast Boy when he claims that the moon is covered in "cheese oceans" and that, after flying to the moon in the "Apollo Creed", some "space dudes" needed to be rescued by an old man named "Sticky Joe" because their "toots were too strong for the moon's gravity". While such a story ostentatiously highlights the fact that historiography can *never* be taken as pure or purely objective, they *also* stress the fact that something (more) true has been irresponsibly obfuscated. In its own childish way, then, the metafiction employed in *Teen Titans Go!* – which is often more of a parody of postmodern metafiction than postmodern metafiction proper – might in fact stand as a subtle sublation of postmodernism, something *un*postmodern – with the "un" functioning here like the "un" in uncanny or undead. It both negates and sustains, ironically, what it precedes. Such a sublation of postmodernism would be, in this sense, neither a simple and nostalgic return to something naively *pre*-postmodern nor a matter of irresponsibly "oscillating" between untenable extremes.

This particular mode of "overcoming" postmodernism – by being, we might say, *more postmodern* than postmodernism – makes possible a certain experience of the real, a certain *affective* rupture. It denotes an *intuition* of the Real – "intuition", that is, in the most Kantian of senses.[20] By holding open a traumatic fissure (or enacting what we might think of as *a perpetually dehiscing wound*) between the possibility of "saying" something *in truth* and the always corruptive nature of what is actually "said", the fissure is paradoxically closed, or sutured. A certain postmodern wound is healed. If, in fact, we are willing to risk saying a bit too much about a show like *Teen Titans Go!*, we might even hazard the suggestion that a certain rupture of the "unsaid" (in a strictly Levinasian sense) is signaled in those moments when the veil of fiction is allowed to *seem* semi-transparent – when "real life" images appear inside the animated frames, when Horvath laments that his work on *Teen Titans Go!* prevents him from spending time with his kids, when we see the tension between creative individuals and an entertainment industry that demands drones forever "work[ing] on *another* episode." These oddly mundane moments remain caught up in the inescapability of the fictional even as they allow us to grasp certain ineffable truths anterior to their framing.

II

A more serious example would be Craig Gillespie's 2017 film, *I, Tonya*. The film recounts the life of American figure skater Tonya Harding – up

20 As Kant states, "in whatever manner and whatever means a mode of knowledge may relate to objects, *intuition* is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed. But intuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us. This again is only possible, to man at least, in so far as the mind is affected in a certain way", Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 65. "Intuition", in other words, denotes the most "immediate relation" possible between a subject and a Thing in itself – which is only ever given via "sensibility". "[I]n no other way – Kant insists –, can an object be given to us", Kant, p. 65. This does not mean, however – as the speculative realists (inclusive of object-orient ontologists) would have us believe – that Kant denies the absolute reality of what is anterior to a subject's senses and, thus, intuition. As Kant insists, "if knowledge is to have objective reality, that is, to relate to an object, and is to acquire meaning and significance in respect to it, the object must be capable of being in some manner given. Otherwise concepts are empty; through them we have indeed thought, but in this thinking we have really known nothing; *we have merely played with representations*", Kant, p. 193, my emphasis.

to (and slightly beyond) her involvement in the Jan 6, 1994 attack on her Olympic rival, Nancy Kerrigan. Kerrigan's right leg was struck with a police baton by Shane Stant, who (along with Derrick Smith) had been hired to "take out" Kerrigan by Shawn Ekhardt, Harding's ostensible bodyguard and a friend of her husband, Jeff Gillooly. The injury prevented Kerrigan from competing at the US Nationals – though she was nevertheless granted a spot on the US Olympic team. She thus went on to compete against Harding in Lillehammer. Kerrigan ultimately earned 2nd place; Harding, 8th – after being granted a re-skate (due to a "problem" with her laces).

This is all well documented. You can look it up.

As an *account* of these events – and the years leading up to them – Gillespie's film is, ostensibly, a Hollywood biopic. As such, it begins with an intertitle that stresses its factual nature. However, this intertitle immediately frustrates the very expectations its appearance (and typical function in *other* biopics) is likely to provoke. The title explains that what follows is "Based on irony free wildly contradictory, totally true interviews with Tonya Harding and Jeff Gillooly". Almost too easily, this somewhat disconcerting claim (which appeals to truth and sincerity while embracing contradiction) allows us to position the film within (what Konstantinou terms) a "*post*ironic" mode. That is, the film's ironic appeal to "irony free" source material should not be overlooked as mere (postmodern, or perverse) irony. The suggestion, even before the often absurd and conflicted narrative gets underway, is that sincere truth claims entail a *form* of irony – that a certain form of irony is the very possibility of grasping the truth of an event, of an *other* (Thing). If we are to traverse – while (or *by*) sustaining – the distance between an event and its representation, between the other and our apprehension of that other, we must risk an ironic point of relation to *and from* that event or other. The typical biopic is, in this sense, anti-ironic – utterly insincere because *it is as sincere as possible*. The true is simply closed off, mortified, no longer permitted to persist in excess of its form. Think of Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), or Morten Tyldum's *The Imitation Game* (2015), etc. In such films the subject, the historical Thing, the other, is lost to – *because it is given to be no different than* – the coherence of its narrative account. *I, Tonya*, however, eschews the often corrosive function of postmodern irony by employing a form of irony that might narrate otherness ethically, that might *sublate* the truth.

First to appear after the intertitle is an image of Margot Robbie *as* Tonya Harding. Facing the camera, she lights a cigarette and prepares to speak. At the bottom of the frame subtitles confirm that this is "Tony Harding, Former Olympic Figure Skater". The footage is offered in a 4:3 aspect

ratio. Combined with the lighting, the immobile camera, and the subtitles, this aspect ratio implies that we are viewing documentary footage. A real interview. Or, at the very least (if we recognize Robbie), its precise replication. But before Harding can speak similarly styled footage of Sebastian Stan as Jeff Gillooly appears. "That's, that's very close", he says (gesturing to a boom mic that has encroached into the frame). Another cut brings us to Allison Janney as an elderly LaVona Harding – presented, also, in interview (or documentary) format. She tells us (or the unseen interviewer) that "Tonya is [her] fifth child from husband number four". As she says this the film cuts away to what appears to be homemade footage of Harding playing in a yard with her father. The footage is presumably from the 70s – the color is muted, there is evidence of scratches, and the edges are blurred; there is no reason to think it is *not* real. However, as the film cuts between this footage, and footage of an elderly LaVona explaining how difficult Harding could be, Janney (as a *young* LaVona) suddenly appears in frame. We are then given interview footage of (and some comments from) "Diane Rawlinson, Tony Harding's coach", a brief excerpt from an ostensibly real "evidence tape" of Shawn Eckhardt, and then interview footage of and introductory comments from "Martin Maddox, Hard Copy reporter 1989-98". After another cut back to the interview with Gillooly – in which he comments on how "cool" it was that his name became a verb (as in "to Gillooly" someone) – we return to Harding, who is finally allowed to speak. She tells us that she is "a real person" and not some "old-timey version of what a woman's supposed to be". Her point is that she was never the type of woman the figure skating community was inclined to accept, but she was the first U.S. woman to land a triple axel. "So – she says –, fuck 'em".

All of this, of course, is prologue to the actual film. A sound bridge carries us from Harding's somewhat smug "fuck 'em" to another intertitle: "Portland, Oregon, 40 years prior". This bridge is a purely nondiegetic song: Cliff Richards' *Devil Woman*. When images return, the aspect ratio has changed to 2.39:1, and the camera tracks fluidly around LaVona and a young Harding. Mother and daughter are standing on an ice rink waiting to meet Rawlinson. As LaVona gets increasingly aggressive and crudely insistent that Rawlinson begin coaching the 6-year-old Tonya, the musical cue is carefully synced with the editing – so that the phrase "She's just a devil woman" is ostentatiously coupled with images of LaVona smoking and discarding ash on the ice. Everything about this scene (like the vast bulk of the film *in widescreen*) is cast as overtly fictional – the nondiegetic and pointedly apropos music, the elegant tracking shots, the precise (yet noticeable) editing, the lighting and/or filtering. This fictionality is dou-

bly accentuated by the documentary footage that precedes it. And yet a striking inversion continues to play out. Since the actors in the overtly fictional diegesis are also the subjects in the documentary footage (even in the apparently homemade footage and the "evidence tapes"), the undeniable fiction of the Hollywoodized film slowly begins to dissolve the apparent verisimilitude of the opening interviews and "real-life" footage. That Harding's interview is initially cut off becomes, consequently, that much more pointed. Her voice, her very identity, has been, as the film stresses throughout, defined by and then largely buried in a complex layering of fiction, other voices, and physical impositions (her mother's, her husband's, the media's, her fans' and detractors', the law's, the U.S. Figure Skating Association's). Viewed (backward) through the lens of the fictional film, the opening accounts (which serve, also, to remind viewers of the two Tonya Harding documentaries that were released just a few years earlier[21]) are given to be both empirically valid *and* epistemologically suspect. They *are*, after all, "wildly contradictory". More pointedly, the odd relationship between the "interviews" and the fictional diegesis (even at the outset) reminds us that interviewed speakers are never more than actors; the instances of their confessions, mere staging. The initial illusion of extreme verisimilitude is, then (if only implicitly), disparaged. The mendacious lie of mimetic closure is placed in antithetical relation to a more ethical negotiation of mimetic distance. And Gillooly's odd first line – "That's very close" – begins to take on a totally different meaning.

As the film moves into Tonya's teen years (and her first romantic encounters with Gillooly), we are encouraged to accept the overt fictionization of Harding's life as a *more* sincere access point to the real and its constitutive affects – more sincere, that is, than the irony-less interviews and media soundbites that Gillespie frequently invokes. This inversion of fact and fiction – this *sublation* of the real *through fiction* – occurs most overtly the first time Gillespie cuts back to the LaVona interview. "To hear her tell it – LaVona complains –, I would operate on her daily without anesthesia. Please. One fuckin' time. I hit her one time with a hairbrush". As she says "hairbrush," we are given a low angle shot of LaVona towering over Harding and beating her savagely with a hairbrush. In such moments, the film does *not* encourage us to take its fictional elements as more real or more objective than its replication of documentary evidence – *but neither* does it simply re-enact a postmodern dismantling of truth claims *per se*. It works, rather, to demonstrate that the real (as an infinite or plastic *Thing*,

21 See *Nancy & Tonya* (2014) and *The Price of Gold* (2015).

an always *wholly other*) must slip the grasp that holds it – *if* it is to be held *at all* (*in* form). This is what I mean – or what Hegel means – by sublation. Paired with Levinas's use of "infinity" to mean what is *not* and what is *within* the finite, the Hegelian notion of sublation is, I want to suggest, a useful way of understanding how a work of art might grasp (in an always finite and contingent form) an ineffable yet affecting truth *by* sustaining the *truth* of its ineffability, its perpetual (and always strange) coming, its endlessly plastic "capacity to" (as Catherine Malabou puts it) "receive form … and to produce form"[22] – but also to explode that form, or to explode *from it*.

Frequent scenes of Harding being beaten are thus offered as true – but *only* in their effective contingency. That Harding was beaten repeatedly – by her mother and, then, by her husband – is not to be taken as a matter of discursive construction. The film is clear on this: Harding's *experience* of abuse (as well as her reciprocal acts of violence) cannot be cast aside as discursive invention, or as a matter of perspective. And yet the specifics of these beatings, the real *affects* of violence, must be apprehended ironically, or negotiated across a mimetic distance. Otherwise their devasting affects *as events* will be ossified, drained to nothing. Mortified. The film is, for this very reason, careful to stress its fictionalized nature even as it effects the sense that its mimetic form can provide a sincere approach to, or the chance to *affectively glean*, the truth of Harding's life and the events that have come to define it.

For instance: the numerous musical cues repeatedly stress that the moments we are seeing are, on some level, performances of a pregiven and popular American script. Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit in the Sky* plays over a scene in which a prepubescent Tonya begs her father not to leave – clearly (and falsely) associating him with a utopian escape from her painful life and abusive mother. As his car pulls away, a deep focus shot shows us LaVona on the porch (in the background) watching Tonya (in the foreground) tearfully watching her father leave forever. The song stresses the manner in which the scene is contingently focalized through Harding's romanticised (and song-inflected) memory, just as the deep focus suggests that LaVona saw something else altogether – like the fact that Harding has naively idolized a father whose willingness to abandon her is hardly any better than LaVona's cruelty. When Harding and Gil-

22 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 9.

looly first kiss, Dire Straits' overtly metafictional *Romeo and Juliet* plays, and then continues over a montage that establishes the defining pattern of their relationship: passionate sex, Gillooly's violence (along with Harding's willingness and ability to return that violence), and imprudent moments of reconciliation. Along with the film's numerous other musical cues, these songs place Harding's life within a specific cultural milieu – defined by hard-rock depictions of passionate (and often violent) love affairs and hard won, underdog, victories. Indeed, we later see Harding train like (as Harding herself explains by breaking of the fourth wall) "Rocky trained when he had to fight the Russian". And, as Heart's *Barracuda* plays over a montage of Harding carrying giant bags of dog food and water jugs and flipping logs in a forest, the camera repeatedly locates Rawlinson, who then also breaks the fourth wall to note, "She actually did this", "And this", "And this".

Such breaks are employed throughout. But, in most cases, they differ quite dramatically (in form and function) from the breaks we get in, say, Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) or John Hugh's *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). The first occurs during the dating montage. As Harding and Gillooly kiss for the first time, Harding's extradiegetic voice (carried over from her interview) explains that "He was really sweet in the beginning". The next cut brings us to a fight in a truck, and Gillooly striking Harding's face. As, *in* the truck, Harding rubs her cheek, her voiceover resumes: "But then…". In the slight pause after "then", the *fictional* Harding turns to the camera and continues: "… He started hitting me a few months in". She then punches Gillooly in the face. From here on, the technique is frequently redeployed to complicate the narrative. At another point, Harding's voiceover transitions into a fourth-wall break when, as her face is pressed into a broken mirror, she says "…he beat the living shit out of me". This break is followed by a cut back to Harding (in interview), who explains (with a chuckle) that she "thought it was [her] fault". She goes on to contemplate the absurdity of her story: "Nancy gets hit one time… and the world shits. For me its an all-the-time occurrence". Placed between the word "time" and the word "and" is a non-diegetic insert: precisely replicated footage of Nancy Kerrigan screaming (famously) "Why! Why!". Significantly, *this* footage is *not* presented in a 4:3 aspect ratio; instead, the 2.39:1 ratio is sustained, imbuing the scene's ostensible authenticity with a latent sense of artifice. The next cut brings us back to the Gillooly interview. "I never hit her – he insists –, That's not me… Um, she hit me, though". The next scene shows Harding chasing Gillooly out of a room while cocking a shotgun. Gillooly (in voiceover) explains that "she fired a gun at me too." After fir-

ing, Harding turns to the camera to say "This is bullshit. I never did this". And cocks the gun again.

If, though, the possibility of a non-(or extra)diegetic space is negated in these moments (in which a documentary reality is pulled into and undermined by an overtly fictional diegesis), this negation is itself negated – to follow, again, a Hegelian formulation – by the suggestion, established throughout, that the apparent transparency of this documentary reality is simply the fiction that precedes the film. Not surprisingly, then, the interviews become more and more entangled in the filmic diegesis. For instance, after a sudden midsentence cut away from Martin Maddox (in interview) – who is explaining how disturbing it was that the classless Harding completed the triple axel to become America's premier figure skater – we see Harding (in interview) at the precise moment we begin to hear her: "Could I – she asks the camera –, just interrupt with a quick word about Nancy Kerrigan. It'll just take a sec". This overt reference to the film itself (inclusive, now, of Maddox's interview) is then mirrored, later, by Gillooly and then, most strikingly, by LaVona, who suddenly returns (in interview) to chastise the entire film: "Well my storyline is disappearing right now. What… the… fuck". At this point, the interviews and voiceovers could hardily even be called *extra*diegetic.

But: These overtly metafictional moments do not corrode, as they would in a particularly bombastic postmodern text, the possibility of an ethical and sincere account of the events and the others in question; instead, the film's careful and progressive dissolution of an ontological line most viewers are likely to assume – viewers who might go online to look up "real" footage or "real" facts – ultimately re*opens* the possibility of a radically non-diegetic space, an ineffable *chora* that is affectively approached via the film's necessarily fictional depictions of violence, abuse, victory, and loss. This is *not* a matter of simply repudiating the possibility of mimetic efficacy. The film opens up an ethically ironic distance between itself and the events (or others) it narrates while (or *by*) embracing a sincere commitment to fidelity. Narrative distance is wrenched opened so that it might be traversed *in all sincerity*. The costuming, hairstyles, sets and makeup are almost invariably near perfect. This almost uncanny material verisimilitude becomes, for most viewers, overt when we finally get to (what the characters call) "the incident" and, in turn, Harding's final Olympic skate. For the first time, too, real footage is inserted – of, specifically, American journalists like Connie Cheng. When, then, Harding is shown approaching the panel of judges in tears – so as to explain (famously) that there is, inexplicably, a problem with her laces – the film seems as close to Socrates's

terrible mimetic lie as its ever going to get. And yet we are not encouraged to take this moment (simply) as an accurate rendition of a historical and traumatically affective event, of a particular individual's *sublime* crisis; we have been positioned instead – by everything that precedes this scene – to reconsider the original mediation of the event as a form of tragic mortification, the moment when Harding's *in*finite otherness was fixed forever in the *lie* of a transparent representation. We are encouraged to endure the distance between this account and the real it struggles to hold in form – *as best it can*. As Harding tells us, the experience of these final events – the media circus that obsessively tracked and framed them, the responses *to those frames* of fans and detractors, friends and strangers – felt "like being abused all over; only this time it was by you. All of you. You're all my attackers too". Coming, as it does, toward the end of the film, this accusation implies an overarching aesthetic mandate – to endure, in Derrida's phrasing, our profound "obligation to protect the other's otherness",[23] to protect a distance we must perpetually hope *to overcome*.

My term for this type of metafiction is "historioplastic" – a maybe too playful play on Linda Hutcheon's already playful "historiographic metafiction". My goal is to suggest that recent works of metafiction reengage a type of Hegelian dialectics so as to counter today's perilous intensification of postmodernism (its entanglement in a post-truth crisis, its cooption by the political right, its misapplication by online pseudo-intellectuals, etc.). As Žižek has shown repeatedly, Hegel's is not a closed system – even if it can allow us to escape a number of "'post-modernist' traps".[24] Hegel's is a system that compels us to "tarry[] with the negative",[25] to perpetually endure the "strenuous effort of the Notion"[26] – the notion, that is, of a divine or *in*finite reality (what Hegel calls "spirit"). What allows us in Hegel to apprehend this *in*finite Real is, paradoxically, the willingness to endure the failure to do so. It is the experience of such a failure that, finally, signals the ethical sustainment of what cannot – not with justice, at least – be contained in the finite, in the coherence of a momentary and contingent form of representation. The dialectical movement of spirit does not end, for Hegel, in closure; it is ironically *sublated* the moment its paradoxically *in*finite end is signaled and sustained in a coherent expression or thought

23 Jacques Derrida, 'Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject', in Elisabeth Weber (ed.), *Points… Interviews, 1974-1994* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 255–87 (p. 276).
24 Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, p. 7.
25 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p. 19.
26 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, p. 35.

(like Christ's divinity in, what Hegel calls, "romantic" art). The "strenuous effort of the Notion" entails, then, *grasping*, but never ossifying, the infinite plasticity of the Real – "plasticity" being (as Malabou demonstrates)[27] the central concept that haunts Hegel's entire project. In no way is this a matter of pretending, sustaining unjustifiable beliefs, or engaging in impulsive "metamodern" oscillations (between irony and sincerity) – *even if* (or precisely *because*) such oscillations have come to define our present, post-postmodern, society (especially in politics and the so-called "fake media"). A film like *I, Tonya* shifts the emphasis from symbolic artifice to the *in*finite Real that *must* perpetually escape its symbolization. As a form of irony, it refuses the violence of mimesis – while, at the same time, striving (again) to touch, as affectionately as possible, the truth.

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27 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity. Temporality and Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 2005).

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LE VIEILLISSEMENT DE L'ESTHÉTIQUE POSTMODERNE OU L'HÉRITAGE POSTMODERNE CHEZ SOPHIE CALLE ET PATRICK DEVILLE

En guise d'introduction

Si les psychologues soutiennent que presque tous les quadragénaires sont touchés par la crise de la quarantaine, on peut bel et bien se demander si c'est aussi le cas du postmodernisme. En effet, 40 ans après la publication de *La Condition postmoderne* et plus de 20 ans après la mort de son auteur, Jean-François Lyotard (décédé en 1998), les temps forts de l'esthétique postmoderne sont sans aucun doute révolus. Si la fin de l'esthétique postmoderne est incontestable aujourd'hui, il ne faut pas ignorer que c'est le résultat d'un lent processus d'épuisement qui a commencé à se manifester il y a déjà vingt ans, c'est-à-dire autour de l'avènement du nouveau millénaire.[1]

Mais, le postmodernisme, est-il vraiment terminé complètement ? Et si oui, quel nom doit-on alors donner à la contemporanéité ? À côté du terme évident de post-postmodernisme, les propositions ne manquent pas : Marc Augé parle de "surmodernité",[2] Gilles Lipovetsky opte pour le terme "hypermodernité",[3] Zygmut Bauman avance la théorie d'une "modernité liquide",[4] Emmanuel Bouju parle d'"épimodernisme",[5] Mikhail

1 Parmi les milliers d'études sur le postmodernisme et la postmodernité, nous nous limitons à faire référence à une seule publication récente qui traite du postmodernisme tout en reflétant sur les modalités de la sortie du postmodernisme : Alexandre Prstojevic (dir.), *Vies et morts de la postmodernité* (Bern et al. : Peter Lang, 2018).

2 Marc Augé, *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris : Seuil, 1992).

3 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Des temps hypermodernes* (Paris : Grasset, 2004).

4 Zygmut Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Politiy Press, 2000).

5 Emmanuel Bouju, 'Épimodernisme. Une hypothèse en six temps', dans *Fragments d'un discours théoriques. Nouveaux éléments de lexique littéraire*, E. Bouju (dir.) (Nantes : Éditions Nouvelles Cécile Defaut, 2015).

Epstein de son côté suggère le terme de "trans-postmodernisme",[6] pendant que Timotheus Vermeulen et Robin van den Akker proposent le terme "métamodernisme"[7]– juste pour nommer quelques approches terminologiques.

Dans ce qui suit, nous n'oserons pourtant aucune approche théorique sur la phase actuelle ni oserons-nous proposer une nouvelle terminologie. Nous nous limiterons plutôt à esquisser l'évolution esthétique de deux auteurs français étiquetés dans les années 80 comme auteurs "typiquement postmodernes" : à savoir Sophie Calle et Patrick Deville.

Le but de notre contribution sera donc de démontrer les relations entre l'héritage de l'esthétique postmoderne et ses dérives esthétiques sous le signe du vieillissement double, celui du projet postmoderne d'un côté et de celui des auteurs de l'autre. Nous établirons notre analyse exemplaire sur les six rééditions du livre phototextuel *Des histoires vraies* de Sophie Calle et sur les treize romans de Patrick Deville, à savoir : les cinq romans publiés chez Minuit, *Cordon-bleu* (1987), *Longue vue* (1988), *Le feu d'artifice* (1992), *La femme parfaite* (1995), *Ces deux-là* (2000) et les huit romans publiés chez Seuil, *Pura Vida* (2004), *La tentation des armes à feu* (2006), *Equatoria* (2009), *Kampuchéa* (2011), *Peste & Choléra* (2012), *Viva* (2014), *Taba-Taba* (2017) et *Amazonia* (2019).

La "condition postmoderne" en littérature

Si c'est par la suite des textes théoriques comme *La condition postmoderne* de Jean-François Lyotard, ou tout simplement par la puissance innovatrice d'une nouvelle génération de jeunes écrivains et artistes qui entre dans la scène culturelle française, le début des années 80 est marqué par un renouveau esthétique qu'on a vite estampillé de "postmoderne".

En ce qui concerne les œuvres narratives, ce renouveau est un vrai tournant et est lié à une émancipation esthétique du dictat du nouveau roman ; c'est-à-dire que c'est la libération d'une esthétique qui se voulait "objective" tout en refusant la poétique du roman réaliste et psychologique. La rupture avec les devises du nouveau roman mène à une fragmentation sans

6 Mikhail N. Epstein, 'On the Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity', dans Mikhail N. Epstein / Alexander A. Genis / Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover, *Russian Postmodernism. New Perspectives Post-Soviet Culture* (New York/Oxford, Berghan, 2015), pp. 542-554.

7 Timotheus Vermeulen / Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2.1 (2010), 7-25.

précédent du champ littéraire. L'une des similitudes entre les nombreux styles et écritures qui apparaissent est un certain retour à la narration, qui pourtant n'est jamais une simple reprise des modèles traditionnels. Certes, les récits de filiation qui d'ailleurs tendent toujours vers l'autofiction et la biofiction aussi bien que les romans appelés "minimalistes" ou bien "impassibles" des auteurs comme Jean Echenoz, Jean-Philippe Toussaint et Patrick Deville racontent des histoires, mais ils le font en troublant toute lecture facile, soit sur le plan de l'histoire par l'embrouillage du réel avec la fiction, soit sur le plan du discours par des jeux stylistiques et intermédiaux.

En effet, les œuvres des années 80 et 90 de l'écrivaine-photographe Sophie Calle et de l'écrivain Patrick Deville sont des exemples emblématiques d'une telle esthétique postmoderne qui se caractérise par un nombre d'attributs majeurs tels que la brièveté, la fragmentation des textes, le plaisir du jeu avec la langue, la phrase et la cadence, l'attrait pour les enjeux intertextuels et intermédiaux de même qu'une prédilection pour des lieux "postmodernes" (c'est-à-dire les espaces transitionnels et les non-lieux dans le sens de Marc Augé). En même temps, les phénomènes d'hyperréalité, de l'inauthenticité et du simulacre y jouent un rôle prédominant.

La photoautobiofiction Des histoires vraies *de Sophie Calle : Tempus vincit omnia ou le vieillissement d'un projet postmoderne*

Sophie Calle est l'une des artistes au double talent qui présente à la fois des œuvres photographiques et des œuvres phototextuelles.[8] En effet, Calle

8 Pour une introduction à l'œuvre de Sophie Calle voir p.ex. Jean Arrouye, *'Des Histoires vraies + dix* de Sophie Calle. Photographie et autobiographie', dans *Traces photographiques, traces autobiographiques*, éd. par Danièle Méaux, Jean-Bernard Vray (Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004), pp. 65-71 ; Camille Camart, 'Les stratégies éditoriales de Sophie Calle : livres de photographies, photo-roman, livres d'artiste', dans *Littérature et Photographie*, éd. par Jean-Pierre Montier, Liliane Louvel, Danièle Méaux, Philippe Ortel (Rennes :PU de Rennes, 2008), pp. 373-389 ; Johnnie Gratton, 'Sophie Calle's ‚Des histoires vraies' : Irony and beyond', dans *Phototextualities : Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, éd. par Alex Hughues, Andrea Noble (Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2003) pp. 182-186 ; Jean-Paul Guichard, 'Poker menteur : de la photographie comme preuve de l'existence de Sophie Calle', dans *Traces photographiques, traces autobiographiques*, éd. par Danièle Méaux, Jean-Bernard Vray (Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004), pp. 73-81.

est, avant tout, connue par ses œuvres provocatrices "où s'entremêlent le public et le privé, l'infraordinaire et l'extraordinaire, l'art et la vie, le subjectif et l'objectif, l'auteur et l'acteur, soi-même et l'autre".[9] Les scandales, voire des procès-verbaux, sont provoqués du fait que dans ses œuvres les frontières entre la vérité de la fiction et la fiction de la vérité sont toujours poreuses, transgressives.[10]

Des histoires vraies est un phototexte qui exploite toutes les ambiguïtés de l'autofiction ; mais aussi de la photoautobiographie[11] car, même si la plus grande partie des photos représente des objets ou des lieux,[12] Calle y inclut aussi des autoportraits.[13] En effet, il n'y a ni des références explicites à la présence matérielle des photos ni des réflexions théoriques sur la photo en tant que telle. La relation entre les photos et les brefs textes au langage toujours précis et au style sobre de compte-rendu doit donc être établie par le lecteur.[14]

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9 Johnnie Gratton, 'Sophie Calle : écriture blanche, photographie, photo-textualité', Écritures blanches, éd. par Dominique Rabaté et Dominique Viart (Saint-Étienne :Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2009), pp. 155-167 (159).

10 Cf. Stefanie Muhr, '"The truest story of my life". Sophie Calle und die Wahrheit der Fiktion', dans *Wahrheit und Wahrhaftigkeit in der Kunst von der Neuzeit bis heute*, éd. par Stefanie Muhr / Wiebke Windorf (Berlin, Reimer, 2010), pp. 145-157.

11 Pour le terme "photoautobiographie" voir p.ex. Philippe Antoine, 'Voyages photobiographiques', dans *Traces photographiques, traces autobiographiques*, éd.par Danièle Méaux et Jean-Bernard Vray (Saint-Étienne : Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004), pp. 249-259 ; Andrée Chauvin-Vileno, 'Pratiques photautobiographiques chez Perec et Roubaud', dans *Images du mythe, images du soi. Mélanges offerts à Marie Miguet-Ollagnier*, éd. par Bertrand Degott et Pierre Nobel (Besançon : PU Franc-Comtoises, 2002), pp. 137-165 ; Agnès Fayet, 'La (phauto)biographie ou la rencontre du sorcier et du démiurge dans *Le Labyrinthe du monde*', dans *Traces photographiques, traces autobiographiques*, éd. par Danièle Méaux et Jean-Bernard Vray (Saint-Étienne : Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004), pp. 229-238.

12 Il est intéressant de noter que Calle recourt aussi à l'usage de la photo nature morte qui à travers la représentation d'un vêtement vide souligne l'absence de quelqu'un ou de quelque chose, comme dans le cas de "La robe de mariée" qui pourrait être interprété comme une prolepse qui annonce tous ses mariages de rêve manqués et le divorce du Greg Shepard.

13 Il n'est pourtant pas toujours sûr s'il s'agit vraiment des photos d'elle-même ou des parties de son propre corps. Les chapitres qui incluent des autoportraits (au moins partielles) sont "Le nez", "le strip-tease", "Le talon aiguille", "Le porc", "Le cou", "Les seins miraculeux", "Le faux mariage", "Le divorce", "L'autre", "Noces de rêve", "La chambre avec vue", "Attendez-moi" et "Matin".

14 Cf. Catherine Karen Roy, 'Phototextuality in Sophie Calle's *Des histoires vraies*', dans *Life and Narrative. The Risks and Responsabilities of Storying Experience*,

Des histoires vraies est une expérience expérimentale[15] dans le sens où il s'agit d'un projet *work in progress* : depuis la première édition – parue en 1994 – Calle l'a régulièrement réédité et enrichi, de façon que l'édition la plus récente – la sixième, parue en 2018 – contient 56 microfictions phototextuelles à double page, pendant que la première édition ne contenait que 25 phototextes.

Le plus souvent la photo est à la page gauche et le texte à la page droite ; ailleurs la photo est en double page et occupe la partie supérieure pendant que le texte, également en page double, la partie inférieure.[16] Chaque double page livre un fragment de vie (en instantané), tantôt léger et drôle, tantôt sérieux, dramatique ou même cruel.

Au mode de confession, la narratrice autodiégétique se dévoile à travers des rôles (le plus souvent) passifs de femme – enfant, jeune fille, modèle, danseuse strip-tease, amante, épouse – et se décrit tour à tour comme objet de désir, d'obsession, de frustration ou d'agression. Il faut souligner pourtant que ces microfictions phototextuelles présentent des évènements ou expériences d'une vie bien réelle mais fictionnalisée, qui n'est pas au cent pour cent celle de Sophie Calle en tant que de l'auteure du livre. La "vérité" des histoires, annoncée par le titre, est donc une "vérité romanesque" pour ainsi dire. Dès là, il ne faut pas non plus croire que la photo soit plus sûre que le texte, ni qu'elle fonctionne comme épreuve authentique et avérée d'une vraie expérience autobiographique. Quoi illustre quoi ? pourrait-on se demander : est-ce une photo qui illustre une histoire prétendument vraie ou est-ce un texte qui illustre une photo prétendument spontanée et non-arrangée ? Dans un monde de simulacres, chez Calle tout reste complètement

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éd. par. Brian Schiff, A. Elizabeth McKim et Sylvie Patron (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), pp. 179-194 (181). Il n'y a pas vraiment des *ekphrasis* photographiques. Le seul exemple qui pourrait être lu comme *ekphrasis* photographique est de statut ambigu. Le texte du chapitre "La vue de ma vie" semble décrire la photo qui accompagne le texte mais puisque la narratrice souligne qu'il ne s'agit que d'une photographie mentale et imaginée : "Ce pré, cadré par la fenêtre, est l'image que mon regard aura le plus photographiée. La vue de ma vie." (Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies* (Arles : Actes Sud, [5]2016), p. 93.

15 Cf. Johnnie Gratton, 'Sophie Calle's *Des histoires vraies* : Irony and beyond', dans *Phototextualities : Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, éd. par Alex Hughues et Andrea Noble (Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2003), pp. 182-186 (183).

16 Jean Arrouye, p. 66, constate que ce fait pourrait faire penser que la photo soit le média dominant et le texte une forme de légende. L'analyse du livre démontre pourtant que cela n'est qu'une stratégie de dépister le lecteur et ses attentes. Comme nous le montrons en bas la relation entre texte et photo est beaucoup plus complexe et reste ambiguë.

incertain. Car, même s'il semble incontesté que "c'est la littérature qui donne sens à la photographie",[17] rien n'atteste que les photos soient celles des évènements réels plutôt que des images (re)constituées par la suite ou bien arrangées artificiellement selon une histoire complètement imaginée.

Regardons par exemple la photo du récit "Le faux mariage"[18] : l'image semble la vraie trace photographique d'un évènement familial : le mariage de Calle avec Shepard (qui pourtant avait eu lieu sans cérémonie à Las Vegas). En effet, le chapitre prend explicitement pour sujet le jeu permanent avec le faux-semblant et la (dis-)simulation de la réalité. Sans l'articuler explicitement, Calle y rappelle l'ambiguïté interprétative de la photographie : en nous montrant une photo de mariage – usage bien rituel et bourgeois du média –, la narratrice avoue qu'il s'agit d'une cérémonie mise en scène – fait que nous n'aurions jamais deviné sans cette explication : "[…] je décidai de convier famille et amis, le samedi 20 juin 1992, pour une photographie de mariage sur les marches d'une église de quartier à Malakoff. […] Je couronnais d'un faux mariage l'histoire la plus vraie de ma vie."[19]

Cette dernière phrase est bien révélatrice : l'histoire la plus vraie de la vie de la narratrice est dans le sens direct le mariage atypique avec Greg Shepard, au sens indirect c'est son jeu perpétuel de rôles (dis-)simulés.

Malgré leur qualité sobre, quasi-documentaire, les photos comme les textes de Calle oscillent donc toujours entre le vrai, l'imagination et le mensonge, de sorte que faction et fiction soient indissociables et forment une "autre" réalité qui est fortement romanesque comme les nombreuses identités du je mis en scène.

Et pourtant, le réel autobiographique semble gagner de plus en plus d'importance ces dernières années. Pendant que la plupart des microfictions des premières versions des *Histoires vraies* se concentre sur des histoires (amoureuses et sexuelles) hasardeuses et fortement farfelues des avatars simulés de Calle,[20] un premier changement de focus se traduit par le fait que la narratrice-autrice barre la dédicace de la première édition et en rajoute une nouvelle : au lieu de se référer à sa vie "romanesque", *à partir de l'édition de 2002* elle dédie le livre à son père, Bob Calle.[21]

17 Jérôme Thélot, *Les inventions littéraires de la photographie* (Paris, PUF, 2003), p. 1.

18 Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies*, p. 68-69. Pour une lecture photo-théorétique du récit voir Catherine Karen Roy, p. 187-189.

19 Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies*, p. 68-69.

20 En effet, le premier pan des histoires est dédié à la relation avec Greg Shepard.

21 Cf. 'définitivement l'homme providentiel de ma vie', Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies,* p. 5.

Il semble que, dans les éditions suivantes, le jeu ludique d'une multitude d'identités simulées s'est épuisé d'une certaine manière et que le je mis en scène se rapproche de plus en plus de la vraie Sophie Calle, donc d'une femme dans la soixantaine avancée. Par conséquence, les phototextes nouvellement rajoutés semblent d'un statut beaucoup plus réaliste, beaucoup plus autobiographique – même s'ils restent, bien évidemment, des photoautobiofictions, c'est-à-dire des compositions artistiques de statut bien fictionnel.

En effet, les nouveaux phototextes sont tous dominés par l'expérience cruciale de la temporalité et de la finitude existentielle.[22] Le chapitre "Monique", par exemple, premièrement ajouté dans l'édition de 2013, contient trois phototextes sur la mère défunte de la narratrice dont le micro-récit "Faire-part" est sans aucun doute le plus émouvant : s'inscrivant dans la tradition élégiaque des "derniers", en tant que documentation[23] *mélancolique de la mort*, le texte rend hommage à la mère qui reste très présente pour la narratrice.[24] En effet, la question de la véracité de la photo ne s'y pose pas vraiment, la photo semble tout simplement de fonction illustrative, son statut de *stock photo* ne trouble donc pas le lecteur.

