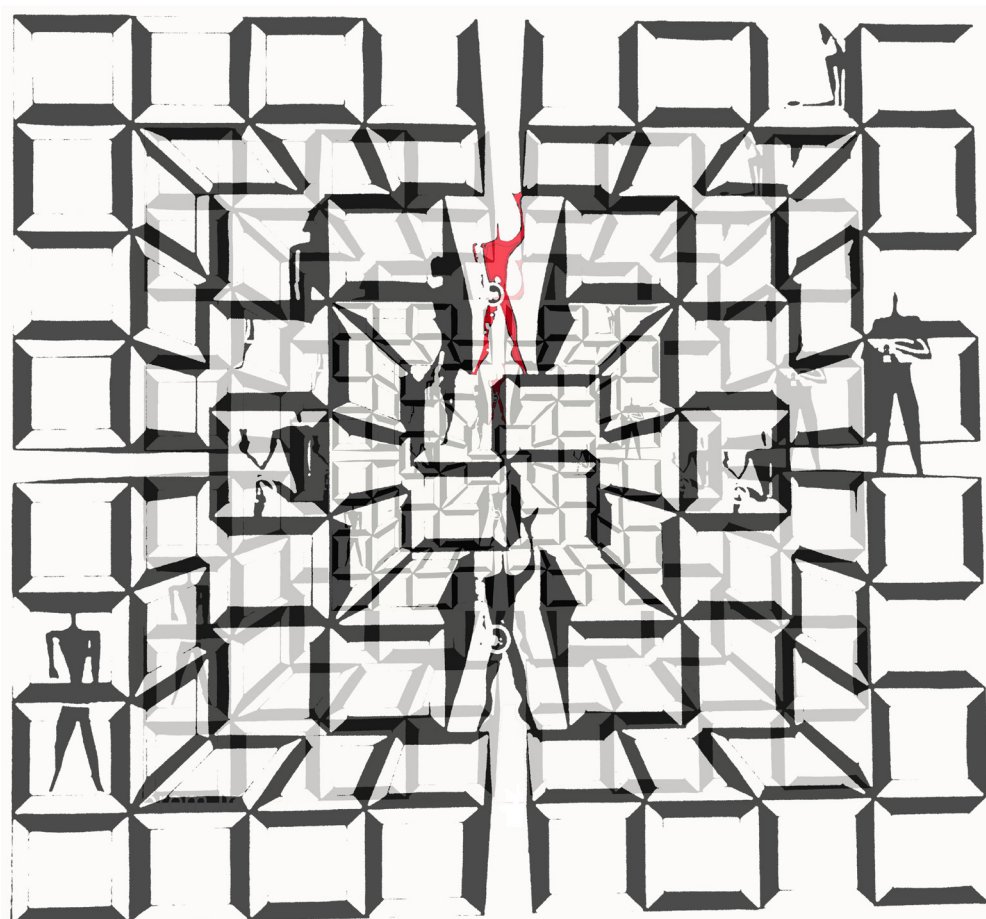


# De\_Sign Environment Landscape City\_2020

Atti

*a cura di* Giulia Pellegrini



*Atti*

## **De\_Sign Environment Landscape City/Di\_Segnare Ambiente Paesaggio Città**

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## Animated Reflections: An Everyman's Guide to Postmodernity

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### Abstract

According to architects, Postmodernism was a movement that lasted about a decade, from its official birth (1977, christened by Charles Jencks in *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*), through its peak (1980, along Paolo Portoghesi's *Via Novissima* at the Venice Biennale), to its death (1988, killed by the new game in town, Philip Johnson's *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition at MoMA New York). The relative brevity of its life is generally what allows to think of it more as a fad than as a proper movement. Moreover, a fad remembered with a bit of embarrassment. 'Good riddance' could sum up fairly well the general, architectural sentiment towards Postmodernism. Yet this kind of statements could depend on a too narrow definition of the term '*Postmodernity*' within the field of architecture. Several reasons suggest that, enlarging that field to other disciplinary domains, mostly linguistics and philosophy, the overall picture could change dramatically.

The problem is, philosophical and linguistical definitions tend to be hard to digest, what with the auto-referential character of Postmodernity, and the aporetic consequences that this implies; what with the difficult concepts – like 'meta-fiction', or '*mise-en-abyme*', or 'worldmaking' (to name just a few) – put in place to tackle such difficulties.

In this paper, we will try to *illustrate* these categories by evidencing their action within a popular medium: the animated cartoons. From there we will argue that Postmodernity is far from dead and that architecture, with all the other arts, is doing its job to keep it thriving.

