Elisa Bricco teaches French Literature at the University of Genoa. She has published several studies on contemporary French fiction and on intermediality (*Le Défi du roman. Narration et engagement oblique à l'ère postmoderne*, 2015). She directed the collective *Scritture ibridate contemporanee* (*Nuova Corrente*, 126|2016) and *Raccontare con la fotografia* (2021, online). She coordinates the research group ARGEC (Atelier de recherches génois sur les écritures contemporaines, http://argec.hypotheses.org).

Luca Malavasi teaches Film History and Visual Culture at the University of Genoa. He mainly deals with the theory of image, contemporary cinema and visual culture. He edited monographic issues of "Bianco e Nero" (2016), "Cinergie" (2017), "La Valle dell'Eden" (2018), "Visual Culture Studies" (2022). Among his books: *Realismo e tecnologia. Caratteri del cinema contemporaneo* (2013), *Postmoderno e cinema. Nuove prospettive d'analisi* (2017), *Il linguaggio del cinema* (2019), *Dalla parte delle immagini. Temi di cultura visuale* (with B. Grespi, 2022).

ISBN 978-88-6977-376-1

E. BRICCO - L. MALAVASI
(EDITED BY)

THE FUTURE OF THE POST

PHILOSOPHY

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

"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

EDITED BY ELISA BRICCO AND LUCA MALAVASI

THE FUTURE OF THE POST

NEW INSIGHTS IN THE POSTMODERN DEBATE

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.

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

THE FUTURE
OF THE POST

New Insights in the Postmodern Debate

Edited by Elisa Bricco and Luca Malavasi

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

CONTENTS

POSTMODERN (AND) MEDIA

Luca Malavasi

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 Fic-
tion": 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 *Metafic-
tion 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 Wal-
lace, *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 Postmodern-
ism?*) and by John Frow (*What Was Postmodernism?* (an explicit reference
to Harry Levin's *What Was Modernism?,* published just thirty years ear-
lier), although dedicated to different aspects (i.e. the French philosophical
production and its reception in the United States, and the dynamics of ex-
change 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 histori-
cal 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, *Èpreuves 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.

References

Barilli R. *Attorno alla galassia elettronica*, in aa.vv. *Incontro con il postmoderno*, Atti di convegno, 27 novembre 1982, Genova (Milano: Nuove edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta,1984).

---

21   Jean-Louis Déotte, '*Les Immatériaux* de Lyotard (1985): un programme figural', *Appareil*, 10, 2012, 1–11.
22   Jean- François Lyotard, *Les Immatériaux. Album et Inventaire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985) (the exhibition catalog has no page numbers, being conceived as a set of loose sheets).

Baudrillard J., Baudrillard, *The Anorexic Ruins*, in David Antal (ed.), *Looking Back on the End of the World* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 29-45.

Bertens H., *The Idea of Postmodern. A History* (London-New York: Routledge, 1995).

Callinicos A., *Against Postmodernism. A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge-Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).

Connor S., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Déotte J.-L., '*Les Immatériaux* de Lyotard (1985): un programme figural', *Appareil*, 10, 2012, 1-11.

Eagleton T., *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

Federman R., *Aunt Rachel's Fur* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001).

Ferraris M., *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2012).

Fredric J., *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: *Duke University Press, 1991*).

Frow J.A., *What Was Postmodernism?,* in Adam I., Tiffin H. (eds.), *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonial and Post-Modernism* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 139-152.

Grant H.I., *Postmodernism and Politics*, in Sims S. (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011) , 28-40.

Hebdige D., *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London-New York: Routledge, 1988).

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

Ingersoll R., 'Post-postmodernism', *Architecture*, 90, May 2001, 109-112.

Lyotard J.-F., *Les Immatériaux*. *Épreuves* d'*écriture*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985).

Lyotard J.-F., *Les Immatériaux. Album et Inventaire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985).

Natoli J., *This Is a Picture and Not the World. Movies and a Post-9/11 America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

Norris C. (ed.), *What's Wrong with Postmodernism?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Sokal A., 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', *Social Text*, 46-47, Spring-Summer 1996, 217-252.

Sokal A., Bricmont J. , *Impostures intellectuelles* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1997).

Ziegler H., *The End of Postmodernism: New Directions*, Proceedings of the First Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies, August 04-18 1991 (Stuttgart: M und P, Verlag für Wissenschaft, 1993).