Dans l'édition de 2016, Calle insère un autre phototexte dans le chapitre "Monique" qui s'appelle "Ma mère est morte" et qui montre très bien la mélancolie véridique d'un sujet vieillissant qui se reflète sur sa propre mort :

> *À la date du 27 décembre 1986, ma mère avait écrit dans son journal intime : "Aujourd'hui ma mère est morte."*
>
> Le 15 mars 2006, j'écris à mon tour : "Aujourd'hui ma mère est morte."
> Personne ne le dira pour moi.
> Terminé.[25]

22 On n'y trouve plus rien de ludique, plus rien des jeux identitaires. Tout au contraire, tout y semble vrai, même les photos semblent des documents réels des moments racontés. Écrit sobrement, le microrécit "Cki", par exemple, est bouleversant par sa simplicité directe et véridique.

23 En plus, Calle a documentarisé la mort de sa mère avec le court métrage *Pas pu saisir la mort* (qui fut montré en 2007 au Pavillon international den la Biennale à Venise) et avec l'exhibition *Rachel, Monique* (2010) au Palais de Tokyo à Paris.

24 Dans le récit suivant intitulé La girafe elle décrit : "Quand ma mère est morte, j'ai acheté une girafe naturalisée. Je lui ai donné son prénom, et je l'ai installée dans mon atelier. Monique me regarde de haut, avec ironie et tristesse." (Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies,* p. 101) Le fait stupéfiant de matérialiser la mémoire de sa mère en girafe semble expliqué implicitement par la dernière photo du livre qui apparait sans texte : la photo montre Calle enfant avec une girafe en peluche – un cadeau de sa mère ?

25 Sophie Calle, *Des histoires vraies*, p. 105.

L'édition de 2018 est élargie par deux micro récits sur la mort de son chat Souris et le chapitre intitulé Bob comme son défunt père est élargi par trois phototextes dont un parle de l'"Infarctus silencieux" duquel Calle a effectivement souffert quand son père est tombé malade.

Il semble que l'expérience de la mort des bien-aimés aussi que l'expérience de vieillir soi-même déclenchent des réflexions beaucoup plus sobres, voire existentielles qui font basculer l'idole postmoderne du ludique et du simulacre en faveur de la réhabilitation d'un moi-narrateur – en effet toujours précaire, instable et hésitant mais tenace – qui cherche à fixer le flux du temps en écrivant l'histoire du présent, en gardant la trace de la vie au médium scriptovisuel.

Même si Calle continue son projet d'écriture au début bien postmoderne, le temps s'avère comme vainqueur de tout : l'expérience de la finitude de la vie domine de plus en plus le contenu des histoires et défait peu à peu l'esthétique postmoderne sans pourtant la réfuter. L'esthétique de Calle est donc post-postmoderne dans le sens "temporel" : c'est-à-dire que son esthétique est toujours très marquée par le postmodernisme sans pourtant s'y inscrire complètement.

Du roman minimaliste et postmoderne au roman docufictionnel et (auto) bio(géo)graphique : l'œuvre de Patrick Deville

Contrairement au travail de Calle, Deville semble avoir rompu avec l'esthétique postmoderne au tournant du XXI[e] siècle. Ce tournant, également marqué par le passage des éditions de Minuit aux éditions du Seuil avec *Pura Vida* publié en 2004, est associé à un changement de la manière d'écrire par l'adoption d'une sorte de maximalisme : pendant que ses romans minimalistes comptent environ une centaine pages, les romans du Seuil en comptent trois cents ou même plus.

Deville lui-même soutient écrire des "romans d'aventure sans fiction"[26] et il précise : "Il ne s'agit pas de biographies même si toutes les dates et les faits sont vérifiables".[27] Il veut entretenir un fort "contact vrai avec le réel

26 Amélie Thomas, 'Patrick Deville travaille sur un nouveau roman', *Le Courrier du pays de Retz*, 25/03/2014, http://www.lecourrierdupaysderetz.fr/2013/12/22/patrick-deville-travaille-sur-un-nouveau-roman/, consulté le 27janvier 2020.

27 Amélie Thomas, '*Viva*, le nouveau roman foisonnant de Patrick Deville', *Le Courrier du pays de Retz*, 11/10/2014, http://www.lecourrierdupaysderetz.fr/2014/10/11/viva-le-nouveau-roman-foisonnant-de-patrick-deville/, consulté 27 janvier 2020.

de ses expériences vécues sur le terrain."[28] Et en effet, un certain nombre de points communs relient ses cinq derniers romans : ils rassemblent des récits de vie placés sous l'égide des *Vies des hommes illustres* de Plutarque et résument ou commentent des événements qui ont eu lieu de 1860 jusqu'à nos jours, tout en entremêlant des lieux (villes, régions, pays…), des entreprises (découvertes scientifiques, révolutions politiques, renouveaux artistiques…) et des personnages (aventuriers, explorateurs, hommes politiques, artistes...) qui, eux-mêmes, acteurs ou témoins, s'entrecroisent de livre en livre. Or, ce nouveau réalisme devillien qui relie faction et fiction se manifeste dans un métissage paradoxal des genres textuels et narratifs les plus divers comme le carnet de voyages, le reportage, l'historiographie, l'(auto-)biographie, l'(auto-)biofiction, le roman d'aventure, le roman histori(ographi)que, le roman de voyage. En plus, Deville y ajoute un jeu intertextuel hallucinant de citations et d'allusions littéraires.

S'il est incontestable qu'il préfère se tourner vers le monde extérieur pour réécrire l'Histoire officielle d'une manière semi-documentaire et en même temps semi-romanesque, il ne faut pas ignorer sa constance esthétique.[29] Il s'agit donc d'un tournant refocalisant et pas d'une rupture comme celui du *Miroir qui revient* (1986) de Robbe-Grillet à l'époque.

Néanmoins, le statut du narrateur à la première personne du singulier est un point central : en effet, même les narrateurs des romans minimalistes montrent de nombreuses ressemblances biographiques avec Deville lui-même. Avec ces mises en abyme, Deville place le "lecteur au cœur d'un jeu avec de vrais et de faux *Je*."[30] Dès que le je narrateur ne raconte plus seulement de pures fictions, mais retrace des biographies de personnes historiques, il met aussi en scène ses voyages, ses recherches d'archive et son projet d'écriture. Bref, l'expérience personnelle et les variations digressives autour des destins des personnages historiques étant imbriquées, il s'autoportraitise. Le statut ontologique du je devient alors encore plus précaire. Si le narrateur dans *Pura vida* constate : "J'étais arrivé en Amérique centrale, il y a quelques années, avec le projet d'y écrire la vie et mort de

28 Isabelle Bernard, *Patrick Deville. "Une petite sphère de vertige"* : *Parcours d'une œuvre contemporaine* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016), p. 169.

29 Marc Dambre le souligne dans un débat dur le nouveau style de Deville dans : 'Table ronde : Patrick Deville et ses contemporains en écriture', dans *Deville & Cie. Rencontres de Chaminadour*, éd. par Collectif (Paris : Seuil, 2016), p. 233–260 (260).

30 Isabelle Bernard, p. 196.

William Walker"[31], il faut se demander si c'est le je autobiographique de Deville ou si c'est le je d'une autofiction. Par cet amalgame d'éléments autobiographiques et biographiques avec des éléments fictifs, les "aventures littéraires" du je sont intégrées au projet "polybiographique"[32] au même titre que les aventures de tous les autres individus cités. Enfin, le je apparaît comme un produit de l'Histoire, de son histoire intime et personnelle et de l'histoire du roman qui le construit et donne sens à son existence.[33]

Avec *Taba-Taba* (2017) apparaît pourtant un roman clairement autobiographique. Deville y écrit pour la première fois sans masque sur sa propre enfance et sur sa famille. Il constate : "[…] c'est réellement le livre que je devais écrire. Tout ce qu'il y a eu avant, c'était pour arriver à celui-ci. J'ai décidé de devenir écrivain vers 7 ou 8 ans pour écrire ce livre-là. Donc, c'est une préparation extrêmement longue, cinquante ans." [34]

L'esthétique postmoderne, le roman minimaliste comme faux chemin pour finalement "trouver" le bon chemin d'une esthétique réaliste et autobiographique ? Certainement pas, parce qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une autobiographie au sens classique. Bien que Deville y parle beaucoup plus de lui-même et de ses souvenirs que dans les romans précédents, le narrateur n'est pas purement autodiégétique et ne perd pas son intention de troubler la lecture, en entremêlant ses souvenirs personnels avec des bribes de l'histoire d'autres personnages historiques ou pas et en les inscrivant dans l'histoire socioculturelle de la France. D'une certaine manière, *Taba-Taba* est bien un hommage à ses parents et à sa famille, mais en même temps c'est une auto-confrontation avec la mort – dans cas de sa tante Simone dont il hérite l'archive familiale – et son propre vieillissement, car *Taba-Taba* voit le jour où l'âge avancé – 60 ans – le force de subir une ré-opération de sa lésion innée de la hanche.

Si dans *Amazonia* (2019) le focus autobiographique est relégué de nouveau au second plan par rapport à l'accent mis sur les histoires d'autres

31 Patrick Deville, *Pura vida. Vie & mort de William Walker* (Paris : Seuil, 2004), p. 19.

32 Marc Dambre, 'Ces deux-là… et la polybiographie', dans *Deville et Cie Rencontres de Chaminadour*, pp. 59-83.

33 Cf. Isabelle Bernard, p. 197–198.

34 Patrick Deville, Isabelle Bernard-Rabadi et Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf : 'Entretien avec Patrick Deville', *Romanische Studien*, 27.07.2017, http://blog.romanischestudien.de/entretien-avec-patrick-deville/, consulté le 27 janvier 2020. Cf. aussi la remarque suivante bien révélatrice dans *Taba-Taba* : "Depuis trente-cinq ans que je tournais en orbite dans ce réseau, je comptais sur son soutien pour relever ici les petites traces françaises.", Patrick Deville, *Taba-Taba* (Paris : Seuil, 2017), p. 271.

personnages, Deville y continue à aborder la relation père-fils – aussi au niveau autobiographique : c'est avec Pierre, son fils de vingt-neuf ans qu'il voyage dans le territoire de l'Amazonie. La réflexion sur le passage de la propre vie reste donc un sujet crucial surtout sur le plan autobiographique. Deville réussit à écrire de manière autobiographique sans écrire d'autobiographie et à fictionnaliser la factualité sans perdre tous les traits de son esthétique postmoderne de ses premiers cinq romans.

En guise de conclusion

Si les textes les plus récents de Sophie Calle et de Patrick Deville ne s'inscrivent plus vraiment dans l'esthétique postmoderne, c'est le résultat d'une évolution d'émancipation lente et progressive et pas d'une rupture nette et absolue comparable au renoncement des nouveaux romanciers à leurs maximes théoriques. La lecture attentive démontre que Calle et de Deville poursuivent le projet postmoderne mais dans des conditions différentes.

En effet, c'est l'expérience des changements de la réception et de la perception dans un monde connecté et mondialisé d'un côté et au fait du vieillissement des auteurs (et avec cela l'expérience douloureuse de maladies et de la mort des proches) de l'autre qui aboutissent quasi forcément à une mouvance vers d'autres aspects esthétiques et thématiques tels qu'un style beaucoup plus sobre et sérieux, l'intérêt pour l'authenticité, l'enracinement de l'individu dans l'histoire individuelle et collective et le développement de questions existentielles.

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LA DISTRACTION COMME SIGNE D'UNE MODERNITÉ DÉPASSÉE

Tentative de représentation de l'urbain à l'heure du *smartphone*

Introduction

Les technologies numériques de l'information et de la communication sont une invitation faite au citadin pour interagir et provoquer sa curiosité au travers d'une nouvelle couche de données dans son environnement.[1] Ces objets techniques sont le support de projection de toutes nos attentions. Il semble émerger ces dernières années, une règle implicite d'être connecté en permanence à notre *smartphone*, cet outil de régulation de nos existences qui est conçu pour nous connecter en toute heure, en tout lieu. Cet article se veut exploratoire afin de présenter les premières compréhensions d'une emprise des phénomènes techniques dans l'expérience de la mobilité ordinaire.

> Par analogie avec les transports, l'Internet mobile est à l'Internet fixe ce que l'automobile fut au chemin de fer, c'est-à-dire un moyen beaucoup plus flexible de se transporter dans le temps et l'espace. C'est pourquoi l'effet du *smartphone* sur les pratiques de déplacement mérite […] d'être analysé.[2]

La présence numérique est particulièrement visible dans les phénomènes techniques du quotidien qui reconfigurent des pratiques existantes de l'espace public urbain. L'espace digital prend aujourd'hui principalement la forme de *smartphones*, d'écrans interactifs, de bornes de paiement ou de capteurs de présence, des objets qui sont devenus d'une grande banalité et qui participent à ce que l'on nomme l'*Ambient Intelligence*.[3] Nous y portons toute notre attention, ces objets configurent alors des écologies senso-

1 Mike Crang et Stephen Graham, 'Sentient cities : Ambient intelligence and the politics of urban space', *Information, Communication & Society*, 10, 6 (2007), 789–817.

2 Anne Aguilera et Alain Rallet, 'Mobilité connectée et changements dans les pratiques de déplacement', *Réseaux*, 200, 6 (2016), 17–59, p. 20.

3 Ibidem.

rielles nouvelles.[4] Il nous semble que cette recherche explore les modalités de l'expérience en s'intéressant à la question centrale de l'attention et de son pendant, la distraction.[5]

Pour appréhender les usages du *smartphone*, nous avons mis en place une démarche empirique pour récolter des fragments d'histoires quotidiennes[6] pouvant devenir révélateurs des transformations longues et invisibles de techniques et technologies. À partir de l'expérience du terrain, nous proposons alors la question suivante : en quoi les mutations contemporaines des techniques et technologies, telles que le *smartphone*, sont significatives d'une forme de modernité dépassée modifiant drastiquement notre rapport au monde ? L'approche par les ambiances[7] de cette problématique, nous permet de mettre en valeur l'expérience attentive de la mobilité dans la mobilité, comprenons ici, la mobilité informationnelle dans la mobilité spatiale, même si elles ne font qu'une dans les pratiques. L'usager est connecté en plusieurs lieux, parfois même sans le savoir, et passe d'un univers physique à un virtuel par les activités qui vont rythmer son voyage par une emprise cognitive forte des phénomènes techniques. Les comportements changent plus lentement que l'on pourrait l'imaginer, mais ils imprègnent notre quotidien, c'est tout un mode de vie, un territoire, une routine que le *smartphone*, pour ne parler que de lui, modifie.

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4 Jean-Paul Thibaud, 'Vers une écologie ambiante de l'urbain', *Environnement Urbain / Urban Environment*, 13 (2018).

5 Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention* (Paris : Seuil, 2014).

6 Nous nous intéressons précisément aux espaces-temps de mobilité qui, comme le support de nos modes de vie, donne à voir l'évolution de nos pratiques assujetties à ces nouveaux phénomènes. Nous accédons à la compréhension des attentions et distraction à l'œuvre au travers d'un corpus d'anecdotes proposant des captations du quotidien en prise avec l'interface technique. Les fragments d'histoires quotidiennes sont des anecdotes provenant d'une enquête pluriformes : des observations directes, des entretiens semi-directifs et des navigations commentées, dans laquelle nous cherchons à mettre en valeur les schémas d'(inter)action du trajet régulier et ordinaire, ces trajets que nous faisons toujours à la même heure, dans la même direction et surtout par le même chemin. Une approche cumulative de ces fragments ouvre la compréhension des articulations entre les différents agencements sous-jacents des ambiances. L'enquête fut réalisée entre 2016 et 2019 à Grenoble (FR), Hatfield (UK), Londres (UK) Aarhus (DK) et Copenhague (DK).

7 Les ambiances serait ce 'je ne sais quoi' de Vladimir Jankélévitch, qui plus qu'un objet d'études, est une approche sensible de l'action qui s'intéresse à 'l'entre-deux' de l'objet et du sujet, du sensible et de l'intelligible, de l'actif et du passif. Jean-Paul Thibaud, 'Petite archéologie de la notion d'ambiance', *Communications*, 90, 1 (2012), 155–174.

Cette ethnographie de l'action, où la légitimité de la connaissance est dans le récit que l'on donne au savoir que l'on observe, met en exergue des marqueurs d'évolution des ambiances, entre des dynamiques lentes (graduation imperceptible dans l'évolution) et des dynamiques rapides (changements brutaux, rupture) ou encore les engagements attentionnels (focalisation, périphérique, collective, *et cetera*). Nous proposons de déconstruire ce que produisent les formes de distraction dans la mobilité ordinaire, en trois parties non exhaustives sur le sujet : le renversement du schéma médiatique entre le sujet et l'objet, l'effervescence phénoménale des techniques pour enfin interroger la gouvernementalité de ce qui semble pousser à la saturation de nos attentions. Enfin, nous terminerons avec les perspectives de ces premières pistes de réflexion vers une critique nuancée et sensible de la fabrique de l'urbain à l'échelle de l'expérience.

Un renversement du schéma médiatique. Interroger la 'mutation des techniques et technologies'[8]

Dans le contexte d'une emprise grandissante des technologies de l'information et de la communication, il apparaît à la fois une évolution des environnements sensibles urbains et l'émergence de ce qui est désormais nommé l'*Ambient Intelligence*,[9] comme une nouvelle manière de lire la relation individu-machine et plus largement individu-mondes. Ainsi nous observons une évolution des pratiques et des expériences de mobilité qui deviennent de plus en plus appareillées, amplifiées et augmentées. Nous faisons l'hypothèse que les nouvelles interfaces techniques ouvrent les portes à une transformation des interactions et focalisations dans l'expérience de l'usager dans sa mobilité. Que ce soit au prisme de la technique,[10]

8 Expression de Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 29.

9 Emile Aarts et Stefano Marzano (éds.) *The new everyday: views on ambient intelligence* (Rotterdam : nai010, 2003) Pour simplifier la lecture, les notions 'Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication' et 'Ambient Intelligence' pourront être réduites à leurs acronymes, respectivement 'TICs' et 'AmI'. Pour conserver tout le sens de cette notion, nous garderons sa forme anglophone, par ailleurs cela évitera toute ambiguïté avec la notion d'ambiances.

10 Emile Aarts et Stefano Marzano.

de la psychologie[11] ou de la sociologie[12], nous nous attarderons sur ce que produit ce nouveau paradigme[13] auquel le *smartphone* participe, sur les ambiances et plus largement sur la constitution du savoir concernant les expériences urbaines. Afin de mettre en lumière cette relation à l'*Ambient Intelligence*, nous appréhendons le quotidien dans ce qu'il a de plus infime, qui se retrouve dans la *praxis* de la ville.

La technique redessine notre environnement à la fois en termes de conceptions, mais aussi en termes de proliférations d'informations. Il semble que les technologies deviennent une couche nouvelle de spatialité insécable de l'environnement global. Plus qu'une question de séparation des couches d'information, il s'agirait de tissage ou de connexion[14] où notre première réflexion serait donc qu'il n'y pas d'augmentation par le numérique de l'environnement ou des ambiances. Il y aurait cependant l'émergence de nouvelles pratiques, de nouvelles relations au corps, de nouvelles expériences. Nous serions donc dans l'amplification de l'interaction qui mènerait à une évolution de nos attentions, où l'*Ambient Intelligence* joue de la malléabilité et de l'adaptation de l'environnement quotidien face à notre présence. Bien qu'il y ait bien une révolution digitale qui touche drastiquement la production de contenu, nous voyons plutôt dans l'*Ambient Intelligence,* une réflexion sur le médiatique et donc un potentiel d'interaction,[15] une forme d'*empowerment* de notre quotidien. Les technologies numériques se déploient pour créer ce que William Mitchell nommait la *bitsphere,*[16] un environnement électroniquement médié où les réseaux sont partout avec une forte capacité à l'ubiquité et à la communication. Dès la fin des années 80, William Mitchell nous interpelle sur la question de l'émergence des TICs dans la production architecturale et urbaine, mais aussi dans les imaginaires associés : "[…] you become an inhabitant, a participant, not merely a spectator. […] We are all cyborg now. Architects

11 Guiseppe Riva *et al.* (éds.) *Ambient Intelligence: The Evolution Of Technology, Communication And Cognition Towards The Future Of Human-Computer Interaction* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2005).

12 Madeleine Akrich, 'Les formes de la médiation technique', *Réseaux*, 60 (1993), 87–98.

13 Diane J. Cook *et al.*, 'Ambient intelligence: Technologies, applications, and opportunities', *Pervasive and Mobile Computing*, 5, 4 (2009), 277–298.

14 Georg Simmel, *Sociologie : études sur les formes de la socialisation* (Paris : PUF, 2013, 1ère ed. 1908).

15 William J. Mitchell, *City of bits: space, place, and the infobahn* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

16 William J. Mitchell, p. 167.

and urban designers of the digital era must begin by retheorizing the body in space."[17]

Déplacer la problématique de l'objet au phénomène technique

Si nous reprenons les mots d'Emile Aarts, l'*Ambient Intelligence* (*AmI*) serait cet environnement électronique sensible à notre présence. Cette A*mbient* nous apporterait informations et adaptation à la situation grâce à sa capacité à être connecté à un réseau beaucoup plus large et puissant que le simple capteur-senseur, pour permettre des interactions plus naturelle et humaine avec l'environnement.[18] L'*AmI* est une culture, une vision qui vient se fondre dans une part qu'elle considère comme non intelligente de l'environnement. Cela réduirait, semble-t-il l'intelligence d'une ambiance à sa part digitale formée par ses capteurs, bases de données et interfaces de toute nature.

Il semble cependant que les capteurs fassent l'impasse sur une part majeure de l'expérience de l'individu dans l'interaction : humeur, ressenti, contexte social et tous ces phénomènes non mesurables qui participent pourtant à la pratique des TICs. L'*AmI* répondrait à cinq caractéristiques techniques :[19] *intégration, ubiquité, personnalisation, adaptation, anticipation*. Ces variables d'ajustement ne nous semblent pas seulement techniques, mais posent aussi des questions d'ambiances et d'expériences du monde. Il semble là y avoir une première limite à cette vision. Ces ajustements ne sont pas que des changements de comportement perçus par l'outil, mais aussi des ajustements de l'usager face à l'outil. Ces cinq caractéristiques semblent donc parler de l'instabilité de l'expérience, il s'agirait alors tout simplement d'ambiances et non seulement d'*Ambient Intelligence*. Malgré le cadre fini que la technologie propose dans un environnement instable par nature, nous y voyons une participation à un potentiel à ambiances par la technique comme nos sociétés en ont déjà vécu dans les évolutions des différents médias.

> Technologically, electronics can now be integrated into any conceivable physical object: into clothing, furniture, cars, houses, offices, and so on. And

17 William J. Mitchell, p. 20–28.
18 Emile Aarts et Stefano Marzano, *The new everyday: views on ambient intelligence* (Rotterdam: nai010, 2003).
19 Ibidem.

> devices can be connected together into meaningful systems, making it possible for us to access content and services in a variety of ways.[20]

Les termes actuels du basculement sont encore imprécis, tout peut devenir *intelligent* dans notre environnement. Marzano décrit l'*Ambient Intelligence* comme une vision avec des approches plurielles.[21] C'est à la fois un *business model,* mais aussi une modification majeure de nos environnements de vie. Toute surface devient potentiel écran, bien qu'aujourd'hui nous la vivons particulièrement avec les *smartphones*, les montres connectées, les bornes de tramway, les écrans d'informations ou encore les QR codes. Tous ces dispositifs sont de plus en plus présents dans notre environnement quotidien, enrichissant une expérience immersive à la fois dans le physique et le virtuel. Ces objets connectés ont tendance à diminuer en taille jusqu'à disparaitre de nos perceptions directes. Ils ne disparaissent évidemment pas, mais leurs pixels sont de tailles tellement infimes qu'ils ne sont plus visibles. Une sensation de dématérialisation accompagne la recherche de la transparence de l'interface[22] tout en exacerbant l'interaction. L'implémentation de ces nouvelles technologies immerge alors l'usager dans une hybridité permanente plutôt que d'être face à l'écran, déjà obsolète dans son format. Tout est dans la granulométrie de l'interface qui nous valorise l'outil comme phénomène et non plus seulement comme l'objet. Par le prisme des ambiances, nous observons donc un déplacement de la problématique depuis l'objet technique vers le phénomène technique.

Dans l'objectif d'une *Ambient intelligence*, il s'agirait alors de produire des dispositifs ambiants compréhensifs des conditions de la situation. Ces dispositifs technologiques sont par essence intrusifs et cachés, malgré tout et dans le soin de l'interaction elles paraissent s'orienter vers des formes plus humaines et moins 'alien'.[23] Les technologies associées à l'*AmI* semblent être un moyen de représentation mouvant, qui cherche un degré d'intégralité[24] maximum dans la compréhension de l'individu et des pratiques qu'elles permettent. Ces phénomènes techniques ont le pouvoir de nous connaître et nous reconnaître. Un basculement épistémologique

20 Aarts et Marzano, p. 12.
21 Aarts et Marzano, p. 9.
22 William J. Mitchell, *City of bits: space, place, and the infobahn* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).
23 Evita Stoop, 'Mobility: freedom of body and mind', *The new everyday: views on ambient intelligence*, éd. par Emile Aarts et Stefano Marzano (Rotterdam: nai010, 2003), p. 144.
24 Claude Cadoz, *Les réalités virtuelles : un exposé pour comprendre, un essai pour réfléchir* (Paris : Flammarion, 1994), p. 11.

s'opère alors sur cet 'intelligent' et sur le degré de sensibilité aux phénomènes techniques de la part des usagers[25] en tant qu'individus, mais aussi comme collectif. Aujourd'hui, cette problématique ne touche pas que la question interactionnelle, mais aussi les processus de consommation, de fabrication, ou encore de vie urbaine. Il s'agit d'un ensemble de problématiques liées à l'urbain qui nécessite un retour sur la question de sa politique et de sa légitimité par une telle pénétration technologique dans les vies urbaines. Ces ambiances dans lesquels les citadins *expériencent* leur quotidien se retrouvent en prise maintenant avec un réseau plus large que la ville elle-même et plus immatériel que sa morphologie. Il semble que nous devons réfléchir ainsi à une nouvelle organisation des limites objet/phénomène, focalisation/distraction ou encore présence/absence pour soigner le commun des ambiances.

L'effervescence des phénomènes techniques. Les enjeux attentionnels des phénomènes techniques

> L'attention est la chose la plus personnelle qui soit : en temps normal, c'est nous qui choisissons ce à quoi nous souhaitons prêter attention, et ce choix détermine de façon fondamentale ce qui est réel pour nous, ce qui est vraiment présent à notre conscience. L'appropriation de notre attention est donc une question qui nous affecte intimement.[26]

L'*Ambient Intelligence* synchronise et désynchronise l'interaction en permanence avec l'usager qui se retrouve entre deux mondes insécables, numérique et analogique. Nous y trouvons une fracturation spatiale et temporelle,[27] là où la situation avait un espace et un temps, s'additionne aujourd'hui un *partout* et un *n'importe quand*. Dans ce flou spatial et temporel, les phénomènes techniques impliquent un fort engagement cognitif de la part de l'usager pour naviguer avec son environnement. La disparition de l'interface ouvre la voie à de nouvelles modulations de nos attentions. En effet, ces phénomènes jouent alors de la contrainte sur cette sélection

25 Lorna Goulden et Paul McGroary, 'Experience design', *The new everyday: views on ambient intelligence,* éd. par Emile Aarts et Stefano Marzano (Rotterdam : nai010, 2003), p. 46.

26 Matthew B. Crawford, *Contact : pourquoi nous avons perdu le monde, et comment le retrouver* (Paris : la Découverte, 2016), p. 24.

27 William J. Mitchell, *City of bits: space, place, and the infobahn*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Donald A. Norman, 'How might people interact with agents', *Communications of the ACM*, 37, 7 (1994), 68–71.

cognitive dans l'environnement numérique avec lequel nous agissons. Le *flow*[28] se perd alors dans un environnement hyperabondant en informations.[29] Nous demandons aux technologies d'agir et réagir comme des actants doués de conscience de la situation. Si tel est le cas, les phénomènes techniques pourraient renforcer et valoriser le *flow*, en jouant non pas de la distraction, mais de la focalisation et de l'inhibition latente. Rendre sensible les data serait leur donner une capacité de *care* pour l'usager qui va lui donner un sentiment de présence.[30]

La distraction, le pendant de l'attention,[31] est un phénomène qui dynamise l'espace-temps perceptif[32] comme un outil de régulation de la perception. Par des captations hétérogènes, incessantes et multiples dans leurs formes, les phénomènes techniques rendent difficile la canalisation de la charge cognitive dans l'action, or l'effort que demande la distraction est élevé et contraint l'usager dans l'interaction. Le phénomène technique renverse alors le schéma médiatique que nous connaissons avec l'ordinateur par exemple, où l'usager va chercher de lui-même l'information. Les phénomènes techniques, eux, portent à l'attention une quantité d'informations dans une dynamique continue vers l'individu. Face à la distraction permanente, l'usager développe de nouvelles modulations attentionnelles et comportements pour palier à un pâtir important face à l'abondance d'informations.

La nécessité d'un outil de (dé)composition

L'urgence d'un réexamen des pratiques de l'urbain hyperstimulant semble être utile pour redéfinir une critique des pouvoirs faisant résonner individualité, objet et monde dans une composition digne d'Edgar Varèse. Dans un univers imprégné de modernité, Edgar Varèse va au-delà des normes de la narration musicale pour massivement s'ancrer dans les sciences et technologies, et

28 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi définit le flow comme une expérience d'être en contrôle et en immersion dans un environnement associé à une forte émotion positive. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding flow: the psychology of engagement with everyday life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

29 Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention* (Paris : Seuil, 2014).

30 Giuseppe Riva, *Ambient Intelligence: The Evolution of Technology, Communication And Cognition Towards The Future Of Human-Computer Interaction*, ed. par Guiseppe Riva *et al. (*Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2005), p. 25.

31 Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2009).

32 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of perception: attention, spectacle, and modern culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 1ère ed. 1999).

offrir des œuvres majeures représentatives de leurs temps. Nous voyons dans ses compositions une métaphore de l'*Ambient Intelligence*. Chaque courbe, chaque pointillé, chaque intensité des diagrammes du poème électronique[33] donnent la représentation de nos attentions distraites par l'émergence des phénomènes techniques. Il écrit par ailleurs quarante ans plus tôt en critique de la musique comme simple récit :

> La musique, qui doit vivre et vibrer, a besoin de nouveaux moyens d'expression, et la science seule peut lui infuser une sève adolescente ... Je rêve d'instruments obéissant à la pensée et qui, avec l'apport d'une floraison de timbres insoupçonnés, se prêtent aux combinaisons qu'il me plaira de leur imposer et se plient à l'exigence de mon rythme intérieur.[34]

Varèse semble nous permettre une métaphore de la constitution de l'*Ambient Intelligence* avec ce jeu de langage représentant l'action des sciences et techniques sur les relations attentives que le citadin construit avec son environnement. Les phénomènes techniques semblent agir sur l'attention dans ce mode *god like view* archaïque. L'*AmI* répondrait aux exigences modernes d'un contrôle scientifique sur son temps. Varèse semble être représentatif de cette modernité où intensité, fréquence et densité sont les modes de composition et non plus le cadre culturel (gamme, tonalité, …) laissant libre cours à l'improvisation avec son instrument. Il y associe un savoir narratif unique et indivisible, difficilement appropriable par l'autre. Nous percevons dans cette démarche, la mise en œuvre d'un outil de composition de la vie urbaine dans les mains d'un compositeur. Son travail serait une synthèse additive qui aujourd'hui nous permet de décomposer une pensée dans un chemin inverse de la distraction et comprendre la modulation telle qu'elle se réaliserait dans la présence croissante des technologies. Nous pourrions représenter à notre tour notre objet d'étude ainsi, mais dans un objectif tout autre : en faire une critique sensible et représenter les fragments d'histoires quotidiennes révélatrices de saturation attentionnelle.

Vers une pensée par la modulation

L'abondance rapide et manifeste des distractions des objets techniques offre autant l'imaginaire d'une prophétie que d'une catastrophe hors de

33 *Son organisé* composé pour le pavillon Philips conçu par Le Corbusier pour l'exposition universelle de 1958.

34 Texte d'Edgar Varèse pour la revue *391*, V (1915), p. 2.

toute échelle humaine. Nous savons aujourd'hui qu'être concepteur d'espace signifie être praticien du monde ayant une capacité à agir sur celui-ci. Il faut donc se donner les moyens de le comprendre sans autorité supérieure où la légitimité de la connaissance est dans le récit que l'on donne à la science, il ne s'agit probablement pas d'être le compositeur d'une modernité dépassée par les évènements. Dans ce travail, nous déconstruisons sans atomiser les œuvres singulières que sont les situations quotidiennes pour en comprendre des agencements d'effets et d'intensités sans exhaustivité aucune, mais qui mettent en lumière des jeux de relations bouleversées par ces phénomènes techniques hors des communs. La modulation serait la transformation d'un cheminement de vie entre *crescendo*, saillance, bulle, *decrescendo*, *et cetera* qui bouscule le quotidien. Nous tentons de saisir une contemporanéité de la notion de modulation, pour fondamentalement comprendre les jeux de pouvoir à l'œuvre. Nous trouvons une limite de la représentation de la modulation par ces diagrammes *à la Varèse* : c'est toutes les textures de chacune des modulations attentionnelles, les humeurs, les liens sociaux associés à la situation qui nous manquent. Nous sentons bien que la courbe seule ne parle pas, le nom de l'effet seul ne suffit pas, ça manque de substance, l'*AmI* en manquerait également. Nous avons trouvé dans les fragments d'histoires quotidiennes de la granularité, toute la granularité du quotidien tel qu'il est vécu. La pensée de la modulation perd tout son sens, si elle n'est pas associée à ces fragments d'histoires quotidiennes et c'est ceux-là même qui semblent manqués dans notre modernité.

Nous sentons un impérialisme des 'industries culturelles dégradantes',[35] pour reprendre les termes d'Adorno, dans la diffusion du savoir narratif. Pour fondamentalement accorder autour de ces objets une sorte de consensus dans les structures socioculturelles. Par l'uniformisation des gestuelles, des modes de discussion, des transmissions d'informations, sans appropriations possibles des objets. Ces industries culturelles renforcent une idéologie provoquant l'illusion de l'objet technique dans l'intrusion de phénomènes dans leurs pratiques. Finalement, et ce n'est surement pas une révélation, la société de contrôle use de ces instruments, et le *smartphone* en premier, pour jouer de la modulation de nos attentions. Nous pouvons noter la disparition ou l'uniformisation d'une part narrative du savoir dans le développement de ces objets de toutes les convoitises. En effet, un discours a été construit par les systèmes industriels formant le

35 Theodor W. Adorno et Max Horkheimer, *La dialectique de la raison : fragments philosophiques*, trad. par Éliane Kaufholz-Messmer (Paris : Gallimard, 2013, 1ère ed. 1944).

seul potentiel usage de ces objets. Une forme de culture technique devenue unique par une pensée technologique fermée et normalisante. Pourtant et pour nuancer, nous trouvons de nombreuses subtilités dans les pratiques, qui sont bien plus effervescentes que ce qui était prévu par le cadre pourtant fermé des technologies de l'information et de la communication. Elles s'inscrivent comme des parades pour se protéger, comme des choix déterminés à n'utiliser le *smartphone* qu'avec sobriété. Malgré tout, un savoir narratif uniformisé qui s'exempt d'une accroche culturelle, ou plutôt qui s'accroche à une culture industrielle du capital et se diffuse ainsi, imprègne finalement le monde dans sa globalité.

Une saturation de l'expérience du monde. Une fascination pour les technologies du quotidien

L'uniformisation des espaces d'échanges et des formes d'interaction profite à une société sous le contrôle des phénomènes techniques. Nous passons d'une forme de gouvernementalisation de l'état que Michel Foucault a mis en lumière en 1978, vers une gouvernementalisation de la sphère numérique, comme une translation d'un paradigme du pouvoir. Les techniques numériques se sont construites autour de trois éléments par ailleurs notés par M. Foucault[36] : *formes de pouvoir (économie), instruments de pouvoir (appareillage), processus de pouvoir (territorialité)*, avec pour finalité un conditionnement de l'espace public. La question du contrôle social par une emprise numérique est complexe à aborder, nous proposons de tenter une compréhension par les pratiques citadines au travers d'un soin des attentions et distractions dans l'expérience de l'urbain. Les dynamiques et modulations que nous avons mises en lumière précédemment semblent acter que cette emprise va au-delà d'une problématique individuelle et se porte dans un cadre complexe transindividuel, tel que Gilbert Simondon le présentait, c'est-à-dire dans une dimension inventive de l'interaction entre individuels et la communauté de pratique.[37] Soutenir cette part inventive renvoie à la compréhension de sa propre position dans la situation et de la signification que nous donnons à l'objet technique et les phénomènes associés. Dans le cas de leur effervescence, ces technologies

36 Michel Foucault, 'Sécurité, territoire et population', *Dits et écrits, tome II : 1976 - 1988*, éd. par Daniel Defert et François Ewald (Paris : Gallimard, 2017, 1ère ed. 2001), 719–723.