### Abstract

Secondo gli architetti, il Postmodern è stato un movimento durato circa un decennio, dalla sua nascita ufficiale (1977, battezzato da Charles Jencks in *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*), alla vetta della sua popolarità (1980, lungo la *Via Novissima* di Paolo Portoghesi alla Biennale di Venezia), fino alla sua morte (1988, ucciso dalla nuova *vague*, quella esibita come *Deconstructivist Architecture*, da Philip Johnson al MoMA di New York). La relativa brevità della sua vita è ciò che generalmente permette di pensarlo più come una moda che come un movimento vero e proprio, per di più una moda spesso ricordata con un certo imbarazzo.

Il generale sentimento architettonico nei confronti del Postmodern è, di fatto, quello di sollievo nei confronti di una dipartita mai abbastanza tempestiva. Tuttavia questa convinzione potrebbe dipendere da una definizione troppo ristretta del termine “postmodernità” nell’ambito dell’architettura. Diverse ragioni suggeriscono che, allargando questo campo ad altri settori disciplinari, come la linguistica e la filosofia, il quadro generale potrebbe cambiare radicalmente.

Il problema è che le definizioni filosofiche e linguistiche tendono ad essere piuttosto ostiche, sia in ragione delle aporie che il carattere autoreferenziale della Postmodernità di per sé comporta; sia per i concetti impervi – come ‘extra-diegetico’, o ‘*mise-en-abyme*’, o ‘*wordmaking*’ (per citarne solo alcuni) – normalmente messi in atto per affrontare tali difficoltà.

In questo scritto proveremo a *illustrare* questo genere di categorie evidenziandone l’azione nell’ambito di un *medium* popolare come i cartoni animati. Di lì cercheremo di dimostrare come, in realtà, la postmodernità è tutt’altro che morta. E come l’architettura, assieme a tutte le altre arti, stia tutt’oggi facendo la sua parte per farla prosperare.

### Timon & Pumbaa Are Alive

“*Nants ingonyama bagithi Baba / Sithi uhm ingonyama*”: the Zulu words are repeated like a mantra, while the sun is rising on the Savannah horizon. “Here comes a lion, Father / Oh yes it’s a lion,” they say: a voice solo, singing acapella, slowly joined by the chorus. The scene is more than familiar to all the kids born after the late Eighties (and to their parents too). All the animals are gathering around Pride Rock, and we all know what is going on: the chorus will give way to the lyrics of *The Circle of Life*, and soon Mufasa, the Lion King, will present his kneeling people with his new-born child Simba.

But suddenly something strange happens: a rasping voice overlaps with the song, mocking it. Then the images stop abruptly on a still frame, only to restart in fast-forward... Wait, are we watching Walt Disney’s *The Lion King*? Yes and no. Yes, this is the opening scene of *The Lion King*. No, we are not *watching* it: rather, the scene *is watched* by two viewers we now see in silhouette from the back, sit on the armchairs of a movie-theatre. We are watching someone who is watching. *The Lion King*. A remote control in hand. Fast-forwarding. What we are actually watching is *The Lion King 1½*, and we are in for a strange ride.

*The Lion King* (1994, hereinafter *TLK*) was the first, and one of the few, Disney’s films based on an original script (not adapted from some source). In the beginning, so the story goes, very few believed in the project, and the executives themselves had no clear idea of which path to take. Until someone came up with the idea of focusing the collective efforts by at least choosing a model of inspiration. Disney CEO proposed *King Lear*, but the final choice fell upon *Hamlet*. Mind: *Hamlet* was not chosen as the material for an adaptation but as an *archetype*. Meaning that *TLK* is only loosely based on Shakespeare’s tragedy. True, there is a nearly one to one matching of the main characters: Mufasa for the dead King, Scar for Claudius, Sarabi for Gertrude, Zazu for Polonius, Simba for Hamlet, Nala for Ofelia, Rafiki for Horatio, Timon & Pumbaa for Hamlet’s ‘friends’ Rosencrantz & Guildenstern. And a major similarity lies in the King’s murder at the hands of Simba/Hamlet’s uncle Scar/Claudius. But that pretty much sums it: after the initial parallelism, the two plots diverge, each towards its own direction: *Hamlet*’s final doom, *TLK*’s expected happy ending.

Notwithstanding, *TLK* remains Shakespearean in spirit: *mutatis mutandis*, it has moments of great poignancy, putting into play the eternal truths of life through dichotomies such as good/evil, love/hate, life/death, and so forth. The whole, naturally, in a peculiar cartoonesque way, meaning that here dichotomies are unambiguously neat, justice is restored at the end, and drama is tempered after a

very typical Disneyan fashion. But only to a point: Mufasa's tragic death is not something that young audiences (and perhaps many adults too) will forget so easily.