37 Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble : Millon, 2017, 1ère ed. 1958 pour sa thèse de doctorat).

et leurs pouvoirs sont marqueurs d'une forme de totalitarisme s'ils sont pris indépendamment des pratiques transindividuelles.

Ces *smartphones* comme des prothèses numériques suivent ce schéma d'une croyance du handicap du citadin qui n'est apte ou capable d'être en contrôle de ses interactions au quotidien. Les usages et perceptions mêmes de ces technologies sont directement impactés par ce qui serait de l'ordre des fantasmes ou de croyances individuelles parfois collectivement partagés. Finalement, nous n'écrivons un récit non plus de nos pratiques individuelles, mais un récit dans un cadre préétablit par une industrie culturelle avec sa motivation du profit appliquée à des objets extériorisant un peu de notre existence et profitant de ces croyances. L'hypermodernité semble se jouer dans une forme de marchandisation de nos attentions et nous fait vivre ce changement de 'héro',[38] depuis l'État jusqu'aux industries. L'action du pouvoir se définit alors par de nouvelles normes de l'expérience imposée par ces objets générateurs de phénomènes en masse. Forcément des gouvernances bien différentes et non soumises à la délibération du peuple semblent être en position de bousculer les savoirs traditionnels de vie urbaine. Dans un tel système d'obéissance, les technologies répondent à une économie et trouvent non plus leur valeur dans l'information et sa transmission, mais dans l'attention que nous portons à elle. Cela déséquilibre fortement la constitution du savoir qui trouve sa légitimité dans la puissance de la stimulation autant en termes de rythme que d'intensité. Une logique de performativité que notait déjà J.-F. Lyotard il y a 40 ans : "On peut voir dans ce déclin des récits un effet de l'essor des techniques et des technologies à partir de la deuxième guerre mondiale, qui a déplacé l'accent sur les moyens de l'action plutôt que sur les fins […]."[39]

Une rupture avec l'ancrage local de l'action

Avec cette fascination, il semble naître une norme implicite d'être connecté en permanence et de réagir à la notification dans l'instantané. Le *smartphone* est conçu dans cette optique et les infrastructures urbaines visent à supporter ces conditions (*QR codes*, *WiFi* public, borne *NFC*, *et cetera*). L'outil de régulation du quotidien qu'est devenu le *smartphone* favorise l'isolement du citadin par rapport à son ancrage local. L'expérience

38 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 52.

39 Jean-François Lyotard, p.63.

urbaine est aujourd'hui sous l'influence d'une pensée par le flux généré et générant des industries culturelles dégradantes dans une 'succession automatique d'opérations standardisées'[40] indifférentes des identités locales de la situation. Cette part générique de la situation construit des espaces d'aliénation où le citadin s'éloigne ponctuellement, mais régulièrement du réel. Là où il n'a pas de préhension directe et physique, nous y voyons l'effet *Google knows* qui participe à l'émergence d'un espace de confort dans lequel la machine comprend les besoins uniquement du citadin, plus que l'urbain complexe et muable.

L'automatisation a pris en même temps un vrai pouvoir sur l'individu durant son temps libre et sur son bonheur, elle y détermine si profondément la fabrication des produits servant au divertissement, qu'il ne peut plus appréhender autre chose que la copie, la reproduction du processus lui-même. Le prétendu contenu n'est plus qu'une façade défraîchie ; ce qui s'imprime dans l'esprit de l'homme, c'est la succession automatique d'opérations standardisées. Emporté dans le *maelstrom* des technologies numériques, le citadin porte en lui la difficulté de maintenir son attention ailleurs que sur cet espace confortable produit pour lui. Les jeux de pouvoir ne sont pas clairs à l'échelle de l'expérience, où ce qui provoque la succession de notification est bien plus large et impalpable que la situation en présence. Bien qu'une rupture anthropologique avec les lieux émerge de cette captivation incessante, tout n'est pas coupure à l'environnement. Nous sommes fermement accrochés aux anciennes conceptions de l'espace, du temps et des usages, mais nos plasticités attentionnelles sont en pleine adaptation face à la mutation de nos pratiques culturelles.

Vers une renaissance de compétences urbaines

En s'intéressant aux dynamiques de ce flux attentionnel sous pression, il s'agit de déconstruire une image caricaturale de cette emprise du numérique, qui est une broderie entre un pouvoir unilatéral menant à l'aliénation et un potentiel à action participant aux ambiances urbaines. L'emprise numérique est une couche informationnelle supplémentaire dans le quotidien avec de nouveaux accès et de nouvelles compétences pour les dispositifs urbains qu'ils soient embarqués par le citadin ou supportés par l'espace

40 Theodor W. Adorno et Max Horkheimer, *La dialectique de la raison : fragments philosophiques*, trad. par Éliane Kaufholz-Messmer (Paris : Gallimard, 2013, 1ère ed. 1944).

public. La renaissance anthropologique serait donc d'ordre structurant pour toutes ces informations accessibles en tout lieu, à toute heure avec des stratégies individuelles, collectives ou situationnelles. Il est question de maîtriser ses effets et intensités pour le citadin, en évaluant notamment la hiérarchie qu'il donne aux tâches attentionnelles qui s'offrent à lui. La renaissance est une perspective anthropologique qui valoriserait l'écosystème technique dans l'objectif de développer une pratique collective urbaine soutenable et individuelle désirable.

Une manière de lutter contre l'asservissement et l'aliénation attentionnels serait de redéployer des valeurs pragmatiques dans les technologies numériques pour les rendre pertinentes dans l'action et sublimer l'attention comme un système de soin, loin d'un processus d'automatisation moderne. L'attention rend capable l'individu d'être social et psychique[41] et là où il y a rupture, le citadin a le pouvoir d'adaptation et d'apprentissage pour s'émanciper de l'emprise. Cette attention individuelle accompagne un accordage collectif entre le fait d'être affecté par le monde et par là même l'affecter par ses propres actions[42] pour supporter la transition entre la rupture et la renaissance, entre le pâtir et l'agir. Les dynamiques attentionnelles que nous étudions semblent former un processus de régulation dans la constitution d'un public pour dépasser la vision technophile. Le citadin reprendrait sa part de responsabilité en main tout en prenant de nouveau soin de ses modulations en s'activant lui-même et non par la machine industrielle, pour sortir du processus d'asservissement que notait déjà K. Marx[43] face au démiurge du capital. Plutôt que de condamner l'emprise numérique du *smartphone* sur la mobilité urbaine et quotidienne, cette recherche valorise l'émancipation dans la ville considérée comme une communauté de pratiques stimulante, attentive et productive.

Perspectives

Nous découvrons une posture possible dans la critique sensible de ces technologies en entrant dans la finesse des processus interactionnels et dans la compréhension des phénomènes individu-machine en prise avec la

41 Bernard Stiegler, *La télécratie contre la démocratie : lettre ouverte aux représentants politiques* (Paris : Flammarion, 2008), p. 121.

42 Hartmut Rosa, *Résonance : une sociologie de relation au monde*, trad. par Sacha Zilberfarb (Paris : La Découverte, 2018).

43 Karl Marx, 'Économie et philosophie (Manuscrits parisiens de 1844)', *Œuvres II. Économie II*, éd. par Maximilien Rubel (Paris : Gallimard, 1968).

transparence des interfaces techniques, mais aussi de leur rapidité, de leur ubiquité ou encore de leur adaptation. La technique considérée dans les problématiques globales de progrès se retrouve face à des questions ultra-localisées d'ordre social et cognitif. Il ne s'agit pas pour nous de réaliser une critique vive à l'encontre des *mass-médias* et des dispositifs de type *Ambient Intelligence* mis en place, mais plutôt de nous construire autour d'une question : quelle place donne-t-on aux sens et expériences du citadin dans un tel moment de changement en termes attentionnels ?

Ce n'est pas qu'une problématique d'industrie, l'usager a appris à la vouloir dans une transformation lente des sociétés, comme un fantasme d'une existence idéale que suggèrent ces technologies. Il semble que cette transformation lente est une caractéristique des bouleversements qui sont souvent notés comme rapides, mais il semble aussi que c'est plutôt de l'ordre de progrès technologiques, d'un pas-à-pas qui nous mène aujourd'hui à une rupture de l'*épistémé*.[44] Nous observons une transformation profonde des objets et des pratiques, qui de modernité en modernité ouvre aujourd'hui à un recul nécessaire pour comprendre, regarder et envisager autrement les savoirs techniques. Avec ces objets universalisants par leur langage, peut-on encore parler de culture technique en l'absence d'un ancrage dans la pratique, dans l'ultra local, dans un quotidien dynamique et singulier ?

Dans l'objectif d'une ville servicielle qui consiste à agréger des bouquets d'offres, les GAFAM et NATU[45] bouleversent les pratiques quotidiennes de déplacement, sans faire évoluer le système d'une fabrique sociale du consommateur de numérique. L'espace public urbain s'imprègne alors d'une forme de capitalisme de l'attention caractéristique d'un effondrement des conditions de l'expérience de la mobilité ordinaire. Avec un ensemble de petits dispositifs disséminés et connectés entre eux, les situations quotidiennes prennent forme par de nouvelles coprésences animées par des phénomènes insérés dans des systèmes techniques de grandes échelles. Nous avons particulièrement observé la mobilité ordinaire, représentative d'une habitude relativement stable dans sa forme avec un trajet que nous faisons régulièrement qui rejoint souvent notre maison, à notre travail, à l'épicerie ou à l'école des enfants. Malgré cette stabilité perceptible, il semble que l'emprise des technologies numériques qui nous accompagnent au quoti-

44 Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses : une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris : Gallimard, 2010, 1ère ed. 1966).

45 GAFAM : Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft (les géants du numérique) ; NATU : Netflix, Airbnb, Tesla, Uber (les géants de la disruption).

dien participe à l'activation de nos mobilités en bouleversant son cours.[46] Il ne s'agit pas de faire une critique unilatérale et négative de la disruption dans la fabrique de l'urbain, en nous intéressant aux dynamiques de nos engagements dans une écologie du quotidien, la question se porte vers un changement de regard. En effet, les technologies numériques et le *smartphone* en premier sont efficaces et inévitables. Alors pouvons-nous imaginer ne pas rendre l'humanité 'sujette à une exploitation automatisée',[47] en (a)ménageant des environnements propices à la modulation attentionnelle dans le soin des interactions du quotidien ? "Nous pouvons dépasser les obstacles idéologiques pour créer un avenir meilleur en intégrant les valeurs écologiques dans les dispositifs techniques et économiques de notre société".[48]

Une certaine perte de contrôle de nos quotidiens apparaît avec comme seules possibilités l'aliénation face à une rupture massive entre structure technique et structure socioculturelle. Nous tentons de (re)construire les *épistémés* de notre époque avec méfiance face à ces bouleversements par une enquête archéologique des structures sous-jacentes de nos quotidiens. Dans le contraste des ambiances extraordinaires, il s'agit de comprendre un fond en présence en allant au-delà du dispositif médiatique et en comprenant ses effets, ses gestuelles, *et cetera*. Ainsi par cette lecture, nous mettons en lumière que ce n'est pas de la technologie dont nous devons nous soucier, mais de sa diffusion et ses pratiques contrôlées. Celles-ci étant bouleversées par les techniques de distraction qui se déploient à grande vitesse et exercent une pression sur nos capacités cognitives au prix de ce que certains appellent un 'capitalisme cognitif' représentatif de la modernité que nous vivons. En effet, ces pratiques individualisantes du *smartphone* dans l'espace public questionnent les rythmes, transitions ou encore affects de nos expériences. Ces nouvelles configurations ambiantes semblent nous pousser vers une nouvelle disparition des lucioles[49] de Pier Paolo Pasolini pour un hédonisme consumériste de la distraction cette fois-ci. Face à cette performativité qui n'est autre que le reflet de sa propre faiblesse, jusqu'où

46 François Ascher, *La société hypermoderne, [ou], Ces événements nous dépassent, feignons d'en être les organisateurs* (La Tour d'Aigues : Aube, 2005, 1ère ed. 2000), p.174.

47 Matthew B. Crawford, *Contact : pourquoi nous avons perdu le monde, et comment le retrouver* (Paris : la Découverte, 2016), p.328.

48 Andrew Feenberg, *Pour une théorie critique de la technique* (Montréal : Lux, 2016), p.111.

49 Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'L'article des lucioles', *Écrits corsaires*, trad. par Philippe Guilhon (Paris, Flammarion, 2018, 1ère ed. 1975)

cette société de -l'hyper- nous stimulera, est-ce vers une libération ou vers un effondrement des pratiques ?

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Leonardo Gandini

LE IMMAGINI DI TROPPO
I due adattamenti di *The Manchurian Candidate*

"If you come in five minutes after this picture begins, you won't know what it's all about!": questa la frase che caratterizzava uno dei poster promozionali della prima versione di *The Manchurian Candidate*, diretto da John Frankenheimer e distribuito sugli schermi statunitensi nel 1962. In effetti, anche entrando per tempo, anche disciplinando il proprio ingresso in sala – come già due anni prima Alfred Hitchcock, nei trailer promozionali di *Psyco*, aveva esortato il pubblico a fare – gli spettatori prevedibilmente avranno avuto qualche problema a capire "what the film was about", ovvero di cosa stesse davvero parlando *The Manchurian Candidate*, alla luce di una sequenza iniziale, per l'epoca, a dir poco imperscrutabile. Tratto da un romanzo di Richard Condon del 1959 che aveva per protagonista un soldato americano, Raymond Shaw, il quale – fatto prigioniero in Corea e sottoposto a lavaggio del cervello dai comunisti – veniva trasformato, una volta ritornato in patria, in un killer di figure politiche ingombranti, il film valorizzava ed estendeva, nella sequenza di apertura, un piccolo dettaglio presente nel libro.[1]

Catturati dai coreani, Shaw e i suoi commilitoni vengono inizialmente, mediante tecniche di condizionamento mentale, suggestionati al punto di credere di essere ospiti di un albergo del New Jersey che ospita una conferenza di argomento floreale, al cospetto di signore che disquisiscono di fiori, laddove in realtà si trovano di fronte ad un gruppo di alti dirigenti comunisti provenienti dalla Cina e dall'Unione Sovietica. È su quest'immagine scomoda ed incongrua – un palco sul quale i soldati sono seduti l'uno accanto all'altro, al cospetto di una platea formata ora da impettiti statisti comunisti, ora da signore esperte di floricoltura - che il film apre il suo racconto. Da una parte dando alla sequenza la sembianza di un incubo, introdotto dal canonico primo piano del volto madido di sudore di un personaggio, il maggiore Marco, che sta facendo sonni agitati, e dalla graduale sovrimpressione di immagini che visualizzano i suoi sogni; dall'altra

1 Richard Condon, *Il candidato della Manciuria* (Roma: Fanucci, 2004).

ricorrendo, per la messa in scena dell'incubo, ad una strategia estetica del tutto inusuale. Nessun flou, nessuna immagine distorta, nessuna dissonanza sonora; al contrario, una sequenza inesorabilmente convenzionale, che rispetta in modo rigoroso, nei raccordi tra le inquadrature e nel montaggio dei piani ravvicinati, la logica della continuità spazio-temporale, collocando dunque l'incongruenza non sul piano dello stile ma soltanto su quello dei contenuti, posto che in platea, a guardare i soldati americani allineati sul palco, figurano al contempo, dunque *non* in alternanza, militari comunisti *e* attempate signore esperte di floricoltura.

Alla luce delle pratiche di Bunuel e Dalì in *Un chien andalou* (1929), della loro scelta di sintonizzare i raccordi di sguardo e movimento sulla lunghezza d'onda dell'incongruenza (la donna che apre la porta di casa e si ritrova su una spiaggia, per fare solo un esempio), non è azzardato considerare questa sequenza una scheggia di cinema surrealista conficcata nel corpo di un film hollywoodiano di genere. Il quale a sua volta da questa scheggia deve provvedere a liberare il proprio corpo, per evitare di rimanerne infetto. Attinente in questo al romanzo di Condon, che racconta i tormenti e gli incubi di un commilitone di Shaw sul quale il condizionamento non ha avuto effetti organici e pienamente riusciti, il film diventa allora *tout court* la storia di un'immagine, quella di cui siamo testimoni nella sequenza iniziale, nello specifico delle modalità con cui i personaggi provano a metabolizzarla e a gestire la sua flagrante incongruenza. Il loro sforzo produce esiti divergenti sul piano narrativo e iconografico. Per il maggiore Marco, afflitto dagli incubi come abbiamo visto in principio, il processo di addomesticamento dell'immagine coincide con un lento e faticoso lavoro di interpretazione della sua bizzarria e di padronanza dei suoi contenuti, mentre Shaw, che di quell'immagine è stato imbevuto, è più docile al suo potere, come peraltro a quello di ulteriori immagini stravaganti che trova disseminate sulla propria strada (la carta da gioco della donna di quadri innesca la sua obbedienza a chi ne controlla la mente e la volontà).

Considerato l'anno della sua uscita, all'inizio di un decennio nel quale la storia degli Stati Uniti sarà poi segnata in profondità da assassini politici, cospirazioni vere o presunte, paranoie collettive e individuali, *The Manchurian Candidate* è stato valutato soprattutto per la sua componente di premonizione, come un film in anticipo sui tempi, che intuisce con grande lucidità in quale *cul de sac* si stesse allora infilando la politica americana. In chiusura della sua monografia sul film, corredata da fotografie più che eloquenti (John Kennedy e Robert Kennedy, Lee Oswald e Jack Ruby, Malcolm X e John Lennon, per citarne solo alcune), lo storico della cultura Greil Marcus scrive: "It [the film] prefigured the sense that the events that

shape our lives take place in a world we cannot see, to which we have no access, that we will never be able to explain".[2]

C'è però un'altra prospettiva, estetica e non politica, a partire dalla quale valutare il carattere premonitore del film di Frankenheimer. Essa riguarda il ruolo performativo giocato dalle immagini, ovvero l'idea che le immagini condizionino gli individui in misura maggiore di quanto ne siano condizionate e controllate. Che esse abbiano dunque una vita propria, a partire dalla quale è possibile desumere pensieri, comportamenti, persino scelte morali. Secondo questa prospettiva, *The Manchurian Candidate* dunque non è semplicemente e soltanto il ritratto profetico di una civiltà, quella americana, imbarbarita da conflitti politici che trascendono l'etica delle relazioni sociali; è anche il ritratto, non meno premonitore, di una civiltà delle immagini capace di risucchiare dentro sé stessa, come la cultura postmoderna (di)mostrerà in modo esemplare nei decenni successivi, ogni ulteriore forma di antagonismo.

Raymond Shaw, il soldato incaricato di assassinare il candidato alla presidenza degli Stati Uniti, è un uomo la cui coscienza è stata narcotizzata e neutralizzata dalle immagini. Sono queste ultime, attraverso l'intermediazione di Shaw, a far deflagrare la politica americana, de-realizzandola attraverso un processo dove a contare sono la superficie, l'apparenza, il travestimento (in precedenza vediamo il politico americano che dovrebbe beneficiare del delitto compiuto da Shaw, partecipare ad un party in costume vestito da Abraham Lincoln).

Nell'epilogo di *The Manchurian Candidate* il maggiore Marco – in riferimento a Shaw che, preso dal rimorso per i delitti compiuti, ha infine deciso di togliersi la vita – afferma: "He freed himself at last". Ma a liberarsi, infine, è anche il film, dall'incongruenza di quelle immagini iniziali sotto il cui peso finiva per essere gravata l'intera narrazione. Liberazione peraltro provvisoria, vittoria di Pirro, perché il cinema americano, qualche anno più tardi, tornerà a fare i conti con il problema della pervasività e della performatività delle immagini, dunque con l'idea che le immagini in qualche modo siano in grado di condizionare tanto gli eventi quanto gli individui che se ne rendono artefici.

Alla luce di questo, ci si sarebbe potuto aspettare che il secondo adattamento del romanzo di Condon, firmato nel 2004 da Jonathan Demme, riprendesse il filo interrotto; laddove invece il film lo afferra, quello stesso filo, dal capo opposto, quello di una società nel frattempo colonizzata dal-

2 Greil Marcus, *The Manchurian Candidate* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), p. 75.

le immagini e segnata in profondità dalla loro onnipotenza. A ben vedere quella fra postmodernità e *The Manchurian Candidate* al cinema è una relazione interessante proprio in quanto, paradossalmente, poco tempestiva, rispettivamente in anticipo o in ritardo sui tempi. Ma per questo stesso motivo, la distanza, temporale ed estetica, che corre fra i due film esprime in modo esemplare quanto il cinema sia stato nel frattempo condizionato dalla postmodernità, considerato che entrambi gli adattamenti, complici gli obblighi di fedeltà almeno parziale al romanzo, devono misurarsi con personaggi ossessionati e posseduti dalle immagini.

Come spesso avviene, il confronto tra un film e il suo remake ci permette così, al di là della qualità delle singole opere, di misurare concretamente la distanza e la differenza che corre fra i diversi ambiti culturali ed estetici entro i quali sono stati realizzati. Come bene scrive Anat Zanger in un testo sull'argomento, "by way of repetition the object in the mainstream is not only repeated but re-designed according to the prevailing norms of society".[3] Di conseguenza, i remakes possono essere proficuamente ritenuti veri e propri "measuring devices for cultural transformations", come scrive Frank Kelleter.[4]

La diligenza formale con cui Frankenheimer realizzava la sequenza iniziale poneva le immagini di apertura del film sotto il segno dell'eccesso, di contenuto e di senso: come potevano le signore appassionate di fiori *e* gli statisti comunisti convivere pacificamente nelle stesse inquadrature, le une accanto agli altri? Come abbiamo detto, la storia del primo *The Manchurian Candidate* provvede gradualmente a neutralizzare quelle immagini, a narcotizzarne l'estraneità al contesto narrativo ed estetico che le ospitava. La seconda versione del romanzo invece vede la luce in un'epoca in cui le immagini imperversano nell'universo mediale attraverso una tale pluralità di forme materiali ed estetiche che la stessa nozione di estraneità finisce, al loro riguardo, per non avere più alcun senso. Non sono ora possibili immagini incongrue, né eccessive, poiché il cinema americano dei vent'anni precedenti ha educato lo spettatore ad accettare e leggere *qualsiasi* immagine, non importa quanto polimorfa e stravagante possa apparire in un primo tempo. Se l'eccesso di visione e di manipolazione – che Luca Malavasi

3 Anat Zanger, *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 23–24.

4 Frank Kelleter, *Remakes and Popular Seriality*, in Kathleen Loock, Constantine Verevis (eds.), *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 28.

giustamente individua come tratti costitutivi del cinema postmoderno[5] – dà caratteri di premonizione allo scenario descritto dal primo film, per lo stesso motivo preclude al secondo la possibilità di percorrere la medesima strada. L'immagine incongrua e indebita non ha più, nel film di Demme, diritto di cittadinanza, poiché nel frattempo si è andato definitivamente smarrendo, nel cinema americano e più in generale nella cultura occidentale, un criterio estetico a partire dal quale definire un'immagine come anomala o impropria.

Per questo motivo *The Manchurian Candidate* del 2004 si configura come una specie di catalogo dei dispositivi di visione propri della contemporaneità, ovvero delle varie modalità attraverso le quali la tecnologia ci consente di (e ci sollecita a) guardare: immagini subacquee, immagini televisive, immagini al computer, immagini ad infrarossi, immagini ecografiche, immagini microscopiche, immagini di sorveglianza. E naturalmente, immagini cinematografiche, presenti accanto alle altre ma al contempo, di fatto, impossibilitate ad assumere un rilievo maggiore delle altre.

La cospirazione al potere politico viene, nel secondo film come nel primo, infine sventata e neutralizzata. Ma è la cospirazione al potere dell'immagine cinematografica che invece il secondo *The Manchurian Candidate* non riesce ad arginare, registrandone l'affermazione in modo quasi impotente. Se nella versione del 1962 il film poteva espellere come corpo estraneo un repertorio di immagini assemblate in modo convenzionale ma eversive nel contenuto, quella del 2004 deve arrendersi all'evidenza di un'estetica ibrida, meticcia, segnata da paradigmi della visione che si succedono fra loro senza soluzione di continuità, soprattutto senza produrre nulla di eversivo. Le immagini fluttuano, navigano sulla superficie del film senza che sia possibile subordinarle ad una gerarchia estetica o differenziarle in base ad un criterio di appropriatezza.

Forse lo scarto può essere misurato in modo ancora più evidente se ci poniamo in una prospettiva che, invece di considerare i due film come versioni successive del medesimo romanzo, li valuta semplicemente come l'uno il remake dell'altro. Questo ci permette di contestualizzare il film di Demme alla pratica della riscrittura, della riproduzione di un originale, che nell'estetica postmoderna in un modo o nell'altro reca sempre ben chiare, sul piano culturale o estetico, le stimmate della distanza, dell'impossibilità di attenersi rigorosamente al modello. Se nel primo film l'attentato alla presidenza degli Stati Uniti nasceva dall'esterno, da una cospirazione co-

5 Luca Malavasi, *Postmoderno e cinema. Nuove prospettive d'analisi* (Roma: Carocci, 2017), p. 144.

munista ordita da cinesi e sovietici, nel secondo la questione riguarda la possibilità di innestare, direttamente nell'organismo dei soldati, minuscole sonde in grado di condizionarne il comportamento. A trarne benefici non sarebbe una potenza straniera ma una multinazionale, denominata Manchurian Global, con la quale è in combutta la madre dell'attentatore, la stessa che nella prima versione si rivelava complice dei comunisti. Lo scarto del remake consiste dunque, sul piano narrativo, nella rinuncia ad uno scenario da guerra fredda in favore di uno imprenditoriale, dove il profitto non è politico né ideologico, ma puramente economico. Il pericolo non proviene dall'esterno, ma è interno al sistema stesso, organico alla logica del capitalismo più aggressivo e irresponsabile.

Variante opportuna, in linea coi tempi, storicamente sensata. Ma anche alquanto significativa in relazione al ruolo giocato dalle immagini, ovvero allo scarto che riguarda il piano estetico. Dove vediamo delinearsi un panorama nel quale ad essere cruciale non è più la nozione di *differenza* (di una ideologia dall'altra, di un'immagine dall'altra), ma quella di *accumulo* (di profitto e di immagini). La distanza che corre dal primo film, cruciale sotto il profilo espressivo, va dunque commisurata alla voracità iconica che caratterizza il secondo, e alla conseguente impossibilità di repertoriare le immagini e di arginare la loro proliferazione. L'imperversare incontrollato di immagini che ora non possono più essere ricondotte alle distinzioni convenzionali tra oggettivo e soggettivo, reale ed onirico, concreto e fantastico, rimanda ad una congiuntura storica nella quale il cinema, ormai pienamente postmoderno, ha acquisito una porosità estrema, tale da assorbire ogni figura di estraneità e ricondurla al proprio multiforme paradigma estetico.

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Annalisa Pellino

MODERNISM RE-ENACTED
Decolonial Forms of Moving Image and Curatorial Practice in *Documenta11* (2002)

This essay proposes a reading of *Documenta11* (2002) as a "paradigm-shifting exhibition"[1] that, within the frame of a globalised art system in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, inaugurated a new discursive approach that overcame the North-Atlantic protocols of curatorial practice. The proposal takes into consideration a theoretical frame that considers postmodernism not as an overcoming of the modernism, but as an internal formation to its plot from a cultural, aesthetic and media perspective.[2] I intend to show how in the wake of the post-colonial and de-colonial critique, the great European exhibition – stemmed within the modernist epistemological framework of 20th Century – dismissed the Western affordances of both modernist and postmodernist approaches. I will also focus on Okwui Enwezor's curatorial choice to restructure the exhibition into a totally new configuration around the *black box* – in place of the *white cube* as the epitome of Western modernism – in order to re-enact[3] modernism and affirm new forms of art and curatorial practices oriented by the idea of *multiple modernities* and temporalities.[4]

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1 T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image. The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (New York: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 35.

2 Stuart Hall, 'Modernism and Cultural Studies. First Encounters', in *Stuart Hall, Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (London-New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 131–221; Elio Franzini, *Moderno e Postmoderno. Un bilancio* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2018); Ruggero Eugeni, *Posts. How media defined, un-defined and re-defined Modernity*, in International Conference, University of Genoa, December 5th-6th 2019. For a general overview on postmodern in western museology and art theory and practice see Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983).

3 Cf. Cristina Baldacci, 'Reenactment: Errant Images in Contemporary Art', in *Re-: An Errant Glossary*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, Cultural Inquiry, 15, 2019, pp. 57–67 <https://doi.org/10.25620/ci- 15_07>.

4 Cf. Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (London: Duke University

Documenta *and the roots of contemporary art*

During the Nineties the contemporary art system was characterised by a double turning point: the *discursive turn*[5] of artistic and curatorial practices, in which it is possible to recognise a path that adopts the postcolonial and decolonial approach[6] to question the institutional legitimacy; and the *cinematic turn*, which usually indicates the relocation of cinema from the movie theater to the exhibition space (museums and galleries).[7]

Conceived as a material and symbolic *dispositif*, *Documenta11* is a watershed in the process of institutional recognition of postcolonial and decolonial thought that – along with feminist and queer studies – had long been shaking the structure of Western knowledge and its systems of legitimisation and representation.[8] Intended as a *locus of discursivity, Documenta11* destabilised the former apparatus and its protocols, namely the exhibition as a *locus of identity* of the modernist discourse. Indeed, *documenta* was founded in 1955 with the aim of bringing again European art of the Twentieth century within the great narrative of international modernism, in order to resume the artistic discourse interrupted by the Second World War.

Press, 2008); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Cf. also the recent Okwui Enwezor: 'The Art of Curating', *NKa Journal. Contemporary African Art*, 48, 2021 <https://read.dukeupress.edu/nka/issue/2021/48?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=This%20special%20issue&utm_campaign=j-NKA_48_Jun2021>.

5 Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', in *Curating Subjects*, ed. by Paul O'Neill (London-Amsterdam: Open Editions & De Appel, 2007); cf. Simon Sheikh, 'Curating and Research. An Uneasy Alliance', in *Curatorial Challenges. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Contemporary Curating*, ed. by Malene Vest Hansen, Anne Folke Henningsen, Anne Gregersen (London-New York: Routledge, 2019); Marie Laurberg, Margriet Schavemaker, *Between the Discursive and the Immersive: Curating Research in the 21st Century Art Museum* <https://bit.ly/2OsZRES>.

6 Cf. Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (New York: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 149–180.

7 Cf. Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-images: photos, cinéma, vidéo* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1990); Philippe Dubois (ed.), 'Cinéma et art contemporain / Cinema and Contemporary Visual Arts', *Cinéma&Cie, International Film Studies Journal*, 8, 2006; Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy. Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); François Bovier, Adeena Mey (eds.), *Exhibiting the Moving Image: History Revisited* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015); Id., *Cinema in the Expanded Field*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).

8 Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti, Michela Quadraro (eds.), *Ritorni Critici, La sfida degli studi culturali e postcoloniali* (Milano: Meltemi, 2018).

According to its creator, Arnold Bode, the exhibition would have to "re-engage in conversation" the modernist discourse, to celebrate the victory of humanist culture over despotism and to reveal the "roots of contemporary art". From this point on Documenta took on the role of the most important exhibition of European artistic scenario and, at the end of the century, of the international one within the so-called "biennalisation" phenomenon.[9]

Discursive (curatorial) turn: from forms to practices

The *biennalisation* takes on a specific function in the general reconfiguration of the contemporary art system, inasmuch as, if the exhibitions (along with the permanent collections of museums and archives) have been the main medium for the art reception within the modernist framework, the biennials have the same role for contemporary culture.[10] Several scholars consider biennalisation at the same time as cause and effect of globalisation: Paul O'Neill notes for example how this has often been the main theme of the biennials during the nineties.[11] While Simon Sheikh, paraphrasing Fredric Jameson, states that their proliferation corresponds to the "cultural logic of globalisation" as it tends to homogenise exhibition formats, artists and works.[12] If globalisation encouraged the geographic expansion of *audiences* and spaces, and the becoming visible of instances until then "peripheral", on the other hand, the contemporary art system also fostered some aspects

9 Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds, Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating After the Global. Roadmaps for the Present* (Cambridge-London: The MIT Press, 2017). Cf. Panos Kompatsiaris, *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials. Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art* (London-New York: Routledge, 2017). Cf. Anna Cestelli Guidi, *La 'documenta' di Kassel. Percorsi dell'arte contemporanea* (Milano: Costa&Nolan, 1997).

10 This expression points at the rapid proliferation of the great exhibitions, that take place on an international scale every two years but also three, four, five or seven years. Cf. Bruce Altshuler, (ed.) *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that made Art History. Volume 1: 1863-1959; Volume 2: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon Press 2008-2013). Cf. also Stefania Zuliani, *Esposizioni. Emergenze della critica d'arte contemporanea* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2012); Vittoria Martini, Federica Martini, *Just another exibition: storie e politiche delle Biennali* (Milano: Postmedia, 2011).

11 Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge-London: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 81.

12 Simon Sheikh, 'Morbid Symptoms: Curating in Times of Uncertainty and De-Globalization. An Introduction', in Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson (eds.), pp. 26 and 72.

of globalisation, generating new forms of cultural colonialism. It nurtured special areas of culture-oriented economic development by stimulating gentrification processes, and intensified the cultural tourism flows by transforming the exhibition into a spectacular social ritual. However, it has also been pointed out that, within the biennials, there is a number of spaces of protest and resistance where it is possible to build counter-visions, alternative to the institutional inertia.[13] Therefore, biennials may be, quoting Oliver Marchart, "big hegemonic machines"[14] for the production of cultural hegemony[15] and, at the same time, they are also programmatically experimental and unstable spaces that allow a wider and faster circulation of discourses thanks to the coming on stage of new actors.[16]

The curators' role reflects this transformation. At the beginning of the twentieth century their figure is closely linked to the modernism, to the birth of museums and to the history of exhibitions – they are the caretakers and the mediators of the collection and its exhibition methods. Whilst from the Sixties onwards they have increasingly become nomadic and independent: Ralph Rugoff call them "jet-set flaneurs",[17] Brad Buckley and John Conomos a sort of "flying curator [...] as much a mediator of artists and their public as of static objects".[18] Then, in moving toward a global dimension, they emancipate themselves from the exclusive relationship with the collections, in order to address artists, audiences and events. Within this scenario it took place a sort of polarisation between the curatorship intended as an "exhibition-making practice" focused on the forms of the display,[19] and the curatorship intended as an expanded and "discours-oriented practice".[20] In particular, Buckley and Conomos

13 Oliver Marchant, 'Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennalization: the Case of Documenta (2008)', *The Biennial Reader. An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. by Elene Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (Berlin: Hatje Cantz 2010), pp. 466–490.

14 Oliver Marchant.

15 Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, Dorothee Richter, 'Contemporary Art Biennials – Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency', *On Curating*, 46, 2020.

16 Cf. Elene Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (eds.), cit., p. 20; Milena Hlavajova, 'How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to Art Institution', pp. 296–297.

17 Ralph Rugoff, 'Rules of the Game', *Frieze*, 44, 1999, pp. 47–49.

18 Brad Buckley, John Conomos (eds.), *A Companion to Curation* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), pp. XIIV–XLIV.

19 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica-San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

20 Cf. Eszter Lázár, <https://bit.ly/3gd88cd> [accessed 21 Feb. 2021]; Hal Foster, *What comes after Farce?* (London: Verso, 2020), pp. 121–130; id., *The Return of*

recognized within the curatorial turn a whole new generation of curators and scholars interested in *emerging* artistic productions[21] from the geographic areas not touched by the modernist narration. Trained within the decolonisation processes and inspired by postcolonial and decolonial theories, these new actors tend to adopt discursive and collaborative forms of artistic and curatorial practice. In a process that involves theory and practice, this approach takes up the model of cultural studies intended, with Stuart Hall, as "discursive formation" in the sense given by Michel Foucault,[22] since they take into account the plurality of discourses criticising the alleged neutrality of institutions. In question, then, is not so much the *raison d'être* of biennials, but how they are able to leave the North-Atlantic framework, to become spaces of possibilities for post-national and post-identity practices in which *pluri-versality* can emerge. Athena Athanasiou states that, in the face of the shift from utterances to speeches, from forms to practices, this kind of curatorship turns into both a theoretical and a political questioning, because it considers the system as an apparatus that regulates the relationship between power, knowledge and subjectivity – precisely in the wake of Foucauldian *dispositif/apparatus* theory.[23]

the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Claire Bishop, 'Former West: Art as Project in the Early 1990s', Id., *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

21 The adjective "emerging" refers both to new subjects and to practices that produce new meanings, values and relationships. It is taken up by Raymond Williams who distinguishes *dominant* cultural moments (tradition and the status quo), *residual* ones (placed at distance but part of the dominant system and serve to legitimise the domination relationship) and *emerging* ones (contain elements of implicit or explicit dissent). Cf. id., *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121–127. Cf. also Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Teresa De Lauretis, 'Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness', *Feminist Studies*, 16, 1, 1990, pp. 115–150.

22 Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', in David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), pp. 261–274. Cf. Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

23 Athena Athanasiou, Simon Scheick, 'Formations of Political-Aesthetic Criticality: Decolonizing the Global in Times of Humanitarian Viewership', in Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds, Mick Wilson (eds.), pp. 71–94.

Documenta 11 *and the "postcolonial constellation"*

Okwui Enwenzor's *documenta11* fits into this scenario as a symptom of the postmodern formalism's end, long before the Nicolas Bourriaud's *Altermodern Manifesto* that, according to Walter Mignolo is a form of "'eurocentric critique of eurocentrism', a 'nice' and 'generous' repetition of 'imperial design' that could only ultimately promote the forms of an increasingly polycentric, globalized capitalism itself – at best an 'interesting provincial option'".[24] Taking up the well-known metaphor of Frantz Fanon, the curator conceived the exhibition as a moment of *tabula rasa* – necessary for the beginning of any "decolonisation". Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the most appropriate expression to describe Enwezor's intervention is not so much *decolonisation* as decolon*ial*isation.[25] The notion of decoloniality refers to the thought that is exercised to change the theory and the order of ideas that regulate the power relations, it is an epistemic project that goes beyond the historical experience of political emancipation of the colonies.[26] Decoloniality is a "syncopated and jeopardized space-time"[27] that consists, with Rachele Borghi, in "multiplying the places of enunciation" within uneven territories, feeding a "constellation of micro-policies".[28] In this case, the gesture of Enwezor is aimed at subverting – today we would say queering – the centre-periphery model[29] proper of the colonial conception of the world and out of date within a global dimension,

24 Cf. David Cunningham, 'Returns of the Modern: On Nicolas Bourriaud's Altermodern', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 9, 1, 2009, p. 7; <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/altermodern-explain-altermodern/altermodern-explained>.

25 Cf. 'Decolonizing Art Institutions', *On Curating*, 35, 2017.

26 Cf. Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Walter Mignolo, Catherine E. Walsh (eds.), *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (New York: Duke University Press, 2018). Cf. Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Washington: Haward University Press, 1999).

27 Gennaro Ascione, *Science and the Decolonization of Social Theory. Unthinking Modernity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 144.

28 Rachele Borghi, *Decolonialità e privilegio. Pratiche femministe e critica al sistema-mondo* (Milano: Meltemi, 2020), pp. 63–92.

29 Cf. Christoph Behnke,Valérie Knoll, Ulf Wuggenig (eds.), *Art in the Periphery of the Center* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015). Cf. 'Centres-Peripheries', *On Curating* 41, 2019; Anthony Gardner, Charles Green, 'Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges on the Global Exhibition', *On Curating - The documenta Issue*, 33, 2017, pp. 109–121.

because both the economic and political institutional power manifests itself in a discontinuous and accelerated manner.

Born in Nigeria but trained within the New York cultural scene between the eighties and nineties, Enwezor went along with this discontinuity to show the antinomies of a model that no longer corresponds to the real circuits of contemporary art. With his co-curators – Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya – he organised five platforms of film screening and public programs, conferences and workshops: Democracy Unrealized (Wien-Berlin);[30] Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation (New Delhi);[31] Creolité and Creolization (St. Lucia – Little Antilles);[32] Under Siege: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos.[33] Each platform took place in a different location and, in line with a strategy of interdisciplinary involvement of theory with practice – it was accompanied by a publication gathering essays from several intellectuals – including Stuart Hall, Chantal Mouffe, Iain Chambers, Oliver Marchart, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Homi K. Bhabha, Ernesto Laclau, Derek Walcott, Jan Bernabé among others. In *Documenta11* postcolonial and decolonial cultural criticism thus becomes a critique of and within the (post-)modernism-driven institution itself, through a centrifugal movement that goes far beyond the classic hundred-days exhibition in the heart of old Europe.

Homi Bhabha – to whom Enwezor explicitly refers in his essay for the exhibition catalogue – questions the mechanism that orient the identification of the places of culture at the end of the millennium, considering them not only as physical spaces but first of all as the relationship between the subjects and the institutions.[34] Places of culture are outside the dialectic center-periphery, both in the former colonies and within the western metropolis, that is, in the sub-text/substratum of the Otherness that has crossed modernity as anachronism and karst movement, to be recognized in its

30 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta11 Platform1* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

31 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation: Documenta11 Platform2* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

32 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11 Platform3* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

33 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.) *Under Siege: Four African Cities-Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. Documenta11 Platform4* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002).

34 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

significant force as an alternative and persistent idea of modernity only at the turn of the 20th century.

Deterritorialisation and relocation: white cube and black box

The fifth and final platform, the *Exhibition*, took place in Kassel, proposing a de-regulation of the exhibition itself as a medium, addressing another aspect of the North-Atlantic paradigm: the white cube as the epitome of Western modernism. Enwezor restructured the whole exhibition around the idea of *black box*, placing it as an explicit counterpoint of the *white cube* as the epitome of Western modernism. But the curator's interest in the black box lacks the theoretical implications it has for film studies.[35] What is relevant for Enwezor is that in the black box Bhabha's idea of an interstitial, differential and performative "Third Space" subverts the white cube protocols oscillating between "regulation and negotiation".[36] In this regard, the exchange between George Baker and Hal Foster within a round table dedicated to the moving image in contemporary art is illuminating:

> Baker: […] The most interesting artists working with film are specifically working out of a geographical relationship of peripherality to Hollywood, for example, people like Stan Douglas in Vancouver, or William Kentridge in Johannesburg, or Eija-Liisa Ahtila in Finland. And when the artist in fact comes out of L.A., such as Paul Sietsema or Sharon Lockhart, they take their camera to Paris or to Japan or to South America. This links back to the question of the most recent Documenta, Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11*, and its thorough investment in the projected image. There's a connection here between...
>
> Foster: The peripheral and the projected?
>
> Baker: Yes. One of the most interesting uses of the projected image now is to disidentify with commercial, Hollywood cinema, and to somehow reconnect to and explore legacies within film that are outside of the Hollywood or the mass-cultural.[37]

35 Cf. Cosetta G. Saba, 'Extended Cinema. The Performative Power of Cinema in Installation Practices', *Cinéma & Cie. International Film Studies Journal*, 20, 2013; Cosetta G. Saba, Cristiano Poian (eds.), *Unstable Cinema. Film and Contemporary Visual Arts* (Udine: Campanotto Editore, 2007).

36 Homi Bhabha, p. 304.

37 Malcom Turvey, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Anthony McCall, 'Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art', *October*, 104, 2003, pp. 71–96.

This idea of the meeting between "peripheral" cultural perspectives and the installation of moving images clarifies the choice of Enwezor to assume the black box as a "cultural technique" of the post-colonial critique, establishing almost a kind of mutual exclusion – more symbolic than material – between white cube and black box. From this point of view the white cube is interpreted as a functional device to the normalised assimilation of the Other on the false line of modernist primitivism,[38] or as the anaesthetising instrument of the abstraction of art from its context, the ideal background, white, immaculate and almost mystical, for the work you want autonomous, sheltered from the real, out of time and forgetful.[39]

From a completely different perspective, the white cube has assumed the function of a liberating but protected space, as well as an opportunity to reinvigorate the cinema against the background of post-cinematic development and within the framework of the so-called "convergence culture".[40] Scholars such as Francesco Casetti and Thomas Elsaesser, for example, welcomed the relocation of the cinema into the exhibition space.[41] Film studies affirmed the seductive idea of spectator freedom within the exhibition, in contrast with the disciplinary posture imposed by the closed and dark space of the movie theater that places the viewer in a sort of "captivity".[42] Conversely, from the perspective of exhibition studies, authors such as Claire Bishop and Boris Groys ascribed the same function to the black box, interpreting the mobility of the spectator within the cinematographic installation as an element of emancipation from a more contemplative classical vision, but in the wake of a general minimalist decentralisation of the point of view – that frees perception by shifting the gaze from the limits of the frame to the most open and dynamic one of the exhibition space.[43]

38 On the relationship between primitivism and modernism cf. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

39 Cf. Brian O'Doherty; Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 39–42; Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins', *October*, 13, 1980, pp. 41–57.

40 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York: NY University Press 2006).

41 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Is a Factory a Museum?', *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 60, 1, 2019, pp. 42–52; Francesco Casetti; Id., 'La questione del dispositivo', *Fata Morgana,* 20, 2013.

42 Cf. Jean-Luc Baudry (1970), trans. by Alan Williams, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly*, 28, 2, 1974-1975, pp. 39–47.

43 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005). Boris Groys, *The Topology of Contemporary Art*, Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), pp. 71–80. Cf. Boris Groys, Politics of Installation, *Journal #02*, 2009

Nevertheless, trying to establish an order of precedence or causality risks to reduce the complexity of this encounter between cinema and contemporary art.[44] Indeed, far from functioning as a mere new setting for cinema, the white cube is also, in agreement with Erika Balsom, first and foremost a *dispositif*.[45] As such it has its own history and reflects an institutional framework, protocols and associated practices, as well as an ideology that can produce mystification.[46] Hito Steyerl for example doesn't recognise the emancipatory function of the mobility of the film experience within the exhibition space, reproaching museum the betrayal of the cinematic duration: in particular she deemed *Documenta11* to expose an excessive amount of moving images that no spectator could see in its entirety. For Steyerl, therefore, even if the exhibition space is a protected place for the relocated cinema, it remains within an exceptional condition and does not realise its political and communitarian utopia, in that the cinematographic installation addresses a fragmented multitude of spectators and prevents the formation of a social body grounded on the experience of a shared vision.[47] Nevertheless, if on the one hand it is possible to agree with this idea, on the other it could be objected, with Elsaesser, that it reflects a classical model of spectatorship proper to narrative cinema. The scholar asks: "Who determines the time, the location, and the kind of attention appropriate to a film once it enters the art space?".[48] For Elsaesser the real dilemma of

<https://bit.ly/3gYl7P8>; Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, 1967. Cf. also Stefania Zuliani, 'Senza cornice. Spazi e tempi dell'installazione', 2015 <https://www.arshake.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Critical-Grounds-04-Stefania-Zuliani-Senza-Cornice.pdf>.

44 On the so-called "querelle des dispositifs" cf. Philippe Dubois, Frédéric Monvoisin, Elena Biserna (eds.), *Extended Cinema. Le cinéma gagne du terrain* (Udine: Campanotto Editore, 2010); Raymond Bellour, *La Querelle des dispositifs. Cinéma – installations, expositions* (Paris: POL, 2012); Francesco Casetti.

45 Cf. Julian Myers-Szupinska, 'Exhibitions as Apparatus', *The Exhibitionist: Journal on Exhibition Making: The First Six Years*, ed. by Jens Hoffmann, Julian Myers-Szupinska, Liz Glass (New York: D.A.P. 2017), pp. 16–23; François Bovier, Adeena Mey (eds.); Andrew V. Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

46 Erika Balsom, p. 51.

47 Hito Steyerl, 'Is a Museum a Factory?', in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. by Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), pp. 319–332.

48 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Is a Factory a Museum?', *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Wayne State University Press, 60, 1 2019, pp. 42–52. Cf. Id., '*Ingmar Bergman in the Museum? Thresholds, Limits, Conditions of Possibility'*, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, n.1, 2009 <https://bit.ly/32jsGMf> [accessed 21 Feb. 2021].

the problematic encounter between these two devices, the cinema and the exhibition, is the fact of creating a hybrid body that offers an experience of duration in space – of *spatialized time*.[49]

In fact, the cause that determines the spectator emancipation, still in agreement with Balsom, cannot be traced exclusively neither to mobility, nor to the duration. The filmic event within the exhibition space is rather the result of the convergence of different elements that make it a situated experience impossible to theorise in a definitive way. The black box enter into the white cube producing a sort of cross-pollination between the two apparatuses, an assemblage that requires continuous negotiation giving rise to a wide range of physical and expressive possibilities, to which corresponds the same amount of audience responses, themselves conditioned by the context.

Aware of the problematic nature of the widespread presence of moving images in large exhibitions, Mark Nash – Enwezor's co-curator for the moving image section – argues that cinematic is a "key mode" in the formation of contemporary subjectivity.[50] In the thirty years that preceded *Documenta11*, the film and the artist's video has established itself as one of the dominant discourses of contemporary art, re-enacting and reconfiguring the practices of experimental and avant-garde cinema, those of the Hollywood fiction and documentary, those related to the archives of the twentieth century, as well as artistic and curatorial practice *tout court*.[51]

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49 Cf. Alessandro Bordina, Vincenzo Estremo, Francesco Federici (eds.), *Extended Temporalities. Transient Visions in the Museum and in Art* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2017); Sandra Lischi, 'Film da percorrere: l'installazione 'cinematografata'', *Predella. Journal of Visual Arts* <https://bit.ly/32kFulm> [accessed 21 Feb. 2021].

50 Mark Nash, 'Art and Cinema. Some Critical Reflections', in Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), pp. 129–136.

51 Here a list of artists and works in alphabetical order: Eija-Liisa Ahtila (*The House*, 2002); Chantal Akerman (*From the Other Side*, 2002); G. A. Ancelovici - Colectivo Cine Ojo (*Memoirs of an Everyday War*, 1986); Michael Ashkin *(Proof Range*, 1999); Kutlug Ataman (*Semiha B. Unplugged*, 1997; *Never my Soul,* 2001; *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read*, 2002); The Atlas Group (*The Operator #17 file: I Think it Would be Better if you Could Weep*, 2000; *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*, 2001); Black Audio Film Collective (*Handsworth Song*, 1986); Pavel Braila (*Shoes for Europe*, 2001); James Coleman (*Photograph*, 1998-99); Stan Douglas (*Win, Place our Show*, 1999; *Le Détroit*, 2000); Park Fiction (*Hamburg Dialog – That's Gentrification*, 2001); Yang Fudong (*The Strange Heaven*, 1997); Douglas Gordon (*Left Is Right and Right Is Wrong and Left Is Wrong and Right Is Right*, 1999); Pierre Huyghe (*Les Grands Ensembles*, 1994-2001; *Atari Light*, 1999; *The Third Memory*, 2000; *No Ghost Just a Shell*, 2000; *Interludes*, 2001;

In the present case, the selection of film-installations within *Documenta11* is oriented by the questions posed in the mid-1980s by cultural theory in Great Britain,[52] whose merit was first of all to politicise the theory and to overcome the idea of a spectator intended as a universal subject, disembodied and out of history.[53]

This approach reflected in the fact that, while the critical discourse on the white cube has put the emphasis on the space within a visual regime based on the disembodied eye, the discourse on the black box questioned the situated look and the kinematic body also in its pre-cognitive and affective dimension,[54] interpreting the cinematic experience in its whole materiality.[55]

Lighting P*rototype*, 2001; *One Millions Kingdoms*, 2001); Igloolik Isuma Productions (*Our Land*, 1995); Sanja Ivekovic (*Personal Cuts*, 1982); Isaac Julien (*Trussed*, 1996; *Vagabondia*, 2000); William Kentridge (*Confessions*, 2001); Joan van der Keuken (*Eye Above the Well*, 1988); Svetlana & Igor Kopystiansky (*Flow*, 2002); Steve McQueen (*Exodus,* 1992-97; *Current*, 1999; *Prey*, 1999; *Girls, Tricky*, 2001; *Now*, 2002); Jonas Mekas (*As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*, 2000); Feng Mengbo (*Q4U*, 2001-02); Trihn Mihn-Ha (*Naked Spaces: Living is Round*, 1985; *The Fourth Dimension*, 2001); Shirin Neshat (*The Shadow Under the Web*, 1997; *Soliloquy Series*, 1999; *Possessed,* 2001); Ulrike Ottinger (*Ticket of No Return*, 1979; *Freak Orlando*, 1981); Pere Portabella (*Warsaw Bridge*, 1989); Seifollah Samadian (*The White Station*, 1999); Eyal Sivan (*Itsembatsemba, Rwanda, One Genocide Later*, 1996); Jean-Marie Teno (*A Trip to the Country*, 2000).

52 Cf. Michele Cometa, *Studi Culturali* (Napoli: Guida, 2010); Stuart Hall, *Il soggetto e la differenza. Per un'archeologia degli studi culturali e postcoloniali* (Roma: Meltemi, 2016); David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen.

53 Mark Nash, pp. 129–136.

54 Cf. 'Performing Body, Projecting Screen', *Anglistica AION: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 11, 1-2, 2007. On the role of affects in the process of the "construction of cultural mind" cf. Antonio Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things. Life, Feeling, and the Making of Culture* (London: Penguin, 2019).

55 Cf. Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University Press, 2014); Id. *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002).

Conclusion

(Re)thinking the institution and thinking through the institution[56] is one of the most debated issues of contemporary art, because it questions its legitimacy, the autonomy of art and its aesthetic canons. This phenomenon, recognized as "new institutionalism"[57] is often intertwined with critical theories that focus on emerging subjectivities: postcolonial/decolonial, feminist and queer. In this case, the new institutionalism proposed by *Documenta11* looks at the relationship between cultural identity, global knowledge circuits and spectatorship. Following the trajectory suggested by Catherine David[58] – curator of *documentaX* where she already exposed the omissions of Western art history from a post-national point of view – Enwezor does not exclude the exhibition but questions its centrality as the uniquely outcome of artistic production. The exhibition is de-structured and converted into a *locus of discursivity* where to "perform" the theory, in the public sphere of the expanded and a-centric "post-colonial constellation": quoting Enwezor "[T]he project of *Documenta11* was conceived not as an exhibition, but as a constellation of public spheres. [...] in the domain of the discursive rather than of the museological".[59]

In a historical moment of huge "political transitions and frictions" and of "global institutional consolidation" of *documenta*, Enwezor chooses to deal with the spectres of modernism and of its post-modern projections.[60] In this way the curator deals with the issue of the *predicament*[61] of contemporary art, precisely due to the problematic relationship between artistic practices and globalisation, as well as between the historicism and cultural approach.

56 Paul O'Neill, *How Institutions Think. Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse* (Cambridge-London: The MIT Press, 2017).

57 Jonas Ekeberg, *New Institutionalism* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003). Cf. James Voorhies (ed.), *What Ever Happened to New Institutionalism?* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014); Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig Books, 2013); 'Institution as a Medium. Curating as an Institutional Critique?', *On Curating*, 8, 2011.

58 Cf. 'Retrospective: documenta X, 21 June-28 September 1997', <https://bit.ly/3fxFoux>.

59 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.), *Documenta11, Platform 5*, p. 54. Cf. Okwui Enwezor, *The Postcolonial Constellation. Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition,* in Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), pp.207–234.

60 Okwui Enwezor et al. (eds.).

61 Cf. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, David Joselit, 'The Predicament of Contemporary Art', in *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 671–679.

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POSTMODERN (AND) MEDIA

Ruggero Eugeni

OUT OF THE POST
How Media Defined, Un-Defined and Re-Defined Modernity

1. *Prepomo, pomo, popomo*

This intervention proposes three mutually related arguments (yes, I know, I am adopting a style that is anything but postmodern: but I assure you that it is not because I love returns to order, but for the simple desire for clarity). My first point is that both the definitions of the postmodern trend and the various movements pretending to overcome it are affected by the concurrent transformations of the media system to a greater extent than they usually admit. In other words, to correctly understand the debates on postmodern and post-postmodern tendencies, it is essential to consider the evolution of the media over the last fifty years or so.[1]

Second, in more detail, I argue that the spring of the postmodern condition is intimately linked to the last season of electric media, between the 1970s and 1990s of the twentieth century: during this period, the multiplication and ubiquity of media screens lead to the birth of "mediascapes"; these new media environments exasperate the contrast between media experience and real experience, which has already arisen since the end of the 1950s. In turn, the overcoming of the postmodern trend is linked to a complete affirmation of electronic and digital media from the 1990s onwards: the images they carry become part of more general data flow management processes that transcend the medial sphere and expand to various social practices (defence, surveillance, medicine, trade, etc.); the new images that derive from it are operational, that is, they imply not only being observed but instead effectively operating within and on different environments.

Finally, my third argument is that the transition from electric media to electronic-digital media is linked to the shift from postmodern to post-postmodern trends because of transformations that take place in the epistemic status of images. Indeed, the last phase of electric media is marked by a

1 This point has already been very well focused by Luca Malavasi, *Postmoderno e cinema. Nuove prospettive d'analisi* (Roma: Carocci, 2017).

tendential scepticism towards images, while digital electronic media introduce a renewed confidence in their ability to render the real and operate on it – yet no longer directly but through the visualization and manipulation of data structures that constitute world models and that can actually operate within and on the world. This renewed trust in the relationship between images and reality helps explain the new climate of realism and the ethical and political commitments that characterize the "post-postmodern" trends. However, this turning point does not imply a return to a pre-postmodern situation at all but, rather, the opening of a new phase based on the use of algorithmic models for the control and appropriation of the world.

A little terminological note before starting. In Anglo-Saxon academic jargon, the use of abbreviating the term postmodern(ism) with the term "pomo" is widespread. Likewise, out of a desire for consistency, I will call the post-postmodern(ism) "popomo" and the pre-postmodern(ism) "prepomo". The reader is warned.

2. *Pomo and popomo for dummies*

Before proceeding, I should briefly introduce the two protagonists of this article: pomo and popomo. Regarding the first of the two terms, I certainly do not intend to retrace the events of pomo or its numerous definitions analytically: over the past fifteen years or so, several reliable surveys of it have been published - which, moreover, are themselves the signal of the closure or overcoming of a historical and cultural cycle.[2] I will only recap a few chronological and thematic points of reference.

2 *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Third Edition, ed. by Stuart Sim (London–New York: Routledge, 2011); Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne,* Siebente Auflage (Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 2008); Gary Aylesworth, 'Postmodernism', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta et al., Spring (2015 edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/); *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* ed. by Brian McHale, Len Platt (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Lucy Niall et al., *A Dictionary of Postmodernism* (Malden–Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016); *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction*, ed. by Paula Geyh (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michel Maffesoli, *Être postmoderne* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2018); Matthias Stephan, *Defining Literary Postmodernism for the Twenty-First Century* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); *The Routledge Introduction to American Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda Wagner-Martin (New York–London: Routledge, 2019); Michael Kane,

As it is known, pomo was defined with precision (not only as a generic anti-modernism but with some specific characteristics) starting from the early 1970s; it took effect throughout the 1980s and then entered a progressive crisis during the 1990s. This trend arose in numerous fields: literary with Ian Hassan[3]; architectural with Roberto Venturi, Charles Jencks and others[4]; philosophical and theoretical with Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Gianni Vattimo, and many others[5]; sociological and anthropological with Alain Touraine and later with David Harvey.[6]

Starting from these premises, it is clear that the adjective "postmodern" is an umbrella term that embraces and connects different objects and methods of analysis. I distinguish in this regard four broad levels:

- A sociological and socio-economic foundation that I call *postmodernity*: we can place here the "Post-industrial society" of Alain Touraine or David Bell; Fredric Jameson's "Late Capitalism"; David Harvey's "Flexible financial regime of accumulation", etc.

- A shared "condition" or "structure of feeling" that crosses and characterizes many manifestations of life and everyday experience: I call it *postmoderness*. We find on this level, for example, David Harvey's "time-space compression"; the "end of History" proposed by Francis Fukuyama; "The end of representational attitudes" of Hans Bertens; the "simulacrality" and the "hyperreality" of Jean Baudrillard, the "disappearance of reality" by Paul

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Postmodern Time and Space in Fiction and Theory, (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020). A proper meta survey is Hans Bertens, 'Postmodernism', *Oxford Bibliographies*, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0081.xml)> [accessed 21 July 2021].

3 Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

4 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge (Mass.)–London: MIT Press, 1972); Charles Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, 1st ed. (London: Academy, 1975).

5 Jean François Lyotard, *The postmodern condition. A Report on Knowledge* (1979), trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review,* 146 (1984), 59–92; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), trans. by S. F. Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994); Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture* (1985), trans. by John R. Snyder (New York: Polity Press, 1991).

6 Alaine Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society. Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society* (New York: Random House, 1971); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge (Mass)–Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

Virilio; and above all the "incredulity towards metanarratives", following the standard definition of pomo advanced by Jean-François Lyotard.

- A style of philosophical thought labelled in Anglo-Saxon countries as "the Theory": the *postmoderne* (in this case, I use the French term); it includes the "post-structuralism" of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and others (including the Nietzsche renaissance led by Michel Foucault); the "linguistic turn" by Richard Rorty (including the Wittgenstein renaissance); etc.

- A series of trends and expressive styles widespread in the different arts: we can adopt the term of *postmodernism*. Here, for example, we find the prevalence of the combinatorial game as an end in itself theorized by Ihab Habib Hassan; the anti-rationalist architecture based on quotations, pastiche and hybridization of styles theorized among others by Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks; the decomposition of the forms of fiction and the meta-reflexive exhibition of the act of narration in literature, of which John Barth, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh speak; the "concert film" oriented towards the immediate sensory, emotional and energetic involvement of its viewer described by Laurent Jullier, etc.

On the other side, popomo (that is, the overcoming of pomo) has undergone a long gestation as well. The first official signs of an "end of pomo" date back to the early 1990s, with the Stuttgart Conference of 1991;[7] in 1993, David Foster Wallace denounced the cynical industrialization of postmodernism on American television;[8] and at the end of the same decade, an alternative line to post-modernism was indicated by Rosalind Krauss with the term post-medium.[9] However, scholars mainly produced alternative formulations to pomo since the 2000s: in particular, a fortunate storytelling sets its conclusion in correspondence with the attack on the Twin Towers of 11/9/2001.[10] If we assume with Charles Jencks that pomo was born with the collapse of the modernist Pruitt-Igoe residential complex, at 3:32 pm on July 15, 1972; [11] and that it ends with the mirroring collapse of the second of the New York

7 *The End of Postmodernism: New Directions. Proceedings of the First Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies 04.08.–18.08.1991*, ed. by Heide Ziegler (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1993).

8 David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13:2 (1993), 151–194.

9 Rosalind Krauss, *"A voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

10 A summary of the debate in Philip Hammond, *Media, War, and Postmodernity* (New York–London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–12.

11 Charles A. Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, New edition (New York: Rizzoli International, 1977), p. 9.

twin towers, on 11 September 2001 at 10:27 am; we can precisely establish its duration: 29 years, 64 days, 18 hours and 55 minutes. In any case, in the mid-2010s, the precious anthology by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavros[12] was able to draw a map of the numerous "isms" that claim to supplant the pomo. Following our previous outline, we can therefore identify:

- A socio-economic *post-postmodernity*: here we find, for example, the "network society" of Manuel Castells; Jeffrey T. Nealon's "globalized capitalism"; Dan Schiller's "digital capitalism"; the "24/7 culture" by Jonathan Crary; the opposition between "the Empire and the Multitude" by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt; etc.

- An experiential *post-postmoderness*: Gilles Lipovetsky's "Hypermodernity"; the "Supermodernity" of Paul Crowther; Zygmunt Bauman's "Liquid modernity"; the "Reflexive Modernity" by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, etc.

- A *post-postmoderne* as a new style and method of thought: the "Post-theory" by David Bordwell and Noel Carroll; the "naturalization of the philosophy of mind" by Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Shaun Gallagher, and many others; the "neurophenomenology" and the renewed interest in the somatic and technological experience of Don Ihde, Lambros Malafouris, Bernard Stigler and others; the new realism of Maurizio Ferraris, etc.

- A *post-postmodernism* operating in the arts and criticism: Nicholas Bourriaud's "altermodernism and Homo Viator"; Alan Kirby's "Digimodernism"; the "Transmodern paradigm" propounded by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda and others; the "Performative" of Raoul Eshelman; Timotheus Vermeulen's "Metamodernism and neo-romanticism"; the various forms of "new realism, authenticity, sincerity, aesthetics of truth etc." by David Foster Wallace, Josh Toth, Ihab Hassan, etc.

3. *In media, res*

Let's try to play a little game: let us compare some dates that punctuate the pomo evolution with those that mark the contemporary development of the media system.

12 *Supplanting the Postmodern. An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century*, ed. by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavros (New York–London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

We can start from 1971. While Ihab Hassan was publishing *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*, Marcian ("Ted") Hoff, Stan Mazor, and Federico Faggin patented for Intel the first microprocessor, that is the component at the base of microcomputing; in 1975 (the same year Charles Jencks published the first edition of *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*), the MOS 6502 chip would have been used to produce the Apple 1, the Commodore PET and then the Commodore 64. In 1972 *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour saw the light; the same year in Manhattan, HBO started to transmit: it was the first cable television and opened the transition from broadcasting to narrowcasting. Let a few years go by: it is 1979, and the happy buyer of a freshly printed copy (in French) of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* could have appeared in the bookstore listening to music from the Sony Walkman, just released: it was the first example of "nomadic" and personalized media; three years earlier, in 1976, JVC had presented the first VHS video recorder on the market, which allowed time shifting with respect to the schedule, and therefore a personalization of television consumption. Another time leap: in 1984 a scholar willing to go to her university's library to read Fredric Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism", would usefully make a detour to an electronics store to buy the brand new Apple Macintosh, the first computer that presented itself as a new medium, capable of "remedying" (but also of completely revolutionizing) the logic of twentieth-century media. And five years later, in 1989, while David Harvey saw the first copies of his *The Condition of Postmodernity* being delivered, Timothy "Tim" John Berners-Lee was building the World Wide Web at CERN in Geneva, a gigantic hypertextual system supported by the Internet; while Jarom Lanier was founding VPL Research (Virtual Programming Languages) and introducing the term "Virtual Reality".

The logic of these coincidences immediately catches the eye: pomo arises within a media system undergoing a profound transformation. Twentieth-century electric media, particularly cinema and television, were experiencing their last season of glory before the switch to digital. In this phase, the model of broadcasting distribution based on the achievement of general audiences through the audiovisual flow and its organization in the schedule saw the competition of new models based on the multiplication of channels and the personalization of consumption; while in the background the digital networks were looming. In this respect, John Ellis speaks of the transition from an "era of availability"

to an "era of plenty".[13] We can summarize this situation by arguing that the media were becoming *environmental*: they were extensively penetrating everyday life spaces and were "colonizing" the dynamics of perceptual and cognitive interaction between the subjects and their environments. In other words, contemporary *mediascapes* were being born at that moment.[14]

Such a strong presence of the media within the social contexts is nothing new; however, the exponential diffusion of screens and their growing centrality make this mediation activity particularly evident and perceptible. In this respect, the fundamental medium is undoubtedly video and specifically television, at the centre of numerous interventions of the period more or less explicitly rooted in postmodernism. Consider, for example, the idea of "neo-television" launched by Umberto Eco in 1981;[15] Baudrillard's ideas of simulation, precession of simulacra and hyper-reality expressed, for example in connection with the 1991 Gulf War;[16] the critical analysis of meta-television cynicism advanced by David Foster Wallace in the 1993 essay mentioned above. Gianni Vattimo best expresses this strong link between the new media environments and the postmodern condition:

> The mass media play a decisive role in the birth of a postmodern society… They do not make this postmodern society more "transparent", but more complex, even chaotic... It is precisely in this relative "chaos" that our hope for emancipating lies… The intensification of communicative phenomena and the increasingly prominent circulation of information… are not merely aspects of modernization amongst others, but in some way the centre and the very sense of this process…[17]

13 John Ellis, *Seeing Things. Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London–New York: Tauris, 2002).

14 Francesco Casetti, 'Mediascapes: a Decalogue', in *Medium*, ed. by Shayari de Silva, Dante Furioso, Samantha Jeff, special Issue of *Perspecta*, 51 (2018), 21–43. According to some recent positions, pomo, especially in visual arts, would derive from an aestheticization of technology and the relationship with it: see Paul Crowther, *Geneses of Postmodern Art. Technology as Iconology* (New York–London: Routledge, 2019). In my opinion, this is true, but media technologies have played a decisive role in this context.

15 Umberto Eco, 'La trasparenza perduta' (1981), in *Scritti sulla televisione*, ed. by Gianfranco Marrone (Milano: La Nave di Teseo, 2018), pp. 313–334.

16 Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991), trans. by P. Patton (Sydney: Power Institute, 1995). See David J. Gunkel, 'Media', in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, ed. by Richard G. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 121–122.

17 Gianni Vattimo, *The transparent society* (1989), trans. by David Webb (Cambridge–Malden (Mass.): Polity Press, 1992), pp. 4, 14–15.

Let's resume our game of coincidences, shifting from the 1970s and 1980s to the period from the 1990s to the 2000s, which is the years in which an intolerance for the pomo and the start of the so-called popomo clearly emerges. It is 1991, and while the First Seminar in Cultural Studies was decreeing the end of pomo,[18] Guido van Rossum made public the first version of Python, a programming software that exploits the logic of object orientation and opens the doors of programming to a large community. Python will prove in recent years to be a powerful big data management tool. In 2003 Klaus Stirtsorfer edited an anti-pomo anthology containing a seminal essay by Ihab Hassan[19]; the same year Igor Azemberg and colleagues introduced the term "deep (machine) learning" to talk about Artificial Neural Networks; and Yann LeCun presented ConvNet, the first example of Convolutional Neural Network (CNN), a machine vision algorithm inspired by the mechanisms of natural seeing. 2007 was the year of another critical reader edited by Pelagia Goulimari, which contains the farewell to the pomo by Linda Hutcheon.[20] The same year, Steve Jobs launched the iPhone, the first smartphone with a touch screen that integrates both media and non-strictly media functions. In essence, a new form of nano-computing or mobile computing was born. The same year Netflix left the DVD rental market and opened the era of "over the top" VOD platforms; the audiovisual market was more and more holding up on the massive circulation of big data, which made it possible to profile the tastes of individual consumers and offer increasingly "tailor-made" products. 2009 saw the release of two significant contributions to the overcoming of postmodern: the proposal for Altermodern by Nicholas Bourriaud, accompanied by an important exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London;[21] and the volume by Alan Kirby, who observes how the digital is dismantling pomo.[22] It is the same year in which Google decisively transformed itself from a search engine to a tool for translating the world into algorithmic models: in the secret of the X lab, Sergey Brin and his team started developing the prototype of the first self-driving car, a meta-device equipped with cameras and sensors to

18 *The End of Postmodernism*.

19 Ihan Hassan, 'Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust', *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*, ed. by Klaus Stierstorfer (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 199–212.

20 Linda Hutcheon, 'Gone Forever, But Here to Stay: The Legacy of the Postmodern in Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism: What Moment?*, ed. by Pelagia Goulimari (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 16–18.

21 *Altermodern*, ed. by Nicolas Bourriaud (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

22 Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure our Culture* (London: Continuum, 2009).

collect traffic and road situation data in real-time automatically. In 2010, while Joseph Toth was publishing his book on the "spectrality" of pomo and Timotheus Vermeulen was introducing the concept of Metamodern, Microsoft launched Kinect for Xbox 360, the first gaming device to track human body movement using a 3D camera and infrared detection –a new way to translate actual developments to digital representations in real-time. Finally, 2015 saw the appearance of the reader edited by Rudrum and Stavros I cited above; in the same year, Google DeepMind's AlphaGo (a neural network self-training in machine learning mode) defeated the three-time European Go champion Fan Hui by five games to zero.

Also in this case, let us try to grasp the logic underlying these coincidences. During the 1990s, we witness the digital "convergence" of media (a term popularized by Henry Jenkins in 2006[23]): different expressive substances (written, images, sounds, audiovisuals) meet and mix on the digital technological platforms and circulate through networks, giving rise to new phenomena of interactivity. Digital devices allow a "remediation" of previous media (a term spread in 1999 by David Bolter and Richard Grusin, the concept of which is also present in Lev Manovich's shortly subsequent work[24]), just as the network remedies broadcasting by enriching it with new possibilities of interaction and agency for users.

At first glance, this series of phenomena seems to bring to completion the environmentalization of the media and the creation of mediascapes initiated in the previous two decades. This is undoubtedly true, but such a reading risks being reductive. In fact, as the media "converge" and "remedy" on digital platforms and networks, they become part of data flow management processes that extend far beyond the traditional media boundaries. These processes include the capture of photon patterns and their translation into algorithmic models that can be manipulated, combined, transmitted, possibly viewed in interactive forms: a dynamic that, in addition to media, is found in sectors such as commerce, surveillance, defence, medical-scientific research and so on. Consequently, if on the one hand the electronic-digital mediascapes radicalize the "colonization" of spaces and interactions within everyday life environments, on the other hand they profoundly transform the sign and meaning of this interaction. Indeed, the relationships no longer occur with reality, but rather with data structures

23 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York–London: New York University Press, 2006).

24 Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge (Mass.)–London: The MIT Press, 1999); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media,* (Cambridge (Mass.)–London: The MIT Press, 2001).

(data-sets and data-cubes) that both translate the world into algorithmic models and act on the world through automated procedures in real-time.

4. *Situational awareness*

Therefore, the passage from the pomo to the popomo *coincides* from a chronological point of view with that particular transformation of the media system, which saw the twentieth-century electric media give way to the new generation of electronic digital media. However, this still does not explain how the media system *influenced* this transition (although some clues have already emerged). To better understand this point, it is necessary to focus on the transformations that have occurred on the *status of the images*, particularly on their *epistemic consistency* and, therefore, their reliability.

The electric media produced what Vilém Flusser has defined as "techno-images": typically, those of photography, cinema and television.[25] We can identify four elements characterizing this type of image. First, the techno-images are based on the principle of automatic imprint and therefore of the appearance to their observer: their strength lies in placing the observer in front of a fragment of reality that suddenly materializes and manifests itself in an almost epiphanic form; their weakness lies in the fact that this appearance is partial and volatile (although repeatable). Second, techno-images presuppose a viewer in the position of a bystander, placed in front of the image and taken by the act of observing it. Third, this type of image presupposes "strong" (that is, well defined) dispositives, and in particular, screens that are thought of as "windows on the world", unique (albeit multiplicable) access points to the portion of the real that the images summon. Finally, techno-images are exclusively media images, since media are precisely thought of as those devices and institutions capable and responsible for activating this well-defined and delimited type of social experience. From these characteristics derives the particular epistemic status of techno-images, which is played out on two related points. On the one hand, the observer's relationship with techno-images is precarious and fleeting and is entirely played out in the present of the act of observation. On the other hand, in this present the referential destiny of the techno-images is determined, which can converge either towards a restitution of the real or towards a representation of the artificial and the imaginary.

25 Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985), trans. by Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

As we have mentioned above, electronic-digital media gave up techno-images to use a new type of image that I will call *visual algorithms*. The visual algorithms are detached point by point from the techno-images. First, their principle is not the *appearance* of a fragment of reality but the *visualization* of a data structure (a data-set or a data-cube); this structure, in turn, can constitute the model of a world in constant reorganization. Second, the spectator is not a bystander destined for pure observation, but a user immersed in an interactive relationship with the image (and therefore with the data structure); since electronic-digital devices can in turn act on the world, the user acquires an effective agency and the image becomes an operational interface (for example in the case of remote driving of drones, but also in the more banal ones of an online purchase, of leafing through an electronic book, etc.). Third, the visual algorithm does not ask for rigid dispositives but more fluid "assemblages";[26] the screens can be indifferently that of a mobile phone or a video wall, or they can even disappear from the user's perception, as in virtual reality.[27] Finally, visual algorithms are not specific and exclusive to the media; rather, they are widespread in many different areas of social experience (as we have seen above: from surveillance to medicine, etc.) and therefore wholly integrated into various practices of daily life. Furthermore, the epistemic status of visual algorithms that derive from these characteristics is entirely different from that of techno-images. On the one hand, the user's interactive relationship with images is not precarious because the image is only the interface that allows her to interact with the data structures whose nature is perceived as stable (the image passes and fades, the data structure remains, however in its constant transformations). On the other hand, within this stable relationship, many different *modes of presence* can be established between the subject and the world: visual algorithms replace the sharp alternative between reality and fiction with various epistemic statutes of the worlds presented, all of which can be controlled by the user. Whether the same software is used to play with a flight simulator or to actually fly an aeroplane; or that a war video game is used for entertainment or to train in real combat action; all this in no way affects the different attitudes and different "situational awareness" (an instructive expression derived from the language of military training) that are requested to and mobilized by users.

26 Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

27 Andrea Pinotti, 'Towards an-iconology: the image as environment', *Screen*, 61 (2020), 594–603.

We finally gained the position to understand why the transition from pomo to popomo is at least in part determined by the simultaneous shift from electric to electronic-digital media. Indeed, the former produces a type of image, techno-images, which have a precarious relationship with their observer and whose epistemic destiny is played on the sharp alternative between reality and appearance. The environmental diffusion of techno-images in the final phase of the electric media age and the concurrent birth of mediascapes based on their omnipresence has triggered an epistemic crisis in the images, from which many features of the postmodern could derive: scepticism, irony, meta-narrations and meta-representations, the disappearance of reality, simulacrality, etc. On the contrary, electronic-digital media use visual algorithms capable of building a solid relationship with observers and articulating different and multiple modes of presence between them and the world. When visual algorithms assume the environmental vocation of contemporary media, the possibility of a relationship and interaction of the subject with the world is reactivated. However, the price of this renewed grasp on the world is the mediation of data structures that, through images operate within and on the world. Many traits of popomo would derive from this: recovery of an idea of realism, of sincerity, of an ethical, social and political commitment, etc.

5. *Conclusion: back to the prepomo?*

The reader who has followed me up to this point has already guessed the purely rhetorical tone of the title of this paragraph. The pomo and the popomo arise as symptoms of a transformation of the epistemic status of images; transformation in turn linked to the transition from the last phase of electric media to the start of electronic-digital media. At this point, it would be limiting both to deny the importance and role of the pomo in the course of Western culture and to proclaim a return to an alleged pre-postmodern (prepomo) order.

Limiting, but also dangerous. Because a gesture of this type would imply ignoring the nature of the new epistemic regime of images. That is, the fact that the interactions with the world allowed by visual algorithms are of an entirely new type compared to the past, since they are mediated by interactions with data structures, data-sets and data-cubes; interactions that are in turn regulated and governed by specific dispositives and not devoid of intentionality. Giving in to the idea of a return to the prepomo would therefore mean ignoring that images are now part of operational dis-

positives responsible for managing the production, extraction, circulation, distribution, accumulation and disposal of different kinds of resources: tangible (for example, economic), intangible (for example time, reputation, etc.) and operational (for example the possibility of acting politically or not in surveillance regimes). Therefore, believing in images and working with them must be analyzed from a complex perspective: it requires *a new political economy of light* – a discipline and a practice of analysis which, like any political economy, can only be critical.[28]

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Krešimir Purgar

THE PRINCIPLES OF PICTORIAL DEPICTION
Three Basic Concepts

1. *Introduction*

In a book published in 2002, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues that the twentieth century was marked by the desire of people to return to the Real, to the kind of reality we distanced from during the Second Industrial Revolution.[1] According to this thesis, the two world wars, the socialist revolutions and terrorism are indications that the Real is finally really happening and that violence towards one another is a form of confrontation with one's own fantasies and fear of the other. As an ardent Lacanian, Žižek will find in the theories of the famous French author sufficient arguments to defend his own theses, which can be summed up "the passion for the Real" culminating in a sort of theatrical spectacle thanks to the power and proliferation of images.

Today we take for granted Žižek's thesis that the demolition of the Twin Towers meant the realization of the popular fantasy that the Hollywood film industry offered in the disaster movies as a typical postmodern genre. But it is not Žižek's cynicism that we may find problematic: the problem is that it is based on the wrong premise. Žižek says that what happened on 9/11 suddenly entered our reality as a phantasmatic screen illusion, but not in the way that reality disturbed the image we have of reality, but that the image itself penetrated reality and shattered our notion of it.[2] So, in that specific case, the basic procedure of creating and destroying the concept of reality takes place, according to Žižek, through images. We could agree with this thesis if Žižek did not provide a few pages further a description of what he considered the potential effects of images:

> This is what the compelling image of the collapse of the WTC was: an image, a semblance, an "effect", which, at the same time, delivered "the thing

1 Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002).
2 Žižek, p. 16.

itself". This "effect of the Real" is not the same as what Roland Barthes, way back in the 1960s, called *l'effet du réel:* it is, rather, its exact opposite: *l'effet d'irréel*.[3]

Not questioning the general position of the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory according to which the Real is the exact opposite of reality, we can in no way agree with the proposition that an image can produce both real and unreal effects at the same time. Historically, people could have imagined a picture to convey meaning either as consubstatntial with its prototype (what it depicts) or as a representation of a prototype. An observer cannot understand the concept of a picture (let alone the meaning of it) unless he or she has taken in advance a specific position of the concept of the picture itself.

Unlike psychoanalytic theory, in general image theory there is no area of transition between interpreting the image as a simulacrum and as a representation. This imagined transition area, if any, is not related to the image but to the ideology and different disciplinary practices of image interpretation. If it cannot happen today that the picture of Christ is confused with the material, real body nailed to the real cross which might even look exactly the same as that at Calvary two thousand years ago – and no matter how realistic the semblance of Christ's body is – how can we claim today that an image may break the barrier of reality and deliver "the thing itself"? There are three possible reasons why we might be able to do so: because we subordinate the ontological *otherness* of the image to our own particular interests; we do not know that the image is always *separate* from what it depicts; or we do not take into account that, following the previous example, the Twins demolition images became popular because they were not images at all but a real event. These three premises will lead us to the conclusion that *otherness*, *representation* and *separation* are typical characteristics of images as non-transparent entities. We observed the demolition of the World Trade Center towers in direct transmission, which, precisely because it was direct (or, transparent) – was not and could not be an image.

We can live either in the "desert of the Real" – that is, in a simulacrum – or in the "desert of images" – not both, or at least not both at the same time. Images do not represent reality and are not related to the order of reality but to the symbolic order of images. In this article we will argue that it is ontologically not possible to confuse images with reality – due to their intrinsic *non-transparency* – and to that end we will expose two main

3 Žižek, p. 19.

theses: A) In order to understand the function of an image we must be able to grasp the distinction between the semblance we see *in* the image and the representation that is actually present *with* the image; B) An observer can understand the meaning of an image only if he or she has taken a specific position in advance – a stance that will account for the concept of the image itself prior to looking at it.

2. *The otherness principle*

At a time when visual experiences are increasingly often enjoyed through the expanded field of digitally created virtual visuality, inadvertently, and entirely necessarily, we neglect the key difference between looking at pictures and looking at any other kind of physical object from our immediate surroundings, which is that pictures bring an appearance of discontinuity into our otherwise linear perception of the everyday. No other physical object or visual projection can carry us with such conviction centuries into the past or prefigure the future, can allow us to experience regions thousands of kilometres away or recall with such an emotional impression the physical presence of our predecessors. According to the earliest theory of the image, Plato's parable of image as simulacrum, we can see that the problem of understanding pictures never lay in their being too little similar to reality but that resemblance in itself was considered by this Greek philosopher to be a second-rate cognitive method. Irrespective of its cognitive function, to which Plato's metaphor of the cave primarily refers, much more important for us is that, in spite of the rejection of the value of pictorial cognition, as soon as we begin to think seriously about the ontological being of the image it is clearly indicated there is a mechanism immanent to the image that always differentiates it from actual reality. Somewhat paradoxically, the inherent strength of the picture developed precisely from the realisation that it is possible to use it to manipulate the space-time continuum or, put more simply, the fact that we cannot be in two places at the same moment, exist in two different epochs or have various incarnations. But concealed behind this commonsensical fact there is a more complex mechanism, which does not depend on the physics of space and time alone, but on the cultural historical reasons for humanity having created the picture at all and what it is used for.

For us to understand what images mean for us today we can find one of the most important cultural-cum-theoretical contributions in debates that unfolded in what was called the Second Iconoclastic Period, in the 8th and

9th centuries, the insights of which are best to be seen in the accounts of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church held in Nicaea in 787. From today's perspective it might seem uncommon that an important contribution to image theory was produced within theological discussions during the Byzantine Empire, but this fact powerfully persuades us that people have since time out of mind used pictures to help them ascertain what the relation between reality and fantasy is. Since they were interested in the problem of the relation between what is and what is not, or between the visible and the invisible, it is obvious that the ontological position between image-as-simulacrum on one hand and image-as-relation on the other indicates that images are not in competition with reality, rather, they establish with it various kinds of *relationships*. What distinguishes the classical image from the modernist one is not that the former seeks a degree of resemblance to the real world while the latter is abstract, but that the classical image is determined by the principle of referentiality to something outside of it, while the modernist image relates only to itself. The act of referencing in pictures to something outside them clearly indicates the principle of otherness, which should by now be one of the basic points of departure in any future archaeology of the image.

In the debates held in Nicaea the basic theme was determined by the heritage and theological justification of the radical iconoclastic policy of emperors Leo III and Constantine V, the consequences of which had an immediate impact on the main agenda of the Council. This was the reason why the Byzantine patriarchs gathered there often invoked the Second Commandment – "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" – and why the prevailing stance opened the path to the creation of images for purpose of the cult in the coming centuries; in the opinion of the clerics there, venerating images is venerating *what*, and not *whom* the image represents. There was a significant intervention that was read on behalf of Leontius, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, from a treatise known as the *Quinto discorso in difesa dei Cristiani contro i Giudei, o delle icone dei santi*. In the debate between Jews and Christians about the defensibility, or lack of it, of the depiction of the Son of God in paintings, after the Christian had explained to the Jew that God himself had ordered Moses to make a temple with images of cherubim and that it was precisely God that had shown to Ezekiel a temple with pictures of palms, lions and people,[4] the Christian rhetorically asks his interlocutor how then could God have anything against us recalling him with the use of the image? To this the Jew replies: "but these pic-

4 Ezekiel, 25, 28-20; 41, 17-20 i 20, 4.

tures are not adored as gods, but are made only to remain in our memory". The Christian comes back:

> Colui che accoglie gli ordini dell'imperatore e ne saluta il sigillo non onora l'argilla o il papiro o il piombo ma tributa all'imperatore adorazione e venerazione; allo stesso modo anche noi, che siamo figli di Cristiani, adorando l'immagine della croce non onoriamo la materialità del legno ma, vedendo l'insegna, il sigillo, la stessa immagine di Cristo, attraverso essa (la croce) accogliamo e veneriamo colui che su di essa fu crocifisso.[5]

As against the iconoclasts, the advocates of pictorial representation who gathered in Nicaea had an additional problem: in order to justify the veneration of holy icons they did not have to respond only to the accusations of idolatry but also to explain three crucial things: what Christians were actually venerating, then how the invisibility of God can be connected with the visible Christ and finally what the relation between the material image and that which it represents is.

The first and second problems are exclusively a matter of theological dogma and presuppose that the God of the Christians is uncircumscribable, invisible and to that extent incomprehensible, while his earthly incarnation, on the contrary, *is* circumscribable, visible and completely understandable. At the Nicaean Council, Bishop Gregory recalled the usually fallacy of the non-Christians, who could not understand the character of Jesus' material presence among people, for they thought that the Christ who was created from the Word of God was something different from that Christ who was born of Mary. There were not two Christs, rather two hypostases that constituted the One. "E' sulla base di questa unione che non è venerato l'uno insieme all'altro ma Gesu' Cristo, Figlio unigenito, è compreso essere uno, onorato con un'unica adorazione unitamente alla sua carne".[6] As for the third problem (that is, the prototype or archetype) the Byzantine patriarchs did not even try to find a justification for the pictorial representation of Christ in the depiction of what was by definition invisible, but in the Christ who was a material, human and corporeal incarnation of the Divine. In the accounts of the Nicaean Council, Deacon Epiphanius in the following statement sublimates the ontological otherness of the image in relation to what we see visualised on its surface:

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5 *Patrologia greca* (ed. by J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857-1866): PG 93.1597-1609. Quoted after: Luigi Russo (ed.) *Vedere l'invisibile. Nicea e lo statuto dell'immagine* (Palermo: Aesthetica, 2017), pp. 39–40.

6 Russo, pp. 72–73.

> L'icona è simile al prototipo non nella sostanza ma soltanto nel nome e nella disposizione delle membra che vengono dipinte. Infatti, neanche qualcuno che dipinge l'icona di un uomo cerca poi nell'icona un animo, sebbene sia incomparabile la differenza tra l'anima umana e divina natura [...] e nessuno mai che sia dotato di senno, al vedere l'icona di un uomo ha pensato che, attraverso l'arte del pittore, l'uomo è separato dalla sua anima. [...] Non, solo, infatti l'icona è priva di anima ma anche della reale consistenza del corpo; [...] se si vedessero queste cose nell'icona, noi la chiameremmo "uomo" e non "icona di un uomo".[7]

The impassioned champion of icons, St John of Damascus had several decades before Nicaea explained in his work that the basic justification for the representation of Christ in images was in the incomparability of the divine nature of the Father and the image of His Son incarnated in human form:

> An image is a likeness depicting an archetype, but having some difference from it; the image is not like the archetype in every way. The Son is a living, natural and undeviating image of the Father, bearing in himself the whole Father, equal to him in every respect, differing only in being caused.[8]

John of Damascus justified the representation of Christ by our arriving in this one and unique case by divine Intervention as the opportunity to make contact with the invisible, the distant and the incomprehensible. According to the same principle, all, and not only religious, depictions succeed to their symbolic or, as we would say today, semiotic nature. We connect the depiction with the reality only at the symbolic level, which means that the intensity of the symbolism of the depiction is subject to a typology of representation set up in advance.

At the end of this chapter about the principle of the otherness of the image we can conclude three main facts: 1. The Christian *icon* is a symbol of the prototype (Christ) regardless of the resemblance it achieves. 2. Since an image has the same technical basis as the icon, an *image* establishes a relationship of similarity between model and its representation in image, and not the sameness in kind. 3. Both icon and image are ontologically *different* from the prototype or any other model they are based on.

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7 Russo, p. 77.

8 St John of Damascus, quoted after: *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. Translation and introduction by Andrew Louth (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 25.

3. *The* representation *principle*

One of the most influential theorists of the postmodern culture of the image, Jean Baudrillard, founded his best known theses of the three orders of simulacra on Plato's insight about pictures as counterfeit depictions of reality on one hand and on the Marxist theory of value on the other. With this original and entirely untypical combination of the ontological, semiotic and social class problematics of the image, Baudrillard reactivated the Platonic meaning of the concept of simulacrum as inherent property of pictorial representations and established it as historically changeable: the counterfeit image of reality was characteristic of the period from the Renaissance to the first industrial revolution; "production" marked the status of the image during the industrial era, while "simulation" has become the reigning scheme of our time.[9] Much before the appearance of the first functional devices for the production of virtual reality, Baudrillard connected the postmodern condition of simulation with the "pure simulacrum" in which people are no longer able to differentiate between reality and illusion. In this way, two otherwise opposing categories of experience – hyperrealism and simulation – merge into a unique system of socio-technological illusion that finds a new ontological state of the image in the complete loss of people's sense of social reality.

For us particularly interesting here is Baudrillard's interpretation of the moment of transition from the pre-modern to the modern age, i.e., from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, when, according to this writer, a counterfeit image of the world was born for the first time. Unlike later eras, the pre-modern and the modern age are not distinguished in terms of the crucial influence of technology on everyday life but, for the first time in history, by the commodification of social signifiers. The sign, thanks to its newly established value, is no longer the equivalent of something real. Instead, it is now the totally arbitrary vehicle of exchange values within the broadest spectrum of social interactions.[10] In feudal or archaic societies, signs are very limited and are not widely distributed. Every sign relates to some prohibition or recalls the hierarchically ordered system that makes social statuses sustained and unchangeable. Class differences were set by birth, and they were an unchangeable signifier until the establishment of

9 It has to be taken into consideration that, from the technological viewpoint at least, the concept of "our time" is rather different from that in which Baudrillard wrote his work *Simulations*, published in 1983 (Los Angeles: Semiotexte). Cf. ibid., pp. 82–89.

10 Baudrillard, p. 84.

the bourgeois stratum in the cities of the Renaissance. According to Baudrillard, then, signs in the pre-modern period are everything but arbitrary, founded on real relations between physical objects and their exchange values. The modern version of the sign starts to appear when, instead of linking two persons or objects in unbreakable reciprocity, the signifier starts to refer to the "enchanted universe of the signified"[11] in a new and entirely arbitrary value of commodity-qua-symbol in a world in which all relations have become entirely relative.[12] Baudrillard says that "the modern sign dreams of the signs of the past and would well appreciate finding again, in its reference to the real, an obligation"; however, the only obligation that the sign now has is that to nature, since nature has become the only objective reference.[13]

What is the obligation that the sign wants to "find again", and is it really true that the Renaissance image-as-a-window testifies to the return of the simulacrum after many centuries of the Middle Ages, to a sort of "transubstantiation of all of nature into a unique substance"?[14] If we follow the standard genealogy of the Renaissance image, i.e., the classic work *De Pictura* of Leon Battista Alberti, we shall concede that the Renaissance image is a transparent surface "through which the *historia* is seen".[15] This *historia* is actually the manner in which we wish to observe the world, and it includes all those new symbolic signs that rapidly came into being in Alberti's time, and of which Baudrillard speaks as of signs with arbitrary exchange values. According to these two theories, then, the more realistic a picture becomes, the more it reflects the simulacrum nature of the mathematically constructed view "through the picture" and accordingly of all the social relations of signification that are focused through the picture/window.

On the other hand, as we have seen, the prescriptive principles of the production of the Renaissance image are significantly out of step with the ontology of pictorial representation that originates in the image theory of the Byzantine patriarchs laid down at the Second Nicaean Council in

11 Baudrillard.

12 These Marxist views are characteristic of the earliest Baudrillard phase, i.e., of the insights put forward in the book *Le Système des objets* of 1968 (first English translation: *The System of Objects*, London: Verso, 1996).

13 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 86.

14 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 87.

15 Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura* I, 19; Cecil Grayson (ed.), *Leon Battista Alberti. On Painting and Sculpture. The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua. Edited with translations, introduction and notes* (London: Phaidon, 1972), p. 55.

787. In order to understand the importance that the earliest theological and dogmatic insights concern the nature of the picture have for the whole of western culture, it is necessary to recall that almost eight centuries later, between 1545 and 1563, in the Italian town of Trento, the nineteenth ecumenical council of the Catholic Church was held, in which, in its entirety, the nature of pictorial representation defined during the Second Iconoclastic Period was confirmed. As for what should be seen in images, in the Trent files the following is expressly stated:

> [...] not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent [...].[16]

From this we can conclude that the degree of realism of the visual depictions in the paintings of the High Renaissance (unlike those from the time of the Council of Nicaea) in no way at all affected the status of the image as medium that made something visible, i.e., making something *visible* is completely different from making something *present*.

It might be objected to this proposition that it does not take into consideration the need of the Renaissance man, as Baudrillard noted, to begin building through the picture a medium of social representation. This objection can be only in part justified, that is, in the part of it that lays stress on the Renaissance pictures being modern in execution but anachronistic in theme. In other words, they depicted historical events as if they were taking place in contemporaneity (i.e., then); in the quattrocento and cinquecento, although the principle of Alberti's simulacrum was used, in the whole of southern Europe artists created pictures with almost entirely religious subjects.[17] It derives from this that the theoretical dimension of the picture always relativised and defined its visual status *a priori*: if we use realistic technology (perspective and the new painting techniques) to depict the subject of the paintings as realistically as possible, this principle had to be reconciled to the fact that the model of the painting (or the prototype), for example Christ, Mary or the saints – who were the most frequent

16 Cf. *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, edited and translated by J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), pp. 234–235.

17 Cf. Johannes Grave, 'Reframing the 'Finestra Aperta'. Venetian Variations on the Comparison of Picture and Window', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 2009, 72. Vol., H. 1 (2009), 49–68 (p. 50).

models in the Renaissance – were in fact always one and the same person, who should, because it is one and the same, always look the same. The Renaissance model of the picture-as-window at the same time abrogates that which it makes possible: it makes it possible for the depiction in the picture to be experienced as similar to reality, and cancels out the possibility of reality because, in the tradition of religious pictures in Christianity – as we have seen from the dogmatic conclusions from Nicaea and Trent – the concept of mimesis was secondary to that of consubstantiation (in the Byzantine tradition) and of transubstantiation (in the Western Christian tradition).[18]

We could raise a hypothetical question: is the historical definition of the image-as-representation that was established as theological dogma in Nicaea and ratified in Trent more important for the contemporary understanding of the ontological nature of the picture, or is the realism of the depiction in and of itself sufficient to seduce the observer, convince them that the scene that they see is real? Here we have to pay attention to not falling into the trap of traditional simplifications: if contemporary art scholarship no longer claims that the medieval painters and sculptors were less adept than those of the Renaissance, only interpreted the world around them in a different way, why then would we think that the contemporary observer does not discern the difference between image and reality? Does a picture's status as representation really depend just on the degree of realism in it, or is a picture crucially defined by what we believe, think or know that we see? To answer this question, we must go back to the contemporary picture theory.

4. *The* separation *principle*

In one of the most influential (and productive) theoretical works of contemporary theory of the image, the text of Gottfried Boehm *Das Wiederkehr der Bilder* of 1994, we can find a canonical art historical observation that in the context in which we are engaged here takes on a much more dramatic meaning. When he speaks of the inspiration that Maurice Merleau-Ponty found in Cézanne's paintings for his thinking about perception, Boehm notes how inadequate for the interpretation of modern art paintings the

18 Cf. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy. The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially pp. 71–75 and Emanuel Alloa, 'Visual Studies in Byzantium: A Pictorial Turn avant la lettre', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2013 12, 3, 3–29.

inherited modern Cartesian concept of the painting based on the Alberti central perspective is:

> An attempt via perspective (visual pathways, pathways of seeing, *Sehbahnen*) to discuss observation, which can be ideally constructed, which combines the abstract angle of vision with the point that dominates the painting, in which in the vanishing point all the parallels are joined lands up high and dry on Cézanne's later work.[19]

On the foundation of the Merleau-Ponty philosophy of perception (inspired by Cézanne, among others) Boehm comments that the French philosopher attempted to think that which seems to the naïve awareness to have been incontestably established; that he who looks does not build opposite to the reality, but executes his doing in reality.[20] We can relatively easily accept a thesis according to which the observer of modern and contemporary art plays an equal part in the creation of the world of art and is not just in its thrall, but here the still more important question is whether the artistic painting can be a paradigm of pictorial representation in general, i.e., does the artistic picture only make possible a deflection from reality, while all applied pictures by definition delimit reality to just what we notice *in* the pictures?[21] In other words, is art a consecrated space of freedom and self-knowledge while the society of spectacle, advertisement and images on social media are just simulacra that, because of their illusionist nature, we necessarily experience as real, although they are not?'

If we judge according to the text of Boehm mentioned, the answer is an express no. Although this author uses examples of only the art picture, two basic propositions put forward in "Return of Images" – about the iconic turn and that about the iconic difference – confirm that the problem area of the picture has long ago departed from the consecrated space of the visual arts. If we look at them as part of the image theory, the turn to the picture and the iconic difference cancel each other out. With the term *ikonische Wende* Boehm endeavours to demonstrate that in contemporary civilisation an entirely new and different interest in the image has arisen, set off by the realisation that the pictorial principle lies at the foundation of all

19 Gottfried Boehm, 'Die Wiederkehr der Bilder', in Gottfried Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), p. 18.

20 Ibid., p. 19.

21 Cf. Stefan Majetschak, 'Sichtvermerke. Über Unterschiede zwischen Kunst und Gebrauchsbildern', in S. Majetschak (ed.), *Bild-Zeichen. Perspektiven einer Wissenschaft von Bild* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005).

human communication whatsoever – both pictorial and verbal. His key evidence behind this proposition is a description of the rhetorical and literary stylistic figure of metaphor, which consists in our mental visualisation of concepts and terms that cannot be depicted pictorially. On the other hand, says Boehm, the contrast that characterises metaphor can be transferred to the image, and calls this contrast the *iconic difference*. In the case of the iconic difference it is not individual phenomena in the gaze, as in the case of looking at Cézanne paintings, that are primary, rather the "conditions of the medium itself."[22] Irrespective, then, of language being contaminated by images, they are equally distinct from language and from reality – in both cases there is a contrast that it is impossible to foresee. The contrast within a metaphor enables us to join what is conceptually clearly separated and the iconic difference for the separation of the image from reality offers the conditions of the medium itself – colour, frame, surface structure, material, analogue or digital source.

Boehm ponders whether the ability of people to distinguish picture from reality is "an anthropological dowry" or whether it is "acquired via cultural history" but does not doubt that the iconic difference is specific to humans and that it should be defined as the "ability to restylise the mobile field of observation of everyday looking with its open borders, its flexible adjustment to new situations, into the limited and stable field of the image".[23] The German author invokes the American philosopher Arthur Danto, who claims that the picture instructs us to a dual attention – that which we might explain with the theory of opacity and that with the theory of transparency.[24] Boehm actually claims that there are not two theories but only one, which takes into consideration the dialectical nature of the image both as medium of communication and as object-in-the-world, but actually privileges the latter for, as Danto states, there will always be some residuum of material that cannot be vaporised into pure content.[25]

However much this kind of problem seems to us to be contemporary, that is, primarily marked by the new techniques of visualisation that enable the gargantuan screen images to be turned into totally transparent windows into some other space-time dimension, the very same problem was addressed by the Byzantine patriarchs in Nicaea, by Alberti and by the envoys of the Catholic Church in Trent. The history of the image has

22 Boehm, p. 29.
23 Boehm, p. 31.
24 Arthur C. Danto, *Die Verklärung des Gewöhnlichen. Eine Philosophie der Kunst* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), p. 243.
25 Danto.

always gone back to the same problem: how is its separation from reality to be made legitimate so that we should not fall into the sin of idolatry (in those days) or become victims of the society of spectacle (today). Alberti's theory of perspective and his instructions to painters for a trustworthy presentation of reality in practice champion the transparency, but the content of mostly religious paintings makes them remain opaque, i.e. they accept the symbolic character of representation and the principle of separation from reality. In a similar dialectic manner, Boehm's theory of the iconic turn admits that we live in the civilisation of the image but these images, as independent objects in the world, are determined by the essential separation with respect to reality; as objects, pictures belong to reality but as representations they are separated from it by the discontinuity that they set up within the field of vision. Alberti's picture-as-window was founded on geometrical construction, on the view into something else in relation to the reality that is not constructed but simply given; in this case, construction subserves representation. But both theoretical models are derived in such a way that they first affirm the power of the image and then delimit the space of the image in relation to reality.

In order to show that the principle of picture as object separated from reality can be backed up with not only hermeneutic and materialist theories, we shall draw attention to Lambert Wiesing, who has put forward a phenomenological interpretation of the image as a cut or break with reality. In his book, indicatively titled *Das Mich der Wahrnehmung* (literally: The Me of Perception), Wiesing proposes three phenomenological insights that construe one's perception of image as the cut or break from reality, that is, as the still-present (iconic) difference which, indeed, does not arise from the intentional awareness of the observer, but rather from the specific effect of the image itself: 1) the unique *object* of image perception: the specific ontological characteristic of the pictorial object is its reduction to a sole property – sensuousness. The image becomes visible merely because it is exclusively visible. The presence of the thing portrayed in the image is an artificial presence that is reduced to mere visibility.[26] 2) the unique *source* of image perception: these are conditions of the possibility of perception of the image's object. The special feature of image perception lies in the subject of perception which, in this case, performs a significantly different constitutive act than in the case of the perception of a normal object, i.e. of

26 Lambert Wiesing, *The Philosophy of Perception. Phenomenology and Image Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 135.

that which is not an image.[27] 3) the unique *consequences* of image perception: when merely observing the image, the experience of perception is not related to the liability to participate in perceived events. One need not participate anymore! It is exclusively in the case of image perception that the observer is not immersed in the perceived world any longer.[28]

If we attempt to apply them to concrete pictorial representations, we shall establish that these three principles can be used to unite the reason for the production of pictures created from the first representations of Christ, as in the Catacombs of Callixtus created in Rome in the third century, to the present time, irrespective of whether they are religious or profane, artistic or popular. Wiesing's theory describes pictorial perception as interaction of various levels of sensory stimuli that only the picture can provide, then through the constitutive acts of the observer, which are specific precisely for the observation of pictures and, completely intuitively (and completely originally) through the physical separation of the observer from the observed event. This last aspect is crucial for our proposition that pictures are not and cannot be simulacra.

5. *Conclusion: all pictures are non-transparent*

The theory of Jean Baudrillard about the rule of the simulacrum is founded on the role of the image as simulation or counterfeit depiction of reality in modern Western culture. It is interesting that this French philosopher attributes belief in the "murderous capacity of images" equally to iconoclasts and iconophiles. While the first, aware of the fatal power of the image to show the non-visible as present, reject the very possibility of pictorial representation, the others, under the aegis of representation, reveal that behind pictures there is actually nothing but a mere political decision that the faithful must recognise in them what they had never seen. Explained in this way, says Baudrillard, the Jesuit initiative that resulted in the decisions made at the Council of Trent can be represented as a total acceptance of the principle of image as simulacrum. Representation is a dialectical principle that serves the concealment of the fact that behind the sign depicted in the image there is nothing. On the other hand,

27 Wiesing, p. 138.

28 Wiesing, p. 140. More on the Wiesing theories see in Krešimir Purgar, *Pictorial Appearing. Image Theory After Representation* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), from which this paragraph is taken: pp. 172–176 and pp. 58–59.

> simulation starts from the utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as vaIue*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.[29]

Baudrillard's viewpoints sounded revolutionary at the time they came into being – at the time in which the end of the modernist utopia and the fear of the civilisation of the image in postmodern ultra-liberal market economy were combined. How justified the fear of images was should be discussed in another place, but here we cannot but at least sketch out the reasons for calling Baudrillard's premises about images as simulacra and simulations mistaken.

The first argument we can offer is of a technical nature. The concept of simulacrum that Baudrillard borrows from Plato signifies the picture of something, but it is necessary to distinguish *picture-as-representation* from *visualisation-as-illusion*. For something to be a representation, it has to meet a temporal criterion and take place in some visual form *after* the event to which it refers or which it represents symbolically. Live television transmissions and the shadows on the wall in Plato's cave are not representations but media-assisted *presentations* of what is happening precisely at the moment when we watch it on the screen or as shadow play on the wall. It is this temporal difference that makes it impossible for presentation to show the symbolic contents characteristic of representation. The symbolism of representation always comes with premeditation about the potential impact of the image, while the presentation with the help of the media visualizes some current state, or as we have explained elsewhere, "iconic simultaneity".[30]

The second argument is, of course, of an ontological nature. Baudrillard observes precisely how the principle of simulation works and also the historical reasons for pictures to be understood as representations (and not as simulacra), when he says that "a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange".[31] The problem is that Baudrillard then immediately proposes the thesis that a "gigantic simulacrum" occurs when guarantee of the replacement of the sign by meaning becomes God in such a way that he himself is simulated in the picture. For here we claim that representation has an a priori otherness already

29 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 11.
30 Krešimir Purgar, *Pictorial Appearing*, especially on pp. 52–59.
31 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 10.

incorporated into it, both in its relation to the prototype (the model of the picture) and its relation to reality. This *re-* in visual representation prevents the identification of reality and picture in the same way in which verbal representation precludes the identification of newspaper stories or literary works with reality. In its relation to reality, every form of representation is entirely symbolic, not only when something cannot be depicted because it is invisible (like God, for instance) but also when it shows something that in some form was once visible. Representation cannot simulate something because in it the relation to reality is defined in advance as symbolic. If representation is merged in simulation it means that the symbolic dimension has vanished and that it is no longer possible to establish a relationship with reality.

Simulation can make representation invisible, but the inverse is not possible – for representation to be turned into simulation. It is not possible because representation functions at a symbolic level, and simulation at the vanishing of the symbolic level of signification. Baudrillard claims that the conversion of representation into simulacrum takes place through four phases of transaction – from picture to simulacrum, i.e., from the Renaissance picture to pure simulacrum in our time when images no longer have any relation vis-à-vis reality. Here we have endeavoured to ascertain that pictures were never bound to reality, and could not have lost something, or everything, of their symbolic dimension. At a technical level, then, pictures have always passed through changes in the ways in which they are visualised, and in this sense we can talk of different intensities of similarities with reality. However, at a symbolic level, the similarity does not refer to the order of reality but to representation.

In Lambert Wiesing we have seen that what is characteristic of the image is that it enables us to experience the represented event without having to participate in it. Even in the case of total immersion in the observed event, when we are standing in front of some vast concave screen and watching a match, we do not have to fear that the ball from the playfield will hit us on the head. Not only because in this case we are not looking at image-as-otherness but a visualisation of a real event that is unfolding precisely at the moment of watching, but primarily because from a technical point of view this is not an image, but a visualisation without any symbolic level of signification. In contrast to Žižek and his interpretation of the television transmission of the destruction of the Twin Towers, we think that the ontological status of the image cannot be explained from its mythic meaning, i.e., by how we interpret it in our collective imagination. From the meaning of some individual picture it is not possible to set up a model of the func-

tioning of all pictures, particularly if we do not establish a clear distinction between the symbolic and the technical basis of the picture. At the moment when these differences vanish we shall no longer talk about images but about totally functional virtual reality – the final stage of simulation that Baudrillard so visionarily predicted. But, Baudrillard's prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. When that happens, we will not witness it on a TV screen or on any other picture surface, but be immersed in an event of pure visuality, free of any symbolic meaning.

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Dario Tomasello

UNA TERRIBILE CONDIZIONE POSTMODERNA

Le pratiche fondamentaliste di auto-rappresentazione nei Social Media

E se il sedicente scontro di civiltà si risolvesse nell'appiattimento su un orizzonte condiviso da tutti gli integralismi che non fa che replicare un funesto progetto estetico?

Il cortocircuito rappresentato dalla dimensione performativa dei selfie (scattati poco prima di un attentato suicida e taggati ad ampio spettro sui Social) coinvolge, come progetto di controversa autorappresentazione identitaria, sia il fondamentalismo islamico sia il fondamentalismo islamofobo. In entrambi i casi, questa "performance terrorista", per usare la provocatoria formula di Richard Schechner,[1] con la sua ansia citazionista, ci ricorda che siamo ancora pienamente dentro una terribile *condition postmoderne*.[2]

Utilizziamo questa distinzione per comodità, consapevoli del suo carattere capzioso. I *case studies* che riporteremo brevemente dimostrano,

1 "Simili azioni, infatti, sono concepite, provate e realizzate come performance. Esaminando quella fase del terrorismo che è culminata negli spettacolari attacchi del 2001 alle Torri Gemelle e al Pentagono e in Pennsylvania persino, se il quarto aereo, come la storia ci narra, non fosse stato ulteriormente dirottato dai passeggeri, è possibile capire come i Performance Studies possano essere utilizzati per analizzare eventi di ogni genere. Se ciò che ho scritto nel Capitolo 2 è corretto ovvero che qualsiasi cosa possa essere studiata come una performance, allora il terrorismo jihadista diviene un argomento privilegiato. Ovviamente, non sto rivendicando la legittimità degli atti terroristici o della violenza in genere. Il mio scopo è comprendere quanto il terrorismo sia performativo, come funzioni in un mondo globalizzato o perché persegua effetti così spettacolari di morte, devastazione e danno diffuso", Richard Schechner, *Il terrorismo jihadista come performance*, in *Introduzione ai Performance Studies*, a cura di Dario Tomasello (Imola: Cue Press, 2018), pp. 428–445 (p. 428). Ho fatto tesoro delle intuizioni di Schechner nel mio saggio 'Scontro di Civiltà, scontro di Selfie. Identità fondamentalista e condizione postmoderna nella dimensione performativa dei Social', *La Valle dell'Eden*, 35 (2019), 83–93, a cui questo intervento si ricollega e a cui in gran parte è debitore.

2 Va da sé che il riferimento riguarda il testo di J.-F. Lyotard del 1979, uscito in Italia per Feltrinelli nel 1981.

appunto, come l'estetica di un Occidente globale abbia finito per prevalere. Fondamentalisti islamici e suprematisti, di là dalle fatue e farneticanti dichiarazioni d'intenti, concepiscono le loro azioni all'insegna degli *action movies* di Hollywood e di videogames come *Grand Theft Auto* e *Call of Duty*.

Va da sé che la *Condition postmoderne* (o la "malattia del postmoderno")[3], per chi la guardi dalla strettoia di questa morsa aggressiva, abbia l'aspetto perturbante di un rispecchiamento fatale. I media e soprattutto i social media sembrano lavorare sulla sopravvivenza costante di questa condizione, spingendoci a inquadrare il nostro immaginario nell'alveo di un attingimento costante dell'archivio consolidato dei suoi *idola*. Da questo punto di vista, Lyotard aveva davvero capito tutto quando affermava nel suo volume in un capitolo intitolato, non a caso, *La recherche et sa légitimation par la performativité*:

> Ici interviennent les techniques. Elles sont initialement des prothèses d'organes ou de systèmes physiologiques humains ayant pour fonction de recevoir des données ou d'agir sur le contexte. Elles obéissent à un principe, celui de l'optimisation des performances: augmentation de l'output (informations ou modifications obtenues), diminution de l'input (énergie dépensée) pour les obtenir. Ce sont donc des jeux dont la pertinence n'est ni le vrai, ni le juste, ni le beau, etc., mais l'efficient: un "coup" technique est "bon" quand il fait mieux et/ou quand il dépense moins qu'un autre.[4]

Lo sviluppo protesico rappresentato dai dispositivi mediali avrebbe rappresentato la materializzazione della condizione postmoderna, tanto da spingere uno dei più ardici e controversi, a mio avviso, teorici americani dei Performance Studies degli ultimi anni, John McKenzie, a dichiarare perentoriamente (come mi ricorda il mio amico Fabrizio Deriu, invitandomi in questo intervento a riconsiderare il rapporto sin qui piuttosto eluso

3 "Ebbene, la malattia del postmoderno – inteso soprattutto come sensibilità nei confronti della non linearità della Storia – dura tuttora e difficilmente si comprende come potrebbe finire. Lasciamo perdere tutte le etichette che ne sono derivate, soprattutto nel campo delle arti, e tratteniamo solo questa insofferenza di fondo per l'idea del progredire, oltrepassare, innovare, originare, in pratica il nucleo essenziale del pensiero postmoderno, già tutto contenuto in *La condizione postmoderna*", Barbara Grespi, Luca Malavasi, 'Quando le immagini hanno smesso di essere (soltanto) immagini', *La Valle dell'Eden*, 33, (2018), 5–18 (p. 10).

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna*, trad. di Carlo Formenti (Bologna: Feltrinelli, 1981), p. 66.

invero tra la ricerca di Lyotard e quella coeva di Schechner) che "la performatività è la condizione postmoderna".

È proprio il momento della verità ciò che va esorcizzato: "l'enjeu n'est pas la vérité, mais la performativité",[5] all'insegna di una manipolazione decostruttiva dei riferimenti culturali consolidati, a Occidente come a Oriente.[6] Questa manipolazione ha prodotto una nevrosi contemporanea che ha a che fare con uno stadio di secolarizzazione fortemente avanzato. Nell'universo variegato e tutt'altro che monolitico del mondo musulmano, le nuove generazioni, alla luce della stagione già profondamente secolarizzata vissuta dai loro genitori, non hanno più memoria di cosa sia la loro tradizione religiosa, semmai ne hanno una malcelata nostalgia che nulla aggiunge alla loro ignoranza. Nello stesso tempo, esse dimostrano un appetito incontenibile proprio per quella liberalità occidentale dell'organizzazione sociale e dei costumi che vedono come una promessa continuamente frustrata. Una promessa destinata quindi ad attirare, nei casi più patologici, un'incontenibile furia omicida e suicida[7]. Il postmoderno ricapitola, a queste latitudini, una malintesa concezione della modernità che ha smesso da tempo di fare i conti con il proprio retroterra intellettuale e spirituale.[8]

5 Ivi, p. 64.

6 È proprio il caso di un dispositivo mainstream della rete, come i memi o le GIF che lavorano, nell'ottica postmodernista, su una citazione sospesa tra devozione e parodia: "The process of distribution can change the meme from its original form, as imitations and parodies flourish in response", Kelly S. Burns, *Celeb 2.0. How Social Media Foster Our Fascination with Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009), p. 78.

7 Si tratta di un assunto recentemente riepilogato, in modo brillante: "[…] however, the decline of the public role of religion as well as the radical undermining of local traditions, coupled with the wider process of modernization, created a strong resentment among the disoriented masses, which then chose to take the reins of collective salvation, confusing the two pland of the spiritual and the temporal right at the time when these two spheres were about to be separated", Giacomo Maria Arrigo, *Gnostic Jihadism. A Philosophical Inquiry into Radical Politics* (Milano: Mimesis International 2021), p. 245.

8 Basterebbe pensare, in tal senso, a come, sempre più spesso, la trasmissione tradizionale della conoscenza, basata, nell'Islam, sul rapporto diretto tra maestro e allievo, sia sostituita da una formazione "fai-da-te", alimentata, in rete, da blog di insegnanti improvvisati e potenzialmente molto pericolosi. Ci sarebbe molto da dire a riguardo, per esempio sullo statuto dell'*ijaza*, ovvero l'"autorizzazione" a trasmettere insegnamenti o a fornire interpretazioni del Corano e della Sunna profetica che non può determinarsi se non a partire dalla testimonianza e dalla vicinanza vissuta di un sapiente.

C'è chi, a tal riguardo, ha parlato di un *Postmodern Islam*,[9] inteso come orizzonte di dis-senso, entro il quale ha trovato linfa vitale anche la Primavera araba e, nel disordine che ne è seguito, le sue scaturigini più terrifiche. Tuttavia, almeno sino ad una certa altezza cronologica del dibattito, questo postmodernismo islamico che ha una diretta corrispondenza con il fondamentalismo, è stato equivocato dall'ansia ideologica di un valido surrogato del terzomondismo, al punto da essere considerato una rivolta promettente contro la modernità[10] invece di riconoscervi, nel segno di una coerente postmodernità, una sua augusta parodia e, quindi, il più reverenziale degli omaggi.

Ad analisi di questo tipo è mancato il conforto lungimirante di un'adeguata conoscenza del potere esercitato dai social media nel modificare e, persino, nello sclerotizzare certe tendenze in atto. La tanto conclamata fine delle ideologie non si è risolta in una pacificazione di là da ogni conflittualità su visioni del mondo sclerotizzate e totalitarie, bensì in un modello estetico *mainstream*, accattivante e vagamente nostalgico che i dispositivi mediali, vecchi e nuovi, hanno contribuito ad amplificare a dismisura imponendo, anche laddove la memoria fatua di un aureo passato non avrebbe avuto ragione di essere, il rimpianto global per il crepuscolo edonista della civiltà occidentale. Quando si esaminano, come si è avuto modo di notare in altra sede, azioni quali quelle di Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel e Brenton Tarrant,[11] a prevalere è l'idea di una perniciosa e ipnotica atmosfera

9 "Today, the context in which Islams reveal themselves is radically different. In the political arenas of Egypt, Iran, Tunisia and Bahrain, they do not function as revolutionary programmes. There is no Khomeini at their head; no Islamist manifesto driving people's actions; no headquarters topped by a green flag coordinating things. Postmodern Islam is diffuse, networked, differentiated, multi-institutional and (in the sense that it is neither paternalistic, nor primarily feminist) "transsexual". Postmodern Islam floats freely on the world-wide-web", Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Postmodern Islam and the Arab revolts*, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/postmodern-islam-and-arab-revolts/

10 "La postmodernità del fondamentalismo consiste, primariamente, nel rifiuto della modernità come arma dell'egemonia euroamericana; in tal senso, il fondamentalismo islamico costituisce il caso paradigmatico", Michael Hardt e Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 149.

11 "È esattamente in questa immersività finzionale che sembrano agire personaggi come Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel e Brenton Tarrant. Il primo, a bordo di un mezzo pesante ha percorso quasi due chilometri a zig-zag, mentre sparava all'impazzata sulla folla radunata a Nizza per vedere i fuochi d'artificio previsti per le celebrazioni nazionali del 14 luglio 2016. Il secondo, autodefinitosi "un uomo bianco qualunque", il 15 marzo 2019 ha fatto strage di fedeli in due moschee nella cittadina neozelandese di Christchurch. In entrambi i casi, non si può fare a

all'insegna della *trance* che assimila ad un farneticante format condiviso, indirizzi politico-criminali solo apparentemente eterogenei:

> Queste azioni dimostrano come l'emulazione guidi coloro che le ordiscono senza che si riesca più a fare chiarezza nella trama intricata delle strategie ideologiche che le presiedono.
>
> La risposta più plausibile è che le ideologie non c'entrano più niente.
>
> Ciò che conta è il desiderio non di affrontare il nemico, e neanche di essere riconoscibili dall'amico, quanto di creare un "leggendario" exploit che, in un ambiguo gioco mediatico, renda sfumate le identità piuttosto che riaffermarle.[12]

In una logica pienamente postmoderna, magnificata dai Social, quello che conta è creare l'evento cercando di ottenere il numero maggiore di *followers*. Si tratta forse di un effetto collaterale già inscritto nel carattere plateale di ogni progetto terrorista, se è vero com'è stato recentemente affermato che il dispositivo principale di questa strategia è l'eventuale emulazione che ne deriverà:

> La nozione di istigazione è fondamentale giacché lo scopo principale dei terroristi non è quello di distruggere il nemico quanto quello di incitare eventuali simpatizzanti all'azione. È una specie di orribile propaganda quella che va in scena per mobilitare quei milioni di individui che potrebbero eventualmente essere spinti ad unirsi ad al Qaeda […]. Le armi fondamentale usata dai 19 terroristi dell'11 settembre non erano coltelli, taglierini e lanciafiamme, branditi per prendere il controllo degli aerei, bensì la più tecnologica delle creazioni americane: il set televisivo. L'11 settembre i jihadisti hanno usato quest'arma con determinazione e ferocia per attaccare la nazione più potente nella storia del mondo proprio nella sua più grande 'debolezza': lo spettacolo.[13]

Se è vero che l'entertainment, con la sua fascinazione sinistra, domina l'universo fondamentalista, è altresì plausibile che la macchina potente della suggestione terroristica non ha mancato di far sentire il suo effetto seduttivo, persino su uno degli artisti più rappresentativi del secolo scorso come Karlheinz Stockhausen:

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meno di registrare un progetto di emulazione, "virale" come si dice nel paradosso di una lingua dei social che sembra ignorare il suo sottofondo epidemico e fatale, scaturito da un'esistenza derelitta e priva di ogni talento", Tomasello, p. 90.

12 Ivi, p. 92.

13 Mark Danner, *Il terrorismo: una specie di orribile propaganda* in Schechner, p. 432

> Ciò che è successo è – proprio ora che ti stai scervellando – la più grande opera d'arte del cosmo intero. Hanno realizzato in un unico atto qualcosa che noi musicisti possiamo solo sognarci, un po' come se ci preparassimo per un concerto per anni e poi ne morissimo. Immaginate cos'è successo. Abbiamo persone che si sono concentrate su una performance e 5000 altre che sono state mandate all'altro mondo in un solo momento. Paragonato a questo, noi siamo niente come compositori. E così quegli artisti che provino ad andare al di là dei limiti di ciò che è praticabile o concepibile […]. Si tratta di un crimine, certo, perché coloro che sono stati coinvolti non erano d'accordo. Non sarebbero certo voluti andare a quel 'concerto'. È ovvio. E nessuno li ha avvisati del rischio di rimetterci la pelle. Ciò che è successo in termini spirituali: la perdita del senso di sicurezza, di ciò che eravamo abituati a dare per scontato fa pensare che qualcosa di analogo debba succedere anche nell'arte, altrimenti l'arte sarà niente.[14]

L'assalto spietato alle Torri gemelle, nella prospettiva del grande musicista, diventa una grandiosa, sebbene funesta, composizione. Chiaramente, si tratta di una dichiarazione destinata a suscitare una lunga scia di polemiche. Tuttavia, le considerazioni di Stokhausen, pur nell'equivoco specioso che le caratterizza, provano a riscattare un'azione degna di un blockbuster, trasfigurandone gli esiti in un'apoteosi dell'immanenza performativa, sebbene a scopi criminosi. Si tratta di una provocazione tendenziosa e, di là da ogni moralismo, incapace di comprendere la *banalità del male* che contrassegna nella sua ripetitività questi gesti.

Il meccanismo ad orologeria di questi attentati sembra prefigurare una regia, educata secondo lo stile cinematografico hollywoodiano:

> Più e più volte martedì [11 settembre 2001], dopo che gli aerei hanno distrutto le torri del World Trade Center e il Pentagono, gli attoniti spettatori hanno pronunziato le stesse parole: "Era come un film". Questo che significa che avevano già visto quella scena in innumerevoli film catastrofici. L'esplosione e la palla di fuoco, gli edifici in rovina, le vittime stordite e in preda al panico, persino il cupo discorso del presidente che assicurava un'azione immediata – tutto era familiare, come se venisse da un blockbuster di di Hollywood. […] Niente di tutto quel che riguardava gli autori di questa tragedia poteva andar perso. I film americani […] raggiungono ormai ogni angolo del mondo e colonizzano l'immaginazione collettiva – una ragione per cui i fondamentalisti odiano l'America.
>
> Ma questi, certamente, comprendono il potere di quelle immagini. Quindi, attaccando il simboli della finanza e della sicurezza americana, non a caso hanno scelto anche il linguaggio dei film americani. […] Bisogna pensare che,

14 Karlheinz Stockhausen, *La più grande opera d'arte nell'intero cosmo*, ivi, p. 438.

> in un certo senso, il loro rifiuto di Hollywood è stato anche il loro trionfo su di essa – hanno potuto de-hollywoodizzare Hollywood.
>
> Si consideri la tempistica. Quando il primo aereo ha colpito il World Trade Center non c'era nessuna telecamera pronta a filmarlo. Perciò i terroristi hanno fornito un secondo attacco a un intervallo ragionevole, perché sapevano che sarebbe stato catturato su pellicola o video e poi ripetuto da molti angoli diversi – un montaggio di morte e distruzione. Era terrorismo con un'audience in mente.[15]

Sottesa alla scansione puntuale di questi fatti efferati, c'è una idea compresa perfettamente da Gabler circa la dimensione spettatoriale dell'oltraggio. Ogni nuovo attentato, scaturito in qualche modo, dall'osservazione affilata di un delitto precedente deve, mimeticamente, riprodurne l'eco, con esiti possibilmente più sconvolgenti.

Nella fattispecie del terrorismo fondamentalista, una ritualità parodistica legata ai cliché di una mondanità social, appena rivestita di una patina pseudo-religiosa, prova a sostituirsi, in un tentativo goffo e funesto, alla ritualità tradizionale ormai smarrita.

Occorre, a tal riguardo, ritornare alla distinzione chiara e netta, operata da Victor Turner, tra la performance rituale con gli scopi primigeni che le competono e tutto ciò che, allontanandosi da essa, si è mosso, nella direzione della degradazione e dell'intrattenimento, da un orizzonte trasformativo e liminare a quello trasportativo e liminoide:

> Nelle società moderne, complesse, i due generi coesistono in una sorta di pluralismo culturale. Ma il liminale che sopravvive nell'attività delle chiese, delle sette e dei movimenti, nei riti iniziatici dei club, delle confraternite, delle logge massoniche e di altre società segrete ecc., non ha più una portata universale. Altrettanto ne sono privi i fenomeni liminoidi, che di solito sono generi di svago quali l'arte, lo sport, i passatempi, i giochi ecc. […] Tuttavia molte persone sentono ancora il liminoide come più libero del liminale, una questione di scelta e non di obbligo. Il liminoide assomiglia a una merce – e in realtà spesso è una merce, che si sceglie e per la quale si paga – più del liminale, che suscita sentimenti di fedeltà ed è collegato all'appartenenza, o all'aspirazione all'appartenenza, dell'individuo a qualche gruppo dotato di una forte coesione interna. Si *lavora* al liminale, si *gioca* con il liminoide.[16]

Il gioco intravisto da Turner, nella logica del liminoide, diviene un gioco al massacro in una misura in cui la fedeltà e l'appartenenza sono, non più

15 Neal Gabler, *Terrorismo con l'audience in mente*, ivi, p. 445.

16 Victor Turner, *Antropologia della performance* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), p. 104.

caratteristiche di una condotta spirituale, ma vuoti simulacri ai quali offrirsi in olocausto.

Questo è quello che è successo a Dacca il primo luglio del 2016 in cui cinque terroristi hanno fatto irruzione nel caffè Holey Artisan Bakery, situato nel quartiere residenziale di Gulshan della capitale del Bangladesh sequestrando e uccidendo venti uomini (tra cui nove italiani).

La dinamica delle sevizie perpetrate, come uno spietato quiz a premi, a coloro che non conoscevano versetti del Corano e l'appartenenza della gran parte dei terroristi alla buona borghesia bengalese (uno dei genitori dei criminali ha chiesto scusa facendo notare come il figlio studiasse chitarra e fosse molto tranquillo) restituiscono un quadro quanto mai contraddittorio, in cui ancora una volta la scelta fondamentalista sembra mascherare una quotidiana disadorna e frustrante in cui i passatempi global (uguali a tutte le latitudini) non bastano più.

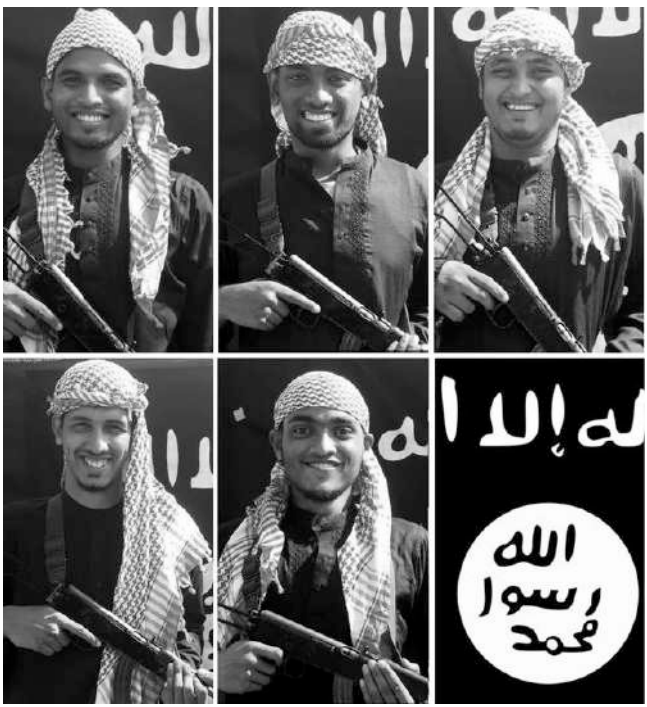

Figura 1 – Gli attentatori di Dacca

La stessa dinamica è riscontrabile in quello che è avvenuto a Hanau, in Germania, il 19 febbraio 2020 quando è Tobias Rathjen a sterminare nove persone e a ferirne altre cinque, mirando a chiunque palesasse una fisionomia da migrante, per poi tornare a casa, uccidere la madre, malata da tempo, e suicidarsi.

Figura 2 - Tobias Rathjen

Le immagini postate prima di portare a compimento il proprio compito criminale sono la spia probante di un processo di degenerazione capace di instillare nel quadro di una routine monotona, la vertigine del gesto fatale, il presentimento di un'azione decisiva, dell'azione definitiva, forse. Quello che conta è che nella trama ormai fitta della narrazione performativa dei terroristi di ogni risma e ideologia, a prevalere è l'*enjeu* emulativo, la possibilità, cioè, di riproporre in termini sempre più sofisticati e crudeli uno stereotipo. Il che ci riporta, nel pieno di una ulteriore estenuazione postmoderna, al carattere reiterato delle nostre azioni cui Scehchner ha offerto la definizione brillante di *restored beahavior* ("comportamento recuperato"):

> Il comportamento recuperato include una vasta gamma di azioni. In effetti, ogni comportamento è un comportamento recuperato: ogni comportamento consiste nel ricombinare frammenti di comportamento precedentemente agito. Naturalmente, la maggior parte della gente di ogni epoca non è mai

> stata consapevole di fare cose del genere. La gente semplicemente vive. Le performance sono sottolineate, incorniciate o enfatizzate come comportamenti distinti dalla vita vissuta: recupero di un comportamento recuperato, se mi passate il termine. Comunque, per quello che è il mio obiettivo qui, non è necessario indagare questa ulteriore complicazione. È già abbastanza, infatti, definire il comportamento recuperato come sottolineato, incorniciato ed enfatizzato. Il comportamento recuperato potrebbe essere anche definito come me in un altro tempo o in un differente stato psicologico: per esempio nel mettere in atto un evento celebrativo o traumatico.[17]

Rathjen è un grigio impiegato di banca, gli attentatori di Dacca annoiati ragazzi della buona borghesia locale che aspirano all'impresa eclatante. C'è un sottofondo di frustrazione ed autoemarginazione nel 'romanzo di formazione' del giovane terrorista che si rivela nel sorriso inebetito o nello sguardo inespressivo di chi cerca la propria morte eroica nell'obiettivo della foto o della videocamera. Eppure, l'*obiettivo* finisce per prevalere sulla propria morte, finisce quasi per esorcizzarla e l'*obiettivo* immanente della foto che immortala il carnefice che si offra in olocausto prevale sull'*obiettivo* escatologico della propria fine. E in questa presunzione di immortalità terragna non si salva nessuno e la vita pesa come un fardello insopportabile.

A soccorrere l'uomo alle prose con questo pervasivo *horror vacui*, subentra la nozione di *Archivio* di Diana Taylor,[18] a cui si delegano, nell'ottica mediale dei social, le proprie inclinazioni e il proprio empito alla rappresentazione. Ciò che si conserva su questa superficie meravigliosamente estesa e capiente è il senso mal riposto della capacità di *lasciare un segno*, che deve servire da unità di misura per chi vorrà cimentarsi ulteriormente. Da un fatto delittuoso ad un altro, attitudini e pose, sguardi fieri o gioviali, servono ugualmente a definire l'incoscienza ipnotica entro la quale come in una dimensione virtuale, si cova la propria rivalsa e, nei termini di una degradazione parodica del modello, si delinea il proprio modello trionfante e derelitto, al contempo. Una terribile condizione postmoderna domina

17 Schechner, p. 83.

18 "[…] submit, does not lie between the written and spoken word, but between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual). "Archival" memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change", Diana Taylor, *The archive and the repertorie performing cultural memory in Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 19.

l'orizzonte privilegiato del nostro tempo e lo scontro della civiltà non ha luogo se non in una competizione in cui la violenza è ormai solo una mera questione estetica.

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Lorenzo Donghi

POST-MODERNO / RE-ENACTMENT
Ripetere il vissuto nel cinema documentario contemporaneo

1. *Premessa. La teoria e i prefissi*

Se c'è un'asserzione che uniforma da tempo l'orizzonte delle *humanities*, e che risuona oggi particolarmente radicata in quel campo del sapere via via definitosi a cavallo tra filosofia, *media studies*, arti visive e performative, è che "in the realm of 'theory' [...] much of the heavy lifting is done by prefix".[1] Del resto, già nel corso del secondo Novecento, e in misura maggiore nel contemporaneo, discutere di teoria significa non potersi sottrarre al confronto con un sovrappiù di neologismi che sembra tenere in ostaggio la nostra sfera linguistica. Laddove, infatti, si registra un'incessante proliferazione di lemmi derivati e composti, distinti dall'apposizione di svariati prefissi (*a-*, *auto-*, *cross-*, *de-*, *inter-*, *iper-*, *neo-*, *post-*, *pre-*, *re*/*ri-*, *trans-* ecc.), che svolgono la funzione di ripensare costruzioni concettuali già acquisite, ma che vengono risemantizzate in accordo a diverse manovre: aggiustamenti innocui (e talvolta leziosi), rigorose ipotesi di ridefinizione, o ancora, instabili aperture di senso.

Sulla scorta di questa premessa, associare concetti quali *post*-moderno e *re*-enactment vuol dire mettere a contatto due reagenti carichi di tensione, dando vita a un composto potenzialmente esplosivo. In un'epoca infatti che così si determina in quanto temporalmente successiva a un'altra (*post-*), emerge la tendenza di ripetere il trascorso (*re-*), al fine tuttavia di pervenire a un nuovo stato di cose. Di riprendere insomma, e quindi di attualizzare, un tempo concluso e perduto: un tempo passato che ritorna, permettendo al presente di confrontarsi con sé stesso. Certo, sarebbe improprio valutare il reenactment come prerogativa esclusiva di quella condizione postmoderna che Jean-François Lyotard ha profilato nel suo maggiore contributo.[2] Eppu-

1 Arnd Wedemeyer and Christoph F. E. Holzey, *Preface* to Wedemeyer e Holzey (eds.), *Re-. An Errant Glossary*, *Cultural Inquiry*, 15 (Berlin: ICI Berlin, 2019), p. VII.

2 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condizione postmoderna*, trad. di Carlo Formenti (Bologna: Feltrinelli, 1981).

re, avendo eletto la ripetizione (di temi, figure, motivi, narrazioni, accadimenti) a insostituibile criterio-guida, se non al rango di suo più ambizioso progetto estetico, è proprio tale condizione ad aver avviato per le pratiche di reenactment una stagione di costante esaltazione: assicurando loro una prorompente vitalità, ma rendendo anche inderogabile un rinnovamento delle coordinate in cui inscriverne la crescente moltiplicazione.

D'altra parte, se è vero che le forme del reenactment sono sempre più interpellate all'interno di tutto il sistema delle arti – e ricorrenti quindi in mostre e iniziative curatoriali, spettacoli di danza, performance teatrali, opere filmiche, video-installazioni, progetti fotografici – va tuttavia anche notato come la febbre teorica che ha accompagnato questa sovrapproduzione abbia oggi raggiunto temperature elevatissime. Tanto che il dibattito internazionale focalizzato sul tema, aperto tra il mondo degli artisti, della critica e della ricerca, negli ultimi anni ha incrementato gli appuntamenti convegnistici dedicati, le pubblicazioni inerenti, persino i propositi di fondazione di un nuovo filone inter-disciplinare di ricerca (i *reenactment studies*)[3].

Il presente contributo, risalendo un solo e unico versante di questo dibattito, intende prendere in esame una precisa modalità di reenactment – quella costituita dal documentario cinematografico – che negli ultimi tre decenni è stata interessata tanto da una ricca produzione, quanto da un'ingente mole parallela di interventi critico-teorici. A rimarcare come il cinema imponga al reenactment alcune precipue condizioni di esistenza che, in quanto connesse ad alcune specificità del mezzo, risultano essere assenti, o quanto meno sottostimabili, in altri assetti mediali. E l'idea che questa ipotesi di studio si propone di sostenere è la seguente: esistono, nella processualità operativa di ogni reenactment filmico, due diverse fasi, legate ad alcuni pensieri della ripetizione ereditati come un lascito dal secolo scorso. Due momenti distinti ma complementari, condotti sotto l'egida di alcuni numi tutelari (quali Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Sigmund Freud) che sono diventati i "padri putativi" delle odierne teorie del reenactment.

Queste due fasi, che richiedono un puntuale approfondimento, sono però presto enunciabili: si tratta, da un lato, della *ripresa*, lo stadio in cui si esplica quella relazione tra osservatore e osservato che, imposta dalla presenza di una macchina da presa, innesca il momento performativo, affermativo, "deleuzian-freudiano" del reenactment; dall'altro, della *post-produzione*, vale a dire il suo correlato intermediale, dialettico, che a buon diritto si

3 Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, Juliane Tomann (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2020).

può definire benjaminiano (in cui ad acquistare rilievo è l'intervento dello spettatore, in quale, pressoché assente nel momento precedente, è invece chiamato in causa proprio nel confronto con il prodotto finale). Prima di illustrare tale ipotesi, è però importante contestualizzare il reenactment nell'attuale panorama documentaristico: un ambito in cui la sua presenza non risulta inedita, e dove, non sempre benvoluto, oggi si riaffaccia quale indiscusso protagonista di un ritorno.

2. *Reenactment e crisi del documentario*

Non c'è oggi intervento critico orientato ad affrontare l'attualità del documentario che non senta il bisogno di sottolineare come tale forma cinematografica, sempre in evoluzione benché longeva come il cinema, versi ormai da qualche tempo in uno stato di perdurante crisi. Una diagnosi, questa, che è primariamente da ricondurre a una vocazione frustrata, che della logica documentaria si presume essere la *quidditas*. Vale a dire, la propensione a rappresentare la realtà: in una fase tuttavia in cui né l'azione in sé, né tanto meno il suo complemento oggetto, possono essere dati per scontati, proiettati entrambi dalla temperie postmoderna in un orizzonte perennemente problematico. Tale crisi è avvertibile anzitutto a livello formale, e indagabile dunque attraverso l'interazione del registro documentario con quelli della fiction e dell'animazione; così come tramite l'adozione di punti di vista, codici e linguaggi mutuati da altri media o dispositivi di visione, che vengono così rimediati e risignificati nel nuovo formato filmico.

Ma tale crisi è anche etica, non meno che politica, e coincidente anzitutto con un *turning point* nel modo d'essere del documentario. Una crisi che, come tutte le crisi, può preconizzare il declino o può, per converso, offrire un'opportunità. Annunciando quindi – polarità *destruens* – l'entrata in un'era postdocumentaria,[4] nella quale ogni proposito di conoscenza veritiera del mondo è destinato a rimanere inevaso, in quanto rivolto a una realtà che risulta come diluita, fino alla completa solubilità, nella labirintica trama delle sue costruzioni mediali. O d'altro canto ribadendo – polarità *costruens* – come quelle che coinvolgono oggi il documentario non siano altro che manovre di adattamento, che in quanto tali non determinano alcun tramonto, né impongono abdicazioni al proprio ruolo. Aprendo semmai al documentario la possibilità di intraprendere un salutare percorso di rigenerazione, il cui esito tuttavia non può che essere la produzione di un'im-

4 Ivelise Perniola, *L'era postdocumentaria* (Milano–Udine: Mimesis, 2014).

magine a cui è ancora possibile dare credito: un'immagine che sappia proporsi, anche dopo la sbornia postmoderna, come un impegno per il reale.[5]

Ebbene: la tensione tra questi due opposte polarità fa vibrare in special modo le corde del reenactment. Forma filmica tanto intrigante quanto elusiva, al punto che in merito a essa i *film studies* ricorrono il più delle volte a cenni generici: dissolvendone la peculiarità nella trattazione di questioni lasche e generiche, o citandola impropriamente insieme ad altre formule (docudrama, docufiction) quasi le fossero sinonimiche. Quando invece richiederebbe un approccio specifico, esclusivo, capace di raccontarla per quello che è: un banco di lavoro di straordinario interesse su cui testare lo stato di salute del documentario contemporaneo.

Di esso, infatti, il reenactment sembra costituire un emblematico punto limite. E non solo per l'evidente paradosso di documentare ciò che non c'è più: una missione impossibile, che però gli consente di ricorrere a quel potere *fantasmatico* che gli è stato attribuito.[6] Ma anche a causa della gamma di possibilità che esso dischiude nel perseguire tale intento. Miscelando, in differente misura, realtà e artificio, pratica documentaria e ricostruzione finzionale: senza contraddizione, anzi impiegando la seconda per corroborare l'indagine sulla prima. E proponendosi come un laboratorio permanente dal quale convocare, raccogliere, e infine vidimare (lo vedremo) le immagini provenienti da altri media, disinnescando così quell'indifferenza referenziale che spesso ne caratterizza l'usuale circolazione.[7]

Riferito a una pratica non certo orfana di precedenti nella storia del cinema,[8] il reenactment esplode si può dire definitivamente, data l'attuale ricorsività, solo negli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso. In quel quadro storico infatti, la comparsa di film come *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985) e *La*

5 Daniele Dottorini, *La passione del reale* (Milano–Udine: Mimesis, 2018).

6 Bill Nichols, 'Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject', *Critical Inquiry*, 35, Autumn 2008, pp. 72–89.

7 Pietro Montani, *L'immaginazione intermediale* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 2010); Dario Cecchi, *Immagini mancanti* (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2016).

8 Per alcune ipotesi di ricostruzione della storia del reenactment cinematografico si rimanda a Nichols, 'Documentary Reenactment...'; Brian Winston, *Honest, Straightforward Re-enactment: The Staging of Reality*, in Kees Bakker (ed.), *Joris Ivens and the Documentary Context* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 160–170; Jonathan Kahana, 'Introduction: What Now? Presenting Reenactment', *Framework*, 50, 1&2, Spring&Fall 2009, pp. 46–60; Andréa França, 'The reenactments in the documentary film', *MATRIZes*, 4, 1, 2010, pp. 149–161; Stella Bruzzi, *Approximation*: *Documentary, History and the Staging of Reality* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2020, con particolare rilievo al capitolo conclusivo 'Documentary re-enactment: the 'model' approximation').

sottile linea blu (*The Thin Blue Line*, Errol Morris, 1988) riporta il reenactment al centro del discorso teorico sul documentario. Linda Williams li affronta infatti entrambi in uno storico intervento:[9] illustrando tramite essi l'emergere di un "postmodern approach"[10] al documentario, e avviando sul tema, congiuntamente ad altre voci (ancora Nichols, ma anche Paula Rabinowitz, Robert Rosenstone, Janet Walker, Hayden White, di lì a poco Stella Bruzzi, Bruce Corner, Jean-Louis Comolli), un dibattito che poggia su alcuni assunti fondativi, che ancora oggi risuonano come bassi continui. L'acquisizione, per esempio, che ogni indagine cinematografica sul reale debba rinunciare a criteri di oggettività; la presa d'atto che la conoscenza non si manifesta come il "riflesso di uno specchio", secondo la metafora decostruita proprio da Williams, ma configurandosi in via aggregativa e frammentaria, quale complicato esito di rifrazioni indirette; la consapevolezza che la drammatizzazione di un evento storico passato, anzitutto se traumatico, reca con sé l'esigenza di avanzare una sua re-interpretazione critica; ancora, la presa d'atto che non ci si debba (più) rivolgere al documentario nei termini di uno strumento osservazionale utile a rivelare la verità degli eventi, che rimane imperscrutabile: quanto piuttosto di un dispositivo performativo che consente di cogliere la natura circoscritta e contingente di tale verità.[11]

Tutto ciò risulta peraltro particolarmente valido se rapportato, più nello specifico, a un peculiare modello di reenactment filmico, oggetto di interesse in questa sede. Si tratta del reenactment in prima persona:[12] formula che accomuna pratiche documentarie che inscenano la memoria di un evento passato tramite l'implicazione dei suoi testimoni diretti, sancendo così una coincidenza identitaria tra chi ieri ha vissuto l'esperienza originaria e chi oggi si cimenta nel ripeterla. Un'opzione che, sebbene restringa ulteriormente il perimetro operativo del reenactment (non si tratta infatti di "appropriarsi" di un'esperienza altrui, bensì di confrontarsi nuovamente con la propria), dal finire del secolo scorso è stata adottata da numerosi esponenti di spicco del cinema documentario internazionale.[13] E che, per sua natura,

9 Linda Williams, 'Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary', *Film Quarterly*, 46, 3, Spring 1993, pp. 9–21.

10 Williams, p. 12.

11 È come noto l'idea principale sostenuta in Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2006, 2ª edn).

12 Ivone Margulies, *In Person. Reenactment in Postwar and Contemporary Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

13 Alcuni casi esemplari, in ordine alfabetico per regista: Raed Andoni (*Ghost Hunting*, 2017); Lola Arias (*Teatro de guerra*, 2018); Marco Bellocchio (*Sorelle mai*, 2010); Mike Figgis (*The Battle of Orgreave*, 2001); Ari Folman (*Waltz with*

risulta particolarmente utile per ribadire un punto: se il reenactment non costituisce affatto una procedura finalizzata a rappresentare un referente perduto, comportandosi semmai alla stregua di una critica al concetto stesso di rappresentazione,[14] allora si fa più semplice definire quale sia la verità a cui può effettivamente ambire. Che non è mai la verità storica del passato, bensì quella fenomenologica di un incontro, di una situazione, colta nel momento del suo accadere: una verità che inerisce a "both the performance of the filmmaker and that of the subject in front of the camera".[15] Ed è allora sul concetto di *performance* che vale la pena insistere.

3. *Ripetizione, performance, ripresa*

Ad accordare una prerogativa anti-rappresentativa alla logica della ripetizione è stato primariamente Gilles Deleuze,[16] a cui si deve anche una lettura esemplare del senso più profondo del ripetere. Manovra che non assume i tratti dell'azione additiva, e che soprattutto non si esercita sommando una seconda occorrenza alla prima (e poi una terza, una quarta... e così via). Piuttosto, movimento che si rovescia interiorizzandosi, *elevando dunque la prima volta all'ennesima potenza*: come accade con il ricorrere degli celebrazioni, o con le ninfe dipinte da Claude Monet.[17]

Una condotta che mai presume di poter ripetere l'identico. Anzi, che risulta praticabile solo se intesa in rapporto a ciò che non può essere

Bashir, 2009); Patricio Guzmán (*Chile, la memoria obstinada*, 1997); Werner Herzog (*Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, 1997; *Wings of Hope*, 1998); Carl Javér (*Rekonstruktion Utøya*, 2018); Irene Lusztig (*Reconstruction*, 2001); Abbas Kiarostami (*Close Up*, 1990); Guy Maddin (*My Winnipeg*, 2007); Mohsen Makhmalbaf (*Nun va goldun*, 1996); Avi Mograbi (*Z32*, 2008; *Between Fences*, 2016); Joshua Oppenheimer (*The Act of Killing*, 2012; *The Look of Silence*, 2014); Rithy Panh (*S-21, la machine de mort Khmère rouge*, 2003; *The Missing Picture*, 2013); Sarah Polley (*Stories We Tell,* 2012); Gianfranco Rosi (*El sicario - Room 164*, 2010), Zhang Yuan, (*Sons*, 1996). A cui si aggiungono casi di reenactment in prima persona non appartenenti al cinema documentario: si pensi per esempio a *The 15:17 to Paris* (Clint Eastwood, 2018) in ambito cinematografico e alla serie *PEN15* (Hulu, 2019-2020) in quello televisivo.

14 Inke Arns and Gaby Horn, *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2007).

15 Bruzzi, p. 133.

16 A partire ovviamente da *Differenza e ripetizione*, trad. di Giuseppe Guglielmi (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 1997).

17 Deleuze, p. 10, citando Charles Péguy.

sostituito, "a qualche cosa di unico e di singolare, che non ha eguale o equivalente".[18] E in cui a essere rigettato non è solo il dualismo gerarchico platonico, che nella metafisica classica era pensato come nesso tra due distinti ordini di realtà, uno (il derivato) gregario rispetto all'altro (l'originale): ma, e più radicalmente, l'idea stessa che vi sia un originale cui conformarsi. A tale sovversione del platonismo va infatti ricondotta la formulazione del concetto di *simulacro*: termine che risuona certo familiare nel vocabolario postmoderno, ma che nell'accezione deleuziana non condivide nulla del carattere intransitivo e autoreferenziale che avrebbe poi assunto in una certa filosofia a venire.[19] In Deleuze, infatti, la nozione di simulacro è da intendersi come l'esito di un'azione sempre mossa da un carattere positivo, nietzschianamente affermativo, e animata da un intento aggressivo-trasgressivo che rifiuta la Legge e la Morale, così come la generalità e l'abitudine: a vantaggio di una realtà, scrive Deleuze, "più profonda e più artistica".[20]

È proprio nel dominio dell'arte che Deleuze fa ricadere in primo luogo questo impianto. In misura maggiore in quello del teatro: il che spiega l'affollarsi di suggestioni deleuziane nell'alveo delle teorie del reenactment di stampo performativo.[21] Laddove peraltro emerge come uno dei maggiori motivi di interesse che caratterizza l'attuale fenomeno del reenactment sia il suo accadere come una *performance del corpo* (deleuzianamente intesa come esperienza della contingenza, piano di immanenza da attraversare con empirismo libero ed "eretico") e, al contempo, come una *ripetizione del vissuto* (che, affrancata dalla logica rappresentativa, si manifesta come autentica creazione di realtà). Un simulacro, nell'accezione sopra chiarita: ma anche una scommessa, una partita in bilico, una congiuntura in cui non si sa mai in anticipo cosa aspettarsi. Una condizione sempre pendente e impronosticabile, magari guidata nei processi, ma mai prestabilita negli

18 Deleuze, p. 10.

19 Concetto che gioca un ruolo da protagonista, per esempio, nella teoresi di Mario Perniola (*La società dei simulacri*, Bologna: Cappelli, 1980) e, ovviamente, di Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

20 Deleuze, p. 12.

21 Tra esse, ci si limita a segnalare Gabriella Giannachi, *At the edge of the 'living present'. Re-enactments and re-interpretations as strategies for the preservation of performance and new media art*, in Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman (eds.), *Histories of Performance Documentation* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 115–131; e Antonio Caronia, *Never Twice in the Same River*, in Antonio Caronia, Janez Janša, Domenico Quaranta (a cura di), *Re:akt! Recontruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting* (Brescia: Link, 2014), pp. 5–16.

approdi: "un gioco aperto, senza esiti prefissati",[22] secondo l'efficace sintesi di Renato Barilli. Un nuovo originale insomma, che si afferma in quanto differenza in sé: cui sarebbe allora opportuno riferirsi non nei termini di reenactment *dell'evento*, ma di reenactment *come evento*.[23]

Quest'ultimo riferimento non è casuale. Anche la prima "fase" del reenactment cinematografico in prima persona attribuisce infatti valenza deleuziana a quella performance che coinvolge sia il comparto produttivo (il regista e la troupe, quindi l'istanza creativa) che i reenactor (gli attori non professionisti che prendono parte all'istanza testimoniale, cui talvolta il regista non è estraneo), nel quadro generale di una crescente de-istituzionalizzazione del rapporto tra osservatore e osservato che sempre più pertiene alla forma documentaria.[24] In questa fase, in cui la ripresa cinematografica coincide con la ripresa del passato, con quel "ricordare procedendo"[25] che si oppone all'andamento retrospettivo della reminiscenza, nulla è però caratterizzato da una costitutiva incertezza come la memoria. Intesa sia come facoltà dell'intelletto, talvolta compromessa, fallibile e lacunosa, che viene "agita" ripetendo; sia come riattivazione esperienziale da parte di un corpo che assolve la funzione di un archivio incarnato, e che dotato di un proprio sapere, inciso nella pelle e custodito nei gesti, recupera comportamenti passati nel presente dell'azione performativa.[26] Di nuovo però, senza poter contare su fini preventivamente accertati, e senza sapere in anticipo *cosa*

22 Renato Barilli, *Tra presenza e assenza. Due ipotesi per l'età postmoderna* (Milano: Bompiani, 1981), p. 173. Testo che, insieme a *La ripetizione differente* (mostra, dalla titolazione dichiaratamemnte deleuziana, organizzata presso lo Studio Marconi di Milano nel 1974, poi riallestita, in un'operazione di reenactment curatoriale, presso l'omonima Fondazione nel 2014) fa di Barilli uno dei pensatori che con più acume e preveggenza si è espresso intorno al binomio ripetizione-postmoderno.

23 Sylvie Jasen, *Reenactment as Event in Contemporary Cinema*, 2011. Tesi dottorale discussa presso il Dipartimento di Cultural Mediations della Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada).

24 Simone Moraldi, *Questioni di campo* (Bulzoni: Roma, 2015).

25 Dottorini, p. 178, in riferimento al concetto di *Gjentagelsen* (ripresa/ripetizione) in Søren Kierkegaard.

26 Sull'esempio della lezione di Richard Schechner, di cui si rimanda a *Introduzione ai performance studies*, cur. da Dario Tomasello (Bologna: Cue Press, 2018), pp. 81–83. Sempre rispetto all'idea di corpo-archivio, presente in particolare nei *dance studies* contemporanei, si confronti anche André Lepecki, 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', *Dance Research Journal*, 42, 2, 2010, pp. 28–48.

possa quel corpo: quali siano le sue potenzialità, gli effetti di cui è capace, quali i rivolgimenti che è in grado di innescare.[27]

La tipologia in prima persona chiarisce infatti che, per quanto fondato sul tentativo di attualizzare il ricordo, più che un mero esercizio mnesico ogni reenactment costituisce anzitutto un processo di attraversamento: un lavoro di scavo, condotto dal reenactor tra gli strati interiori del proprio sé.[28] Un *working through*: così come Lyotard definisce la processualità freudiana orientata a favorire l'emersione "di ciò che rimane costitutivamente nascosto dell'evento e del senso dell'evento".[29] Tuttavia, proprio durante le riprese di ogni reenactment, il *working through* dei reenactor si sovrappone, fino a coincidere, con il *work in progress* del film. E se è vero che la ripetizione "non muta nulla nell'oggetto che si ripete, ma muta qualcosa nello spirito che la contempla",[30] gli interpreti delle proprie vicende passate risultano fortemente affetti dal farsi dell'opera. Esattamente mentre, e in misura non certo minore, i loro ricordi, le reciproche interazioni, i momenti di rivalsa o di sbigottimento che vicendevolmente innescano, influiscono prepotentemente sull'andamento realizzativo dell'opera stessa, rendendo necessari ripensamenti, modifiche, persino temporanei abbandoni, rispetto al progetto originariamente stabilito.

Una precarietà dunque intrinseca, strutturale, che conferisce all'immagine il potere di far emergere da una continuità indifferenziata qualcosa che non è pensabile senza la mediazione del dispositivo; e una precarietà che assegna all'esperimento, cioè al reenactment, un carattere sempre provvisorio e imprevedibile, oltre a un significato mai definitivo, ma valido unicamente nel contesto di un incontro tra il punto di vista di una camera e i diversi soggetti che delle sue riprese costituiscono il profilmico. O, più in linea con il lessico deleuziano, i diversi *campi di forze* che, di fronte a essa, si piegano e dispiegano intessendo relazioni uniche, dimostrando nel loro divenire di essere un'opportunità costante. Così come lo dimostrano nel loro ripetere: la questione cruciale che pone infatti ogni reenactment in prima persona non è solo – e freudianamente – *ripetere perché si rimuove*, bensì, commutando i termini, *rimuovere perché si ripete*, in quanto proprio tramite l'esperienza della ripetizione differente viene cancellata quell'istanza rappresentativa "che media il vissuto rapportandolo alla for-

27 Gilles Deleuze, *Cosa può un corpo? Lezioni su Spinoza*, cur. da Aldo Pardi (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007).
28 Samuel Antichi, *The Black Hole of Meaning* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2020).
29 Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inumano. Divagazioni sul tempo*, tr. di Emilio Raimondi e Federico Ferrari (Milano: Lanfranchi, 2001), p. 46.
30 Gilles Deleuze, *Differenza e ripetizione*, p. 120.

ma di un oggetto identico o simile".[31] Nella rilettura freudiana operata da Deleuze,[32] e in una prospettiva dunque spinoziana, anti-edipica, allergica a schemi predisposti e ad apparati disciplinanti, i meccanismi che presiedono all'emersione del passato operano per assicurare una saldatura tra mantenimento identitario e apertura alla differenza, giacché i processi attivi nella ripetizione, lavorando in maniera anti-mimetica, tentano di restituire una condizione pregressa solo a patto di inglobare tratti e distorsioni che, di essa, alterano inevitabilmente la costituzione originaria.[33]

È allora nel suo far scaturire la novità inglobando una dissonanza che resiste a qualsiasi struttura o narrazione precostituita che l'esercizio del ripetere una volta, e in modo terapeutico, scongiura il rischio di ripetere a oltranza, e in modo incoercibile. Permettendo così, da una parte, di distinguere tra le forme dell'elaborazione consapevole e le trappole del sabotaggio inconscio (ossia, tra una ripetizione verticale e dinamica, che con il suo incedere suscita spostamenti e variazioni, e il meccanismo orizzontale, vuoto e improduttivo, della coazione a ripetere). E dall'altra, di valutare il ripetere del reenactor non come una manovra autoreferenziale, impermeabile all'esterno, quasi fosse una nostalgica azione di recupero condotta in solitaria verso il proprio rimosso. Al contrario, e rimarcando la logica non autotelica del procedimento, come una consegna, un gesto testimoniale. Un gesto dunque relazionale e intersoggettivo, sempre in cerca di un destinatario, di un continuatore: che tuttavia risulta ancora assente in questa fase.

4. *Il secondo tempo delle immagini*

La ripresa infatti non basta. Trasformare in immagine l'azione del testimone-performer, predisporla come documento autonomo, è condizione necessaria ma non sufficiente affinché il reenactment in prima persona dispieghi pienamente la sua prestazione testimoniale. Serve un passaggio ulteriore, un supplemento di mediazione: occorre infatti che le immagini di tale performance non siano solo *mostrate* ma *montate*, coinvolte quin-

31 Deleuze, p. 29.

32 Ben prima del dittico scritto con Pierre-Félix Guattari, tale rilettura è già avanzata in *Differenza e ripetizione*, vedi in particolare pp. 7–42.

33 Si pensi solo ad alcuni espedienti produttivi che abbondano nei reenactment in prima persona, quali l'allestimento scenografico di un set diverso dal luogo originario, la sostituzione di alcuni testimoni scomparsi con figure attoriali, persino lo "scambio di ruoli" tra diversi reenactor.

di in un raffronto che chiama a raccolta diversi contenuti, provenienti da altre fonti, altri archivi, altri immaginari. Occorre quindi che l'intervento affermativo della ripresa trovi compimento in quello dialettico della post-produzione. O, in altri termini, che le immagini della performance del re-enactor risultino integrate in una convocazione plurivoca al fine di essere autenticate da un confronto di natura intermediale.[34]

Se Deleuze è dunque il riferimento principale delle teorie performative del reenactment, mentre Freud costituisce un passaggio obbligato per coloro che si muovono nel quadro di quelle terapeutiche, Benjamin è il nome a cui guardano gli approcci al fenomeno di taglio storiografico.[35] Del resto, cos'altro scorgere nelle attuali forme del reenactment se non la manifestazione di una "crisi della storia" avviata in coincidenza del declino delle grandi narrazioni moderne? Crisi che è primariamente dovuta al crescente scetticismo incubato nei confronti di qualsiasi concezione teleologica a cui far aderire il divenire storico: definitivamente sottratto a ogni finalismo, incapace di tracciare per l'umanità una strada sicura verso progresso ed emancipazione. Tutto noto: eppure, stabilire che il postmoderno presenti una mozione di sfiducia, per quanto radicale, nei confronti della storia, non significa per forza assecondare alcuni spericolati assunti della sua vulgata. A questo proposito, il funzionamento del reenactment sembra avere qualcosa di interessante da dire.

Ricorrere a un reenactment non significa infatti cedere a un ludico espediente postmoderno, impiegato per rievocare a piacimento il tempo perduto, come giocando a rimpiattino con il passato: piuttosto, significa scorgere nella strada che ci separa da quest'ultimo un tragitto non irremeabile. I reenactment mirano infatti a trasformare la continuità informale del passato, intesa come indeterminazione caotica e inesausta, in un'esperienza discreta e definita: si rivolgono cioè a ciò che è trascorso come a qualcosa che è ancora possibile intercettare, cogliere, attualizzare. Così facendo, l'accadimento ripetuto diviene storico occupando il tempo, affermando il suo statuto di evento finito. Tuttavia, come già in Benjamin, "in questo processo la storia non ha caratteristiche di chiusura, di prescrizione",[36] in quanto la

34 Nel senso chiarito in Pietro Montani, *L'immaginazione intermediale*.

35 Caronia, *Never Twice in the Same River*; Jan Verwoert, *The Crisis of Time in Times of Crisis*, in Caronia, Janša, Quaranta (a cura di), *Re:akt!*, pp. 27–31; Vanessa Agnew, 'Introduction: What Is Reenactment?', *Criticism*, 46, 3, 2004, pp. 327–339.

36 Caronia, *Re:akt!*, p. 84.

concezione storica di cui il reenactment si fa promotore è identificabile con un "campo di possibilità".[37]

È proprio allora l'intervento della ripetizione a decretare la rottura con il "presente ereditato" – il tempo, ammonisce Benjamin, "in cui di volta in volta dominano […] gli eredi di tutti coloro che hanno vinto sempre"[38] – favorendo una revisione che non accetta mai di ribadire, o peggio celebrare,[39] il significato già acquisito di un evento, e che di esso privilegia frammenti che non sono mai stati in essere: che appartengono ai vinti, agli oppressi, e che esigono di essere compiuti. Una storia che, a differenza dell'assiologia postmoderna, crede quindi nel riscatto e nella redimibilità. Coltivando la memoria del passato in funzione di quella dell'avvenire, del futuro anteriore,[40] e chiarendo così le ragioni per cui i reenactment trovano agiatamente riparo sotto la copertura di Benjamin. Lì infatti rivelano la loro natura di *azioni inattuali condotte a favore del tempo venturo*: azioni cioè che, reinterpretando il passato per mezzo di una presa di distanza (che è senz'altro temporale, ma a seconda dei casi anche ironica, parodica, polemica, straniante), lo reinquadrano all'interno del decorso temporale.

Ciò avviene in particolare nella fase di post-produzione che caratterizza ogni reenactment filmico, in quel preciso momento di arresto in cui le immagini delle riprese si trovano inserite "in una costellazione carica di tensione"[41] con una ben determinata epoca anteriore. Quando, cioè, le immagini della performance del reenactor vengono coinvolte in un'operazione di montaggio che convoca altre incisioni mediali con cui raffrontarle dialetticamente: interviste altrui, che consolidano, o al contrario minano, il resoconto del reenactor; ma anche elementi provenienti da archivi pubblici e privati; e ancora documenti storici video e fotografici, registrazioni sonore e vocali, inserti realizzati in animazione, ecc.

A spalancarsi insomma è, da una parte, tutta una serie di altri contributi che si intrecciano all'esperienza del reenactor: non per ammutolirla ma, al contrario, per fornirle una rinnovata eloquenza, frutto di un dialogo corale e non di un soliloquio. E dall'altra, la sterminata disponibilità di *found fo-*

37 Caronia, *Re:akt!*, p. 84.

38 Walter Benjamin, *Opere complete*, cur. da Enrico Ganni (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), VII, p. 486.

39 Come capita con fenomeni come la *living history* e le rievocazioni storiche di stampo turistico-didattico. Vedi Hillel Schwartz, *One More, with Feeling*, in *The Culture of the Copy* (New Yor: Zone Books), 2ª edn, pp. 217–263.

40 Marina Montanelli, *Il principio ripetizione, Studio su Walter Benjamin*, (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2017), p. 11.

41 Walter Benjamin, *Tesi di filosofia della storia*, tesi n.17, in *Angelus Novus,* cur. da Renato Solmi (Torino: Einaudi, 2014), 4ª edn, p. 85.

otage che intasa oggi la nostra cultura visuale, i cui prelievi costituiscono le voci di un controcanto decisivo, che della stessa performance mira ad autenticare il valore. Non basta infatti ripeterlo con i corpi: del passato, bisogna congiuntamente ripetere le immagini, concedendo loro un secondo tempo fatto di relazioni, di scambi, anche di contrasti.[42] Ed è proprio nel solco di questa reciprocità che l'immagine documentaria proposta dal reenactment contemporaneo, sebbene consapevole di rinunciare al miraggio della trasparenza assoluta, può continuare a qualificarsi in modo referenziale e transitivo. Non giungendo dunque agli esiti nichilisti vaticinati dalla disillusione postmoderna, ma stabilendo sempre nuove modalità con cui scandagliare i fondali della realtà, cercando di coglierne e restituirne la pregnanza più profonda.[43]

Lungi dal costituirne il punto di rottura, è allora specificatamente il ricorso a differenti formati tecnici dell'immagine, così come alle diverse forme discorsive con cui essa si presenta nel nostro immaginario, a consentire al reenactment documentario in prima persona di mettere in relazione, con un intento che sappia essere genuinamente critico, la reinterpretazione di un evento da parte di un soggetto implicato con le diverse epifanie che, di quello stesso evento, costituiscono invece le tracce mediali. Così, dopo che il reenactor, promosso ad *attore sociale*[44] in forza dell'esperienza attraversata, ha consegnato a una camera la sua testimonianza, e dopo che il regista è intervenuto su di essa con il suo supplemento di mediazione, inizia la partita dello spettatore. Che, osservando in differita *quel* corpo rimettere in scena la propria storia, intende *quel* ripetere come un gesto che lo chiama in causa: ma che, come detto, è anche tenuto a risignificarlo tramite la moltiplicazione della dialettica con gli altri materiali con cui *quel* tornare a fare gli viene presentato, in accordo a dinamiche di costruzione condivisa del senso che sono alla base di ogni reenactment in prima persona. Un dispositivo che infatti, pur muovendo da essa e dal suo valore di esemplarità, non si esaurisce mai nella ripetizione di una vicenda soggettiva e personalistica: bensì che cerca sempre di sprigionare, dalla ferita inferta al singolo, una contro-effettuazione rivolta a un orizzonte comune. Chiedendo allo spettatore di ricostruire, e al contempo trascendere, una

42 Jennifer Steetskamp, *Found Footage, Performance, Reenactment: A Case for Repetition*, in Jaap Kooijman, Patricia Pisters, Wanda Strauven (eds.), *Mind the Screen* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 333–344.

43 Una puntuale esposizione di tali modalità, tra cui il reenactment, si trova in Marco Bertozzi, *Documentario come arte* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2018).

44 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 42.

vicenda individuale a partire dalla propria sintesi dei materiali disponibili. E consentendogli dunque, con il suo intervento attivo, di far retroagire la possibilità sul tempo trascorso: sempre al fine però di prendere posizione rispetto alla propria epoca.

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RE-ANIMATING IMAGES
Il documentario animato tra postmoderno e sguardo intermediale

Intorno alle forme postmoderne del cinema documentario si è sviluppato un dibattito negli anni Novanta che ha coinvolto studiosi e studiose tra cui Linda Williams[1], Bill Nichols[2], Paula Rabinowitz[3], Janet Walker[4], Hayden White[5] e Robert Rosenstone[6]. Linda Williams conia il termine *postmodern documentary approach* prendendo in esame film che riflettono lo scetticismo legato alla capacità del cinema documentario di rappresentare e cogliere una verità univoca e incontrovertibile, mettendo in primo piano la manipolazione del racconto, tra cui, come casi emblematici, *La sottile linea blu* (*The Thin Blue Line*, 1988) di Errol Morris e *Shoah* (*Id*., 1985) di Claude Lanzmann. La studiosa individua nel cinema contemporaneo una mancanza di fiducia "nell'abilità della macchina da presa di riflettere verità oggettive di un qualunque referente sociale".[7] Questi film adottano un linguaggio storiografico in linea con la nozione di storia postmoderna, che si pone in contrasto con le forme di narrazione tradizionali, le scoperte e le pretese di verità incontrovertibile, mostrando lo smantellamento e il dissolversi dell'unidirezionalità della storia, dell'unitarietà del sapere, a favore della manipolazione e della frammentazione. La verità non è garantita e

1 Linda Williams, 'Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary', *Film Quarterly*, 46, 3, (Spring 1993), 9–21.
2 Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
3 Paula Rabinowitz, 'Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory', *History and Theory*, 32, 2, (1993), 119–137.
4 Janet Walker, 'The Traumatic Paradox: Documentary Films, Historical Fictions, and Cataclysmic Past Events', *Signs*, 22, 4, (Summer 1997), 803–825.
5 Hayden White, *The modernist event*, ed. by Vivian Sobchack, *The persistence of history: cinema, television and the modern event* (London-New York: Routledge, 1996), 17–39 (p. 19).
6 Robert Rosenstone, *The future of the past: film and the beginnings of postmodern history*, ed. by Vivian Sobchack, *The persistence of history*, 201–219.
7 Williams, p. 10.

non può essere riflessa in maniera trasparente.[8] Come prosegue Linda Williams, "è diventato quasi un assioma del nuovo cinema documentario che i film non possano rivelare la verità degli eventi, ma solo le ideologie e la consapevolezza che costruisce le verità".[9]

Rievocando fatti storici attraverso formule narrative, investigando e mescolando regimi visivi, strutture ed estetiche differenti, significati ed eventi, utilizzando immagini di repertorio, riprese dal vero, cronache diaristiche in prima persona, ricostruzioni e rievocazioni di fatti storici, il documentario postmoderno attua una rappresentazione *para-historical*, come sottolinea Hayden White.[10] Lo studioso conia il termine *postmodernist docu-drama*, mentre Robert Rosenstone il concetto di *postmodern historical film*,[11] facendo riferimento a quei film che mettono in primo piano il proprio processo di costruzione/creazione filmica, privilegiando la pluralità dovuta a molteplici prospettive, attuando una drammatizzazione dell'evento storico che comporta incontrovertibilmente anche una sua interpretazione. La chiave non è l'accuratezza o la verosimiglianza degli eventi trattati, quanto l'abilità di "mettere in sospensione la distinzione tra reale e immaginario".[12]

L'abiezione della pretesa apparente di oggettività fornita dal cinema documentario e la sottile relazione espressa dalla mescolanza di aspetti realistici con forme fantasmatiche vengono portate all'estremo nel documentario attraverso la tecnica artificiosa per eccellenza, ovvero l'animazione. Quella dell'*animated documentary* è, come sostiene Daniele Dottorini, una sorta di genere a sé nel cinema del reale, che si definisce essenzialmente per la sua tecnica, quella di "mescolare riprese dal vero ad animazioni di tipo diverso (dal disegno animato tradizionale al CGI, passando per l'animazione a passo uno).[13] Annabelle Honess Roe propone di considerare il documentario animato secondo tre funzioni: *mimetic substitution*, *non-mimetic substitution* e *interpretive*. Nel primo caso l'animazione mima la realtà, nel secondo l'obiettivo di realismo viene messo da parte in favore di un approccio più creativo per colmare il gap dovuto alla mancanza di refe-

8 Pauline Vaillancourt Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads and Intrusions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 66.

9 Williams, p. 13.

10 White, p. 18.

11 Secondo Rosenstone, il *postmodern historical film* non intende fornire verità incontrovertibili e letterali del passato ma fornisce interpretazioni e verità metaforiche, mezzo di trasmissione del messaggio storico, posizionandosi come sfida e revisione critica del discorso storico tradizionale.

12 White, p. 19.

13 Daniele Dottorini, *La passione del reale. Il documentario o la creazione del mondo* (Milano: Mimesis, 2018), p. 213.

renzialità dell'immaginario. L'interpretazione esplora invece i concetti, le emozioni, i sentimenti e gli stati d'animo, aiutando a far comprendere allo spettatore la soggettività di un determinato personaggio.[14] L'utilizzo dell'animazione, che ri-mette ulteriormente in discussione i tradizionali limiti epistemologici dissolvendo completamente il legame indessicale e il rapporto ontologico con la realtà rappresentata,[15] può provvedere alla ricostruzione e ricreazione di eventi, episodi storici che non sono stati documentati o di cui la documentazione non è più disponibile, andando a costituire un modello alternativo, antimimetico, per accedere al passato e per figurare i contenuti dislocati, frammentari e fantasmatici della memoria traumatica.[16]

Il primo caso di studio che vorrei prendere in esame, *Valzer con Bashir* (*Vals Im Bashir*, 2008), diretto da Ari Folman, risulta essere un esempio paradigmatico al fine di riflettere sulle modalità con cui la forma animata può trasformarsi in veicolo e strumento per esplorare la memoria repressa e per rielaborare l'esperienza traumatica. Il regista va alla ricerca e alla riscoperta del proprio vissuto in un percorso che lo porterà a comprendere il personale coinvolgimento nel massacro palestinese compiuto dalle falangi libanesi, con la complicità dell'esercito israeliano, tra il 16 e 18 Settembre 1982 nei campi profughi di Sabra e Shatila a Beirut. Folman, che non riesce a comprendere e a ricordare l'accaduto a cui potrebbe aver preso parte, decide di recarsi da amici ed ex commilitoni, i cui racconti, le cui testimonianze possono in qualche modo far riaffiorare in lui i ricordi, i tasselli mancanti che sono stati repressi, non assimilati, al fine di ottenere un quadro più dettagliato e organico della propria esperienza durante il conflitto e il ruolo che ebbe in occasione del massacro.

Il film si apre con le immagini di un incubo ricorrente che Boaz, un ex-soldato che ha prestato servizio insieme al regista, decide di raccontare a Folman. Ventisei cani corrono all'impazzata non curanti delle persone o degli oggetti che trovano sul loro cammino, per poi radunarsi ed abbaiare sotto la finestra dell'uomo. Il sogno si ricollega direttamente all'esperienza

14 Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

15 Secondo Cristina Formenti, il documentario animato, dal momento che "adotta principalmente la grammatica e l'estetica del cinema di finzione, ma manca visivamente un legame indessicale con la realtà filmata […] utilizza attori ricreati per ri-mettere in scena e drammatizzare storie realmente accadute", dovrebbe essere ridefinito come "la forma più sincera di docudrama". Cristina Formenti, 'The sincerest form of docudrama: reframing the animated documentary', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 8, 2, 103–115 (p. 103).

16 Steve Fore, 'Reenacting Ryan: The Fantasmatic and the Animated Documentary', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 6, 3, 2011, 277–292.

vissuta da Boaz durante la guerra in Libano quando uccise, nel corso delle operazioni di pattugliamento, lo stesso numero di cani, ventisei, e che adesso, da più di due anni, continuano a perseguitarlo. Boaz decide di rivolgersi a Folman per rielaborare la propria esperienza traumatica, "non può il cinema essere terapeutico? Tu le tue angosce le hai sempre elaborate attraverso i film, giusto?", commenta l'uomo. Il regista in questo caso diventa testimone dell'atto stesso di testimoniare. L'incontro tra i due reduci permette a Boaz di trovare una figura a cui raccontare la propria esperienza e a Folman di rendersi consapevole, con stupore, di aver represso l'evento e di non averlo registrato cognitivamente nel momento del suo accadimento.

La stessa notte in cui avviene l'incontro tra i due ex commilitoni, nell'inverno del 2006, anche il regista, che prima di allora non aveva alcun tipo di ricordo della guerra, ha un terribile flashback della notte del massacro. L'uomo, all'epoca un giovanissimo soldato, sta facendo il bagno in mare quando viene illuminato dai bagliori dei razzi al fosforo. Le scie luminose cadono verso il centro urbano e lo attraggono insieme ad altri due suoi compagni verso la città. I tre giovani emergono dal mare mentre il sole sta sorgendo, si rivestono e proseguono il cammino per le strade di Beirut, deserta e ridotta in macerie. L'immagine da cui è posseduto l'uomo si ripete più volte nel corso del film, in un eterno ritorno traumatico, ogni volta rivelando un elemento in più che possa andare a restituire un quadro completo della notte del massacro. Folman decide di riassemblare la cronaca degli eventi interagendo e incontrando altri suoi compagni, i cui ricordi, le cui memorie, le cui testimonianze possono ricostituire l'evento storico, colmare il vuoto dell'esperienza mancata, non assimilata. Il regista vuole in primo luogo trovare un senso, attribuire un significato al proprio ricordo della guerra in Libano, un flashback che è riemerso in occasione dell'incontro con Boaz ma che ha bisogno di essere autenticato, ristabilizzato, reinserito e ricontestualizzato all'interno della ricostruzione dell'accaduto. Il regista si domanda se il suo ricordo non sia irreale, completamente frutto della propria immaginazione. Fantasia e realtà, immagini mentali, fantasmatiche e ricordo si alternano mescolandosi senza possibilità di una cesura netta.

Secondo quanto teorizzato da Janet Walker, il *trauma cinema* "rappresenta la realtà in maniera obliqua, prendendo ispirazione dal funzionamento dei processi mentali e mescolando tecniche auto-riflessive che rendono chiare la fragilità della struttura storiografica audio-visiva".[17] La studiosa identifica come fondative della memoria traumatica due istanze: una im-

17 Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema. Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 19.

maginaria e una fattuale che provvedono ad una costruzione dislocata e fantasmatica della verità degli eventi. Riflettendo sulla memoria traumatica e sulla questione della sua attendibilità, secondo Walker non è possibile operare una netta cesura tra fantasie, ricordi falsi o aderenti alla realtà. La studiosa conia il termine *disremembering* in merito alla tipologia di produzione del ricordo di un evento traumatico, che significa "ricordare con una differenza ed è un processo caratterizzato da immagini e suoni mentali relativi ad eventi passati ma alterati per certi aspetti".[18] I falsi ricordi e le costruzioni fantasmatiche nella memoria "sono parti e suddivisioni del processo", elementi fondamentali nella riconciliazione e rielaborazione del passato traumatico.[19] La memoria traumatica presenta quindi uno scenario fantasmatico di forme ibride, un terreno friabile dove la produzione del ricordo non coincide con una realistica. La memoria traumatica di Ari mostra la propria natura dinamica, frammentata, *disremembed*.

Nel finale di *Valzer con Bashir* viene fornita un'interpretazione del sogno, quel flashback riemerso nella psiche del regista, immagine che viene trasferita in una dimensione fattuale autenticata dalle parole del giornalista Ben-Yishai. Il reporter racconta che, dopo aver raccolto diverse voci e *rumors* su quanto stesse accadendo a Sabra e Shatila, decide di recarsi direttamente sul luogo insieme ad un cameraman. L'uomo è il primo ad entrare nei campi profughi a documentare il massacro, filmando decine di corpi ammassati nei cortili o sotterrati dalle macerie delle abitazioni. Un gruppo di donne esce dal campo procedendo lungo la strada. La macchina da presa le sorpassa andandosi a fermare sul volto di Folman che, insieme ad un commilitone, osserva impietrito le donne avanzare verso la propria direzione. Dopo il primo piano del regista, la sequenza finale è composta esclusivamente da immagini di repertorio che mostrano la stessa scena vista precedentemente attraverso la forma animata, ovvero un gruppo di donne disperate piange la morte dei propri cari durante il massacro. Come sostiene Massimiliano Coviello, facendo riferimento alle potenzialità retoriche del "testo nel testo" proposte da Lotman, in *Valzer con Bashir* "il regime narrativo del testo di finzione funge da strumento autenticativo nei confronti del sottotesto composto dalle immagini di repertorio".[20] Il processo di rielaborazione comporta un rinnovamento delle capacità percettive

18 Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, p. 17.
19 Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, p. 14.
20 Jurij Mihajlovic Lotman, *La cultura e l'esplosione: Prevedibilità e Imprevedibilità*, trad. Caterina Valentino (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1993), p. 87 in Massimiliano Coviello, *Forme del ricordo e processi di autenticazione delle immagini*, Valzer con Bashir *di Ari Folman*, a cura di Dario Mangano, Alvise Mattozzi, *La ricerca*

nel momento in cui viene assimilato cognitivamente l'accaduto. In questo modo il regista, messo di fronte per l'ultima volta al proprio passato, riesce a vedere e riscoprire le tracce referenziali dell'esperienza traumatica che acquisiscono valore aggiunto e autenticità, venendo comparate in maniera dialettica con le figurazioni animate.

Il film diventa così "luogo di esponibilità per le immagini documentarie, le loro potenzialità performative, la loro evidenza indessicale è rafforzata dal montaggio intermediale in cui sono collocate".[21] Il pianto delle donne fa da ponte sonoro tra le due scene, iniziando nel regno finzionale dell'animazione per proseguire nell'autenticità delle immagini di repertorio che, estrapolate da un archivio statico, acquisiscono ulteriore significato nel momento in cui vengono contestualizzate all'interno di una struttura narrativa. Le immagini prelevate dal repertorio televisivo vengono riabilitate quindi dalle tracce animate. L'insieme di immagini, di diversa provenienza e formato, comparate in maniera dialettica dal montaggio intermediale, promuovono un processo di rielaborazione dell'evento traumatico verso una riscrittura della memoria storica e collettiva. Secondo quanto afferma Pietro Montani, della cui etica l'intermedialità è un organo centrale, attraverso un processo di "perlustrazione critica",[22] tra rimediazione e rimemorazione, le immagini possono veicolare una conoscenza, riassumere il proprio valore testimoniale, nel momento in cui non restituiscono un richiamo esclusivamente affettivo ma vengo rese disponibili alla "configurazione di un'esperienza effettiva".[23]

L'utilizzo dell'animazione nel documentario permette di rappresentare il "nonfilmabile", concetti astratti, pensieri dei personaggi, "quello che risiede sotto la superficie della realtà quotidiana", riflettendo sulla problematicità del legame indessicale con la realtà mediata dalla tecnica di finzionalizzazione.[24] Secondo quanto afferma Paul Ward, nel documentario animato la tensione tra la percezione dell'*animatedness* e la *documentariness* potrebbe rivelare più "realtà" in merito ad una situazione rispetto a quanto invece accadrebbe nei documentari in *live action* ed è "un requisito per ogni forma di espressione che voglia affrontare il mondo esterno in tut-

semiotica, Interventi dal III Simposio interdottorale del CISISM (Roma: Aracne, 2012), pp. 13–40.

21 Coviello, p. 39.

22 Pietro Montani, *L'immaginazione intermediale. Perlustrare, rifigurare, testimoniare il mondo visibile* (Bari: Laterza, 2010), p. 64.

23 Montani, p. 70.

24 Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 85–88.

te le sue complessità e contraddizioni".[25] Come sostiene ancora Dottorini, il documentario animato esplora "le forme attraverso cui il cinema lavora l'immaginazione, sia per trasformare il mondo, sia per evocarne la perdita, sia per dare forma a incubi e desideri".[26]

Un altro film che riflette sull'utilizzo dell'animazione come forma di figurazione per rendere visibile una memoria traumatica, verso un processo di rielaborazione, è *La strada dei Samouni* (2018) diretto da Stefano Savona. Ad un anno di distanza dall'operazione Piombo Fuso, una campagna militare lanciata dall'esercito israeliano per colpire duramente la Striscia di Gaza, protrattasi dal 27 dicembre 2008 al 18 gennaio 2009,[27] il regista ritorna sul luogo della strage ritrovando la famiglia Samouni, conosciuta in quella tragica occasione.[28] Seppur decimati dal violento attacco dell'anno precedente nella periferia rurale della città di Gaza, i Samouni cercano di lasciarsi alle spalle quei terribili momenti, ricostruire una parvenza di normalità e unione, superare la rabbia e il dolore celebrando il matrimonio di uno dei propri membri, la prima festa dalla fine della guerra. Seguendo il filo del ricordo e delle testimonianze di chi c'era ed è sopravvissuto, Savona tesse un ritratto della vita della famiglia partendo dai periodi lieti e spensierati, prima di quei tragici momenti di sangue, fino ad arrivare ad una ricostruzione dell'evento traumatico. Per rappresentare quello che la macchina da presa non ha potuto cogliere, il regista decide di ricorrere alla tecnica dell'animazione, un gesto estetico artificioso che possa dar forma e vita all'immagine mancante del trauma. Il film procede alternando in maniera dialettica le riprese dal vero con le immagini animate in bianco e nero (realizzate da Simone Massi, tra i principali autori internazionali di animazione a passo uno), contraddistinte da un tratto vibrante e ruvido che sembra graffiare, scavare, lacerare lo schermo, restituendo la drammaticità dell'evento e le cicatrici del suo passaggio, un dialogo intermediale continuo e a stretto contatto. Le prime si rifanno a un principio di realtà, traccia referenziale per le seconde che diventano unica forma di figurazione del passato traumatico. I due sistemi di rappresentazione si intrecciano, completandosi e completando il racconto. La forma animata lascia spazio alle riprese dal vero e viceversa: come sottolinea Alessia Cervini, "un lavoro di messa in forma del reale nel quale, bazinianamente, il documento e la

25 Ward, p. 89.
26 Dottorini, p. 213.
27 Per un approfondimento si veda Marcella Emiliani, *Medio Oriente: Una storia dal 1991 ad oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 2012).
28 Nel 2009 Stefano Savona riprende gli ultimi giorni dei bombardamenti aerei sulla Striscia di Gaza nel film *Piombo Fuso* (2009).

finzione si co-implicano, in modo da non interrompere il circolo virtuoso che tiene insieme la rappresentazione estetica del mondo e la "flagranza" di quello stesso mondo".[29]

A guidare, con le proprie testimonianze, il racconto del tragico evento sono in particolar modo la piccola Alma e il fratello Fuad che durante il raid hanno perso il padre. In apertura, la bambina confida al regista che non ricorda, che non conosce la storia e che non saprebbe come raccontarla. Amal, insieme ad altri bambini, disegna sui fogli di carta, per gioco, dando sfogo alla propria immaginazione, traccia dei segni nel terreno davanti alla propria abitazione, ormai in rovina, per mostrare dove fosse un sicomoro, albero imponente sotto cui si riunivano gli uomini del villaggio. Le sue parole, le sue azioni, le tracce del ricordo che la bambina porta con sé si tramutano in immagini animate e vengono traslate in una dimensione altra. La memoria traumatica diventa forma visibile. L'animazione prosegue il racconto restituendo una nuova linfa, forma maieutica, dando voce a chi non ne ha, venendo in soccorso a chi non riesce ad esprimersi, mescolando sogno e realtà, mito e avventura. La problematicità nel dare e mettere in forma un'esperienza traumatica coinvolge non solo il sopravvissuto, ma anche il regista stesso, che cerca di restituire, attraverso il film, il punto di vista del testimone. Come riporta Savona nelle note di regia:

> Ho capito che per rendere loro giustizia, non potevo fermarmi alla constatazione della tragedia: la famiglia Samouni meritava che raccontassi la loro storia per intero, facendo rivivere sullo schermo anche il loro passato. Attraverso le immagini d'animazione, ho potuto ricreare i momenti chiave della loro storia: il cinema va oltre la cronaca e permette allo spettatore di avvicinarsi in maniera più intima e profonda al vissuto dei protagonisti.[30]

Servendosi di riprese documentarie per tessere il tempo presente e immagini animate per raffigurare il passato, la memoria traumatica e la sua dimensione fantasmatica, il film crea una stratificazione di formati e registri che non ha come obiettivo quello di restituire una versione particolarmente fedele e mimetica dei fatti accaduti ma quello di suggerire una reinterpretazione che sorpassi l'irrappresentabilità del trauma.[31] Riflettendo

29 Alessia Cervini, 'Ripensare il reale', *Fata Morgana Web*, 10 Dicembre 2018, https://www.fatamorganaweb.unical.it/index.php/category/autori/alessia-cervini/

30 *La Strada dei Samouni* (2018), note di regia. http://distribuzione.ilcinemaritrovato.it/per-conoscere-i-film/la-strada-dei-samouni/note-di-regia

31 Huyssen prende in esame *Maus* (1991), la graphic novel di Art Spiegelman incentrata sull'Olocausto, a partire dai racconti del padre dell'autore, sopravvissuto

sull'immagine mancante, attraverso l'utilizzo dell'animazione, il cinema documentario "cerca di far diventare immagine in altro modo quel passato come assenza, quel pensiero immateriale, quel desiderio non visibile. […] perché il non filmabile non debba necessariamente essere anche non immaginabile".[32]

La relazione eterogenea tra documentalità, fattualità e processi di finzionalizzazione emerge chiaramente anche nel film *Chris the Swiss* (2018) di Anja Kofmel, dove la realtà dialoga costantemente con il livello dell'animazione attraverso la costruzione di un discorso intermediale. A più di vent'anni dalla tragica scomparsa del cugino Chris, la regista decide di compiere un viaggio atto ad indagare e gettare luce sulle strane circostanze del suo assassinio. L'uomo, un reporter recatosi nel 1992 in Croazia per seguire la guerra civile nei Balcani, venne ritrovato privo di vita in un campo con indosso l'uniforme del PIV, un gruppo mercenario internazionale. Per raccontare e per portare avanti la propria personale ricerca, scavando in un rimosso tanto familiare quanto collettivo, la regista alterna filmati d'archivio, che ritraggono il cugino o episodi del conflitto, interviste realizzate ad altri reporter presenti nello stesso teatro di guerra, registrazioni telefoniche di criminali in carcere e immagini animate. Se da un lato il materiale documentario viene riservato per lo sviluppo dell'inchiesta, la *detection*, facendo emergere oltre all'orrore della cronaca di guerra anche alcune delle possibili motivazioni che hanno portato a tale conflitto, dall'altro l'animazione si ricollega alla dimensione intima dell'autobiografia e del film di famiglia, ricostruendo, o sarebbe meglio dire proponendo una possibile ricostruzione, di quanto accaduto al cugino. I disegni in bianco e nero, stilizzati, con un'estetica da acquarello, filtrano, danno forma e mediazione alle visioni e interpretazioni personali dell'autrice per quanto riguarda la storia di Chris, i motivi che l'hanno spinto in quei luoghi e la sua terribile fine.

La forma animata segue un sentiero immaginifico, non mimetico nei confronti dei fatti accaduti, dal momento che la regista non rappresenta in maniera fantasmatica quello che ha esperito in prima persona come nei

ad Auschwitz. L'opera, rigettando il sistema di figurazione realistico e mimetico, dal momento che i personaggi sono rappresentati non in forma umana ma con sembianze animali, compie una risoggettivazione puramente rielaborativa atta a riflettere sulla complessità e la molteplicità di stratificazioni che contraddistinguono il trauma storico e il rapporto tra testimonianza e sua trasformazione-trasposizione in immagine-testo. Andreas Huyssen, *Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno*, ed. by Barbie Zelizer, *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 28–42.

32 Dottorini, p. 212.

due casi di studio precedenti. La donna non sa cosa sia realmente successo e, durante la propria ricerca, si lascia guidare dall'immaginazione, dal potere interpretativo, facendo disegni e ritratti che poi andranno a comporre la struttura del film. Le animazioni trasmettono e presagiscono l'orrore e l'oppressione della guerra, figure dalle sagome sfocate che si aggirano nei bordi dell'inquadratura, creature-ombra che si uniscono in uno sciame, una matassa nera che si alza in cielo pronta a colpire la città. Il disegno non duplica il reale ma restituisce una forma a scene oniriche, incubi e dialoghi immaginari. Ancora una volta è lo scenario onirico, attraverso la tecnica dell'animazione, a rendere concreta la dimensione soggettiva ed interiore, ricordi, illusioni e proiezioni evanescenti. Le memorie traumatiche prendono la forma del disegno. Il montaggio intermediale, tra reale e immaginario, riflette sull'eterogeneità delle strategie di enunciazione ripensando alla capacità testimoniale del cinema.

Per concludere, l'animazione diventa una forma di figurazione che rievoca il trauma trasposto e rielaborato in un universo alternativo, traslando e trasferendo un'esperienza per natura inaccessibile ed indicibile oltre le forme convenzionali di rappresentazione al di fuori del legame referenziale diretto con il mondo esterno. L'utilizzo dell'animazione riconfigura e mette in discussione i tradizionali limiti epistemologici del cinema documentario, estremizzando la tensione che generalmente si crea tra quello che viene presentato sullo schermo e l'immagine indessicale che si espande, verso una relazione dialettica tra l'assenza di un referente visivo materiale e l'eccesso dell'estetica dell'animazione, spesso simbolica e non realistica.[33] La ricerca, dunque, tende verso la creazione di un sistema di rappresentazione ibrido, che vada oltre il regime realistico, più adeguato a restituire lo stravolgimento degli schemi di produzione di senso dovuti all'esperienza traumatica. Il corrispettivo formale del trauma, la sua natura temporale ritardata e latente, difficilmente riconducibile ad uno schema narrativo e un percorso di rimemorazione razionale, possono venir al meglio figurate da una forma non realistica e antimimetica. Le opere prese in esame, attraverso determinate e specifiche strategie estetiche e formali, provvedono alla frammentazione e alla decostruzione del tessuto testuale e stilistico del film, rispecchiando la natura della memoria traumatica.

Dall'incrocio tra forme di figurazione ibride si genera uno sguardo testimoniale intermediale, un dialogo costante tra reale e immaginario, fiction

33 Annabelle Honess Roe, 'Absence, excess and epistemological expansion: towards a framework for the study of animated documentary', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 6, 3, 2011, pp. 215–230.

e non-fiction, filmati d'archivio e disegni animati, che mira a perlustrare la complessità della prestazione immaginativa da cui l'istanza del racconto dipende.[34] Nonostante l'indifferenza referenziale che sembra caratterizzate lo stato dell'immagine contemporanea, "è proprio in questo scenario che le pratiche più attente e consapevoli dell'immagine sperimentano nuove strategie di autenticazione, soprattutto attraverso una ricerca costante di nuove forme di intreccio tra l'aspetto finzionale e l'aspetto documentale delle immagini".[35] Laddove l'immagine manca, quando essa non può essere creata filmando, l'animazione, attraverso un lavoro di immaginazione, procede verso una rilettura e risoggettivazione del reale al fine di risignificare e rielaborare l'esperienza traumatica.

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34 Pietro Montani, *L'immaginazione narrativa. Il racconto del cinema oltre i confini dello spazio letterario* (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2000).

35 Dottorini, p. 39.

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Giacomo Fuk

DONALD JUDD: POSTMODERNISM AND SPACE

The American artist Donald Judd (1928-1994) has been linked to the notions of "postmodern" and "postmodernism" by the art critic Rosalind Krauss in a 1979 article about recent American sculpture. The paper contains an implicit polemic against the art criticism of Alfred H. Barr Jr, Clement Greenberg, William Rubin, and Michael Fried, who understood abstract American painting and sculpture as a continuation of European avant-gardes towards a purification of the mediums of art: a very influential interpretation, which established the still widely employed – and much inclusive – definition of this continuity as "modernism".

So influential that Krauss doesn't really contest the existence of modernism, rather considering it surpassed by a "historical rupture" and a "structural transformation" which consists in a blurring of the distinction between sculpture, architecture, and landscape in some works of the years 1968-1970, as those of Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra – and Donald Judd. She questions the continuity between these authors and the artistic avant-garde of the first half of the twentieth century:

> No sooner had minimal sculpture appeared on the horizon of the aesthetic experience of the 1960s, than criticism began to construct a paternity for this work, a set of constructivist fathers who could legitimize and thereby authenticate the strangeness of these objects. Plastic? inert geometries? factory production? – none of this was *really* strange, as the ghosts of Gabo and Tatlin and Lissitzky could be called in to testify. Never mind that Gabo's celluloid was the sign of lucidity and intellection, while Judd's plastic-tinged-with-dayglo spoke the hip patois of California.[1]

1 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 8 (Spring 1979), 30–44 (p. 41); repr. in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 31–42 (p. 32). Krauss wrote many a time about Judd; however, the present paper aims just at point at Judd's relation to contemporary architects and to 'postmodernism', and not at

Krauss's claims seem indeed to rely on some of Judd's ideas and especially on his renowned article *Specific Objects* (written in 1964 and published in 1965), where he gathered a large number of recent works (particularly by John Chamberlain, Frank Stella, Lee Bontecou, and Claes Oldenburg) under the idea of "specific objects":

> Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture. […] The new three-dimensional work doesn't constitute a movement, school, or style. […] Three-dimensionality is not as near being simply a container as painting and sculpture have seemed to be, but it tends to that. But now painting and sculpture are less neutral, less containers, more defined, not undeniable and unavoidable. They are particular forms circumscribed after all, producing fairly definite qualities. Much of the motivation in the new work is to get clear of these forms. The use of three dimensions is an obvious alternative. It opens to anything.[2]

Pollock and Newman are especially credited with having discovered a new spatial function of the work of art:

> In work before 1946 [year of Pollock's first "drip" paintings] the edges of the rectangle are a boundary, the end of the picture. The composition must react to the edges and the rectangle must be unified, but the shape of the rectangle is not stressed; the parts are more important, and the relationships of color and form occur among them. In the paintings of Pollock, Rothko, Still, and Newman, and more recently of Reinhardt and Noland, the rectangle is empathized. […] The parts are few and so subordinate to the unity as not to be parts in an ordinary sense. A painting is nearly an entity, one thing, and not the indefinable sum of a group of entities and references.[3]

These statements could resemble to those of Greenberg stressing the medium (painting as such) in "abstract expressionism"; but Judd was interested in form (the rectangle, the relation between unity and parts), not in medium. His conclusion is the opposite than Greenberg's: not the autonomy of painting, but its mixing with sculpture; not the contemplative purity of medium, but the presence of the object in the space of real perception.

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discussing Krauss's relation to Judd – a task already carried out by David Raskin, 'The Shiny Illusionism of Krauss and Judd', *Art Journal*, 65.1 (2006), 6–21.

2 Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', Arts Yearbook, 8 (1965), 74–82, repr. in Donald Judd, *Writings*, ed. by Flavin Judd and Caitlin Murray (New York: Judd Foundation/David Zwirner Books, 2016), 134–145 (p. 135).

3 Ibid., p. 136.

Judd did not begin his career as a sculptor, but as an art critic and a painter. His paintings of the years 1958-1961 were strongly inspired by Pollock and Newman. What Judd was looking to in their works was not their style or technique, but their compact unity, their stressing of the edges of the canvas, and their large scale (which is not the same as large size[4]). Through these characters, the painting tended to lose its ancient status of image and to project itself into the surrounding space. Newman wanted the viewer to come so close to his works that he could be no more aware of the whole of the painting at a glance – exactly what happens in architecture.

The use of color, particularly cadmium red, in Judd's paintings in 1960-1961 was certainly influenced by Newman's (but also Matisse's and – maybe partly via Lichtenstein – Léger's) use of intense and expansive pigments evenly spread all over his nearly monochrome canvases. This use of color was to be fundamental in all of Judd's later works. In 1961, he began to introduce tridimensional elements in his paintings, like the *Letter Box* of 1962 (Judd never gave a title to any of his works; but analogy and reference *usque recurrunt*: the critics nicknamed them *The Stack*, *The Bleachers*, *The Harp*, *The Lifeboat*, and so on[5]). The sensation of the painting as an object prevailed over the perception of the image. In 1962, Judd began to put some works no more on the wall, but on the ground, without a pedestal, producing a perceptive continuity between the work and the surrounding architectural space.

Few years later, Robert Morris exalted the special and perceptive openness and the "publicness" of works like those of Judd, Tony Smith, John McCracken, Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt, and himself: "The quality of publicness is attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself".[6]

> The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one

4 "But scale is not dependent on size. All of Newman's small paintings and prints have a large scale. All of the painters were against what they called 'easel paintings'. All wanted their paintings to be seen at the usual distance, not fifty feet back, reducing them to pictures". (Donald Judd, 'Abstract Expressionism', in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1975–1986* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1987), 37–48, repr. in Judd, *Writings*, 324–337 (p. 336).

5 Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 32.

6 Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', *Artforum*, 5.2 (October 1966), 20–23, repr. in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge (Mass.), London, and New York: The MIT Press and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1993), 11–21 (pp. 11–13).

> of the terms in the newer esthetic. It is in some way more reflexive, because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.[7]

The bulky and slightly gloomy appearance of Morris's sculptures of the time, imposing their rather uncanny presence to an almost reluctant architectural space, shows some affinity to the work of Tony Smith, though without the latent lyricism of the latter, but contrasts with the lightweight, transparent, even illusionist quality that Kirk Varnedoe pointed out in Judd's works.[8] This quality, attributable to the pictorial *Bildung* of their author, doesn't put Judd's "objects" and architecture in mutual opposition, but connect them in an open spatial unity.

The provoking (and actually somewhat illustrative) mode of presence of Morris's tridimensional works can be said to tend to representation in a theatrical sense; a tendency confirmed by his late sculptural series *Moltingsexoskeletonsshrouds* (2015), which may recall the sacred terracotta sculpture of fifteenth-century northern Italy (and lacks the illustrative character of several of his previous works). Judd's tridimensional works, contrariwise, absorb the viewer's gaze, almost like painting, except that they produce a tridimensional, near architectural space; Judd called them "installations". His works always establish a relation not only with the viewer's gaze, but with his entire body insofar that he has to move, and to move in the space of the work (and not just around it, as for statues); this relationship between the work and the body rules any representation out, above all the representation of the body (anthropomorphism was one of Judd's *bêtes noires*), whereas Morris always considered the body as a motive of his work, until the powerful representation he gave of it in *Moltingsexoskeletonsshrouds*, where sculpture becomes a sort of choreography.

Judd began to write on architecture quite early, in 1964, where he noticed that most American "modernist" buildings shown a "thoroughly pu-

7 Ibid., p. 15.
8 Varnedoe, p. 108.

erile" elegance.[9] The new techniques and taste introduced in the USA by the example of European architects like Le Corbusier et Ludwig Mies van der Rohe had paradoxically given rise, particularly after 1960, to a new separation between building and composition, between the structural organization of space and the decorative treatment of façades. The neoclassical forms of Philip Johnson's project for New York State Theater in the Lincoln Center (1964), which recall the Italian architecture of the 1930s, are the triumph of this separation.

Philip Johnson (1906-2005) had been a champion of "modern architecture" in the USA and had worked with Mies van der Rohe and Barr. Judd knew him well for having worked with him in 1971, when Johnson commissioned from him a work for his Glass House. According to Judd, "modernist" American architects like Johnson or Skidmore, Owings & Merill had turned the work of Wright and of European architects like Gropius, Le Corbusier, or Mies van der Rohe into a style (a decorative formalism), and then some of them, like Johnson, turned this "modernist" style into a neoclassical, to a certain extent anti-modern style, which would eventually become the so-called "postmodern" style[10]. "Modern" and "postmodern" architects are often the same people (as for Johnson):

9 Donald Judd, 'Month in Review', *Arts Magazine*, October 1964, 60–64, repr. as 'Twentieth Century Engineering' in Judd, *Writings*, 146–150 (p. 149). On Judd's work in architecture, see: *Donald Judd. Architektur*, ed. by Donald Judd and Peter Noever (Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst: Wien, 1991); Urs Flückiger, *Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas* (Birkhäuser: Basel, 2007). There is much less about Judd's thought about architecture: see Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009); Alexander R. Bigman, 'Architecture and Objecthood: Donald Judd's Renaissance Imaginary', *Oxford Art Journal*, 40.2 (2017), 263–286. A relevant testimony to Judd's interest in architecture (and to his often unsuccessful effort to collaborate with architects) is in *The Relationship Between Art and Architecture: Summary of a Workshop* (Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation: Santa Monica, 1989).

10 The interpretation and reception of European architecture in terms of image and style – and in particular 'modernist' style – has been quite explicitly established at the beginning of the 1930s by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson himself, especially through the 1932 MoMA exhibition *Modern Architecture* (the MoMA was then directed by Alfred H. Barr Jr): see the catalogue of the exhibition, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, ed. by Henry-Russel Hitchcock and Philip Johnson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, *International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1932), republished in 1966 with a new foreword and an appendix by Hitchcock.

> "Postmodern" is nonsense since "modern" means only modern, which is now. The term is cant since the rather small influence of the "modern" architects is held responsible for the banality of all architecture and since then this supposedly dire influence is attacked by those who claim to want something more, often some of the same architects who debased the style of Mies van der Rohe to the "International Style". This is two strawmen wrestling.[11]

As he had done in his writings as an art critic, Judd did not believe in categories, like "modernism" and "postmodernism", and applied to them a nominalist and skeptical attitude; he preferred looking only to real works and to single authors. In a text written for the catalogue of the exhibition *Bilderstreit* held in Cologne in 1989 and which is in reality a virulent attack on the project of the exhibition itself (and to be sure was not published in the catalogue), Judd wrote, with his habitual disregard for diplomacy:

> In architecture "modern" is only a word. The major architects cannot be considered as having one style. Usually the "postmodern" salesmen mean the "International Style", which is a falsification in exactly the same way as "postmodern" and by the same architect, Philip Johnson, who promoted and debased the "style", the work, of Mies van der Rohe as the "Internal Style". Mies van der Rohe is a great architect and is not responsible for, say, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who benefited from him. The accusation of dogma is just cheap and fashionable talk of art and revolution. The proof as always is in the work.[12]

During the 1980s, Judd wrote many comments on the "postmodern" architectures of Johnson, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, and others; all of these comments are very harsh – and often humorous. "The recent architects are similarly exterior decorators"[13]; the Seattle Art Museum designed by Venturi and Scott Brown "is an instance of the wedding-cake architecture of our excessive institutions, just as Stalin's skyscrapers were"[14]; James

11 Donald Judd, 'On Architecture', in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1975-1986*, 87–91, repr. in Judd, *Writings*, 402–408 (p. 406).

12 Donald Judd, 'Ausstellungsleitungsstreit', in Judd, *Writings*, 558–583 (p. 579) (first published in German in *Kunstforum*, April/May 1989, 492–503, then in French in Donald Judd, Écrits 1963–*1990* (Paris: Daniel Lelong, 1991), 210–233).

13 Donald Judd, 'Notes, January to August 1991', in Judd, *Writings*, 700–713 (p. 701).

14 Donald Judd, 'Letter to the editor [of *Time* magazine], 19 February 1992', in Judd, *Writings*, 752.

Stirling's Stuttgart Neue Staatgalerie is "a cute boutique"; Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao has "an appearance of cheapness pretending to be expensive" and his Vitra Museum (in Weil am Rhein) is "banal decorative sculpture"[15]; Paul Rudolph is "the brute in brutalism"[16]; Johnson's and Burgee's AT&T Building in New York (protected by the Landmarks Preservation Commission since 2018) is "a Fascist Disneyland"[17] and his lobby "looks like Lenin's mausoleum, except that the center-piece is a priapic capitalist monument rising from poinsettias"[18]; Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans is "cut-out, pop-up Classicism"[19] – and so on. About this latter, Judd wrote in 1992:

> Filson [Ronald C. Filson, collaborator of Moore] said that the purpose of the piazza and the ruins was to make the Italian Americans feel at home. It's hard to imagine that many have a domestic regard for columns, usually never having been to Italy, where columns are not so common anyway, especially steel ones. Filson suspects that the Piazza d'Italia is corny but justifies it as what the Italian Americans want. How does he know? This attitude is patronizing, of course.[20]

The "patronizing" symbolism is the main problem of Judd with "postmodern" architecture. This symbolism is in its turn the complement of the typically "postmodern" pretension that the architect is an artist: "It's a big mistake to try to turn architecture into art, into sculpture".[21] Like Adolf Loos, Judd thought that an architecture cannot be a work of art, for the simple reason that people have to live in it. Venturi's artistic and literary conception of the architect's work in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) is to Judd a thorough misconception, leading to an equal misunderstanding of art and of the function of museums.

> The present architecture [Judd wrote this in 1992] exploits art in at least two ways. It takes forms and the use of materials from the past and present art, as well as from past architecture, especially, even more meanly, in building museums. Secondly, the exhibition of art, which is the reason to build museums, is a practicality ignored by architects and evidently by those who

15 Judd, 'Fine Art and Commercial Architecture', in Judd, *Writings*, pp. 781, 788.
16 Ibid., p. 781.
17 Donald Judd, 'Notes, 1983', in Judd, *Writings*, 316–323 (p. 317).
18 Donald Judd, 'A Long Discussion Not About Master-Pieces but Why There Are So Few of Them: Part I', *Art in America*, September 1984, 9–19, reprinted in Judd, *Writings*, 352–376 (p. 371).
19 Ibid., p. 373.
20 Ibid., pp. 373–374.
21 Judd, 'Fine Art and Commercial Architecture', in Judd, *Writings*, p. 783.

> commission them. Architecture is supposed to have a function and the function of a museum is to exhibit art. A building without a function is ridiculous, an expensive frivolity. The less the function, the more extravagant the building; formlessness follows dysfunction.[22]

Here is a good demonstration of Judd's taste for aphorisms; so much so that one could think that – although he has always wanted to appear the opposite of an artist-intellectual, writing only to make some essential statements about his craft, express his appraisal of other artists' work, or protest against what he considered threats to civilization – he transferred in writing a keen sense for humor and parody (but not for play, because he appeared always quite serious in art as well as in writing) he excluded from his art.[23]

The "postmodern" vision of art and architecture as images is the very opposite of Judd's, who saw in space the common characteristic of both. Art and architecture become above all a question of cultural and social symbols – and of drawings and renderings. The evocation of Gothic Europe in Johnson's Burgee's AT&T Building and, even more, in their Republic Bank Center in Houston is to Judd "capitalist realism" which replaces the real transformation of space with the presentation of symbols of the social status of the chairmen of banks and insurances, and identifies architecture with the pure project. "The representation of the project in the architectural office, which is what the client sees and buys, becomes the existing work, a duplication of the model or drawing and not architecture".[24] The Leeza SOHO skyscraper built in 2015-2019 by Zaha Hadid Architects in the financial district of Beijing is a very recent demonstration of the fact that this attitude is nowhere near out-of-date.

Along with the taste for quotation and pastiche, "postmodern" architecture claims for irony and playfulness in architecture, on the model of Pop Art and literature. This is the case of Michael Graves, Frank Gehry, and others, but, most of all, of Robert Venturi. All these architects saw "postmodern" as a playful and ironic reply to the seriousness and supposed coldness of "modern" architecture.

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22 Ibid., p. 779.

23 An ambiguity in Judd's rejection of 'illusion and allusion' in his art has been soon pointed at by Rosalind Krauss in her article 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd', 4.9 (May 1966), 24–26. The interesting comparisons there made between Judd's sculpture and architecture could be the basis of an interpretation of Judd's work very different from that Krauss herself gave thirteen years later in 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (see Raskin, 'The Shiny Illusionism of Krauss and Judd').

24 Judd, 'A Long Discussion I', in Judd, *Writings*, p. 373.

Their taste for meaning in architecture unquestionably developed a large and still very active following. The ludico-semiotic "postmodern" attitude is, for instance, still perfectly expressed in the shipwreck-shaped tower projected by Black n' Arch and David Černý for the Praguer real estate company Trigema; this project is – somewhat paradoxically – meant to denounce the global warming.

"In art and architecture, it's impossible to use forms from the past. They become symbols, and not profound ones either, but on the order of the Spanish Colonial TV set".[25] This relation to the past not as history but as a stock of quotable forms is the core of Judd's polemic against "postmodernism". Venturi's praise of "strip cities" in *Complexity and Contradiction* and then especially in the very popular *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972, written with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour) had, according to Judd, nothing liberating or even really ironic:

> The Americans invented the strip city after World War II thus destroying the civitas and the whole visible history of American towns. This is unique to this country and is one of the great changes and tragedies of this century. Robert Venturi assumed that the people liked the strip city and its silly symbols; he certified it as natural and took orders for more. The strip city is a development, even before the present developers, that was probably not considered or wanted by anyone, like most great changes. It's not a desire of the populace. At the same time, they began the rejuvenation of the old downtowns, a desire of businessmen. Both developments are wasteful and destructive. They are one of the main economic efforts of the United States since the war. This perversely emulates the destruction and lucrative reconstruction of Europe.[26]

Judd turns against Venturi the accusation made to 'modern' architecture of being disconnected from society. Neither architecture nor art can ignore, according to Judd, their relationship with society and history.

This relationship between art and society radically changed since the seventeenth century:

> As Pollock said of modern art, "It didn't drop out of the blue". It's not possible to consider even a few of the other issues without a little history. In Europe for some three hundred years the nature of art has been primarily the concern of the individual artist. Gian Lorenzo Bernini is the last artist to produce first-rate work under the auspices of a major institution of the society. After that no one first-rate believes sufficiently in religion or the state to be

25 Ibid., p. 361.
26 Ibid., pp. 368–369.

> willing to have their work represent these generalizations. Also, after that the belief in the direct correspondence of one's feeling about the external world with the real nature of that world slowly dies. The artist can no longer look at the world, put it in a picture, and claim reality, a similar reality, for both acts. More and more the portrayal of the natural world is as the artist feels it, not as it is. For two hundred years there were successful attempts to move realism away from the institutions and their versions of the world to a presumably better and less pretentious subject matter. Bernini is portraying reality; Courbet is painting a picture, the last real picture. The need for ordinary subject matter, even for ordinary visual elements that have no subject matter, is one of the major forces of the last three centuries.[27]

The progressive loss of real connections between institutions (the church, the state) and the individual, the parallel progressive shift of reality from an objective nature shared through culture and society to subjective perception and *Erlebnis* are, according to Judd, the historical objective conditions of the exclusion of social structures until Courbet and then of the increasing interest in the visual and formal elements of art to the detriment of the representation of reality.

> In addition to the growing disbelief in the rationalistic world of the religious world, there was the positive growing belief in the fundamental elements of visual art, though those elements always present if art is comprehensible, though they are often inhibited. I was impressed once, at an exhibition of Cézanne's, even in his work, by the lack of color. The quality of a work of art is produced by those elements that are most visual; color, surface, proportion, and structure. The more clear and dominant these are, the more clear and dominant the quality of the work.[28]

This explains a certain sympathy Judd seems to have for the empiricist philosophy (the "disbelief in the rationalistic world") of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, to which he occasionally appeals against abstract categories (like "modernism" and "postmodernism"). Of course, this is a North American viewpoint, which takes no account of German but also English – and even American – idealism and romanticism and emphasizes empiricist thought and the reflection on modern natural sciences.

These thoughts clearly recall those of many artists of the first half of the twentieth century, but most of all the Russian constructivists' and, to a lesser extent, Klee's, whom Judd admired much, though without the vaguely cosmological elements often appearing in his writings.

27 Judd, 'Abstract Expressionism' in Judd, *Writings*, pp. 325–326.
28 Ibid., p. 326.

These reflections belong to the mid-1980s. About the same period, Judd wrote about the industrial revolution and the transition from an agricultural civilization to an industrial civilization:

> The industrial revolution occurred two hundred years ago but the industrial civilization is just beginning. So far it's not been a good beginning, but the civilization will happen nevertheless and can be bad, to the point of not being a civilization, to barbarism, or mediocrity, which perhaps is the real barbarism, or good, which is unlikely. The nineteenth century was an amplification of the old society, a transition, but not a new society. The old society died in World War I. Since then a lot of the wars and troubles have been about the formation of a new society. It's not that the society is in a later phase of this or that grand scheme, or necessarily declining on plan, or afflicted by a technical invention, but is in a beginning in which much is new and unknown, in which some alternatives are known and most are unknown.
>
> The occurrence second to the worst – nuclear war – can that the new civilization will resemble the old. There were two classes, the military aristocracy and the peasants, and there can be two classes, a wealthy bureaucracy, partly military, and an industrial peasantry, which includes the lower bureaucracy. There was not much of a middle class until the industrial revolution and there may not be much of one, since the real middle class, now the old middle class, constantly shrinks. Most of the people who think that they have become middle class have not, either economically, politically, or intellectually. Among everything that is steadily devalued are also the classes, which is sad considered broadly and humanely, but which too is satisfying if you don't like the idea of classes and laugh at the gullibility required to ascend in them. Most people are becoming industrial peasants, *contadini industriali*, fed, housed, and provided with a few symbols. A commercial culture is being made for them.[29]

To the "postmodern" pretension to a ludico-esthetical conciliation between architecture and society, Judd opposes an interpretation of "postmodern" esthetics as the symptom of a social crisis. The industrial society, our society, is the recent and traumatic consequence of the destruction of the agricultural civilization and of local cultures. The new industrial society and the establishment of nation states lead to form an enormous middle class. The words "debase" and "debasement" appear very frequently in Judd's writings to describe the destruction of popular culture and its consequences on art and architecture.

In his first text about the industrial revolution and the middle class, written in 1975, Judd said of this latter:

29 Judd, 'Ausstellungsleitungsstreit', in Judd, *Writings*, pp. 565–567.

> Their grandparents were removed, usually willingly, from a particular place, were there was some local culture, always including a religion. The present people don't believe what their grandparents believed. But they don't believe much that's new either. Mostly they fill up the space with ideas like nationalism. These industrialized, mostly middle-class people can't go back to the farm. They don't have much of the past. So the few people among them who want to do something, who don't like the thoughtlessness, have to invent their own interests. They can only go ahead.[30]

That is what justifies to him unprejudiced individual research of new forms of art. "Postmodern" architecture (and art) is to Judd an attempt to recreate a common taste based on common symbols, something like the architecture and the art of the pre-industrial civilization. But the evocation of local culture becomes just a stylistic, playful "regionalist" quotation which is the *pendant* of nationalism, and the will to address the society becomes the will to satisfy the *mauvais goût* of the middle class (which includes to Judd the rich), a glorification of a so-called "popular culture":

> Because the "popular" culture is the commercial culture, the imitative culture, this may be the first time that there is little or no popular culture. This means that there is no substance to influence the developed culture as happened before. […]
>
> The commercial popular culture, the concocted culture, the parasitical culture, is taken by some as a real popular culture and used or attempted to use, similarly to the old popular culture.[31]

That is why, since the second half of the seventies, Judd intended his work in abstraction, proportions, color, and space as also a political work, an attempt to take very seriously the efforts of modern art and architecture to create a new culture. We can finally say that Judd's work cannot be simply opposed to "modernism" (and the same could be said of the work of other artists carrying out comparable research at the same time, as Dan Flavin or Robert Morris), at least because he criticized and refused – in his thought as well as in his works – the existence of a "modernism" epoch of art, followed by a "postmodernist" one. Against these notions, he maintained that the avant-gardes of the first half of the 20th century did not establish a "modernist" style or a purification of the mediums of art, but,

30 Donald Judd, 'Imperialism, Nationalism, and Regionalism', in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art Design/New York University Press, 1975), 220–223, repr. in Judd, *Writings*, 268–282 (pp. 274–275).

31 Donald Judd, 'Notes, 1987', in Judd, *Writings*, 454–483 (p. 471).

just as their fellow architects, opened multiple – and still far from being entirely explored – paths in the transformation of space through form, proportion and color.[32]

The great theorist of postmodern, the American architect Charles Jencks (1939-2019) wrote in 1977 a very famous page about the demolition of the huge "modernist" apartments complex of Pruitt-Igoe: "Modern architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1972, at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grâce* by dynamite".[33]

This text is far from having lost its influence; it has been quite enthusiastically revived in 2017 by the architect Reinier de Graaf, partner of Rem Koolhaas's office, which had just metamorphosed a building of the Venetian Renaissance, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, in a luxury shopping mall.

Jean-François Lyotard described the "postmodern condition" as the end of grand narratives (*grands récits*). But the idea of a postmodernity following a uniform modernity – perhaps separated by a dynamite blast – can become just another *grand* récit. Judd opposed to it a rigorous empiricism.

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32 Judd had been a student of Rudolf Wittkower and, even if he seemed not to love him, he was probably impressed by his attention to proportion in architecture. This issue has been discussed in Bigman's above (note 9) cited article. On Wittkower's relevance for modern architecture, see the classic and still illuminating article by Henry A. Millon, '*Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*: Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture', Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 31.2 (May 1972), 83–91.

33 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy, 1977), p. 9.

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