Like *Hamlet*, *TLK* is essentially a *Bildungsroman*. The ordeal Simba goes through is punctuated by many of the genre's standard topics: an initial state of innocence, the turmoil caused by betrayal, death, deception, and denial; then the restoring of innocence, in a temporary state of suspension lighted by friendship; further on the protagonist's anagnorisis favoured by romantic love, his following assumption of destiny, in turn leading to the final battle between good and evil, and the restoring of the natural order of things. The pedagogical message is unequivocal, but effective nonetheless. No doubt, young audience will love above all Simba's existential parenthesis in the company of his mentors/friends Timon & Pumbaa, in a carefree life cadenced by the notes of *Hakuna Matata*, a Swahili phrase for 'no worries' as a title for a 'problem-free philosophy'<sup>2</sup> set to music. But, the more enticing the dream, the more effective the bottom line: no matter what, there comes the time when we must face up to our moral duties and fight for our own salvation and good life. The plot is well crafted and brilliantly written, and the film was a major success. Due to long life through home video, it will remain a major, if mostly unconscious, moral reference for many generations to come.

By the mid-Nineties, Walt Disney Company began to produce low-budget, direct-to-video films as sequels to major productions. *TLK* made no exception: in 1998 *The Lion King II: Simba's Pride* was released. Generally, low-budget has also meant low-quality, and this case makes no exception. Like its older brother, the sequel is also inspired by a Shakespearean archetype: the one set by *Romeo and Juliet's* vicissitudes. Sadly, the borrowing is quite mechanical, with a limping plot and a sloppy animation. The pedagogical message, here, is very politically correct: a call to a more progressive attitude towards minorities. Halas, the poorly structured plot mostly prevents the attaining of such a commendable purpose.

By 2004, a third instalment of the *Lion King* franchise was released, *The Lion King 1½* (hereinafter *TLK ½*). And it was a whole other story, different not only from its predecessor, but also from any other Disney's sequels, both previous, following, and probably to come. The title already is revealing in two ways: the fraction ½ is mockery of the sequels' numbers and a clear reference to *The Naked Gun 2½* (1991), a comedy by Zucker, Abrahams, and Zucker, the notorious trio specialized in parodies of other films or genres. And, the same fraction puts the film in a strange position, *before* the sequel released six years before. Indeed, someone has called this film a 'syncquel,' or a 'sidequel,' and we shall soon see why. *TLK 1½* is, first and foremost, a postmodern toon. Not in the same way, however, as the many others that kept appearing since the Eighties. It is, and probably will remain forever, the most postmodern cartoon ever. So much so that, we could say, more than a postmodern film it is postmodernity personified (or 'filmified,' if we may say so). And, not so much postmodernity explained to the kids, as Lyotard would have it, rather postmodernity brought to the kids to grow up with as their sentimental education. To understand why, we must go back to where we started: the still image, the remote-control, the fast-forwarding.

From their shapes, it is easy to guess whom the black silhouettes belong to: Timon & Pumbaa, the deuteragonists of the first instalment. So what we have here is two characters of a film *stepping out* of the screen in order to watch it. This is what narratologists call 'metalepsis,' meaning, as Genette explains, "any kind of transgression, whether supernatural or playful, of a given level of narrative or dramatic fiction, as when an author pretends to introduce himself into his own creation, or to extract one of his characters from it. In other words, the word *metalepsis*, as part of a more general genre called 'meta-fiction,' defines any kind of narratorial device by which a 'sacred boundary' is broken: the one between the fictional

and the real world. Like Oliver Hardy seeking complicity with the public by looking directly at the camera. This last example already shows that metafiction is not born with postmodernity: Genette himself makes an example by quoting a passage from Diderot's *Jacques le fatalis*. But there is no doubt that it becomes a major device, if not *the* device, of postmodern poetics, and through whole new levels of complexity, putting in place intricate conundrums of ontological nature. So, Timon & Pumbaa are watching *TLK*, and a second degree of fiction superimposes itself on the first, pretending to be the 'real' one. The images of the 'watched' are fast-forwarding because the 'watchers' are arguing about what part of the film to watch. Timon is fast-forwarding to skip directly to the part when the two first appear in the story (around the middle of the film), Pumbaa disagrees. Here is their dialogue:

*Pumbaa*: "Uh, Timon, what are you doing?"

*Timon*: "I'm fast-forwarding to the part where we come in."

*P*: "But you can't go out of order."

*T*: "*Au contraire*, my porcine pal. I've got the remote."

*P*: "But everyone's going to get confused. We got to go back to the beginning of the story."

*T*: "We're not in the beginning of the story."

*P*: "Yes, we were – the whole time."

During this conversation, the film in the background keeps fast-forwarding and rewinding according to the contender's opinion (Pumbaa too holds a remote). But Pumbaa's last sentence comes as a revelation: in 'real life,' the two *existed* even before they entered the scene. So, at last, they agree to rewind, not just to the beginning, but "to before the beginning" to recount "the whole story." And, before we give a brief résumé of it, it is worthwhile to take a short recess to comment this first, revelatory dialogue.

The sequel we are watching is a "second-degree" product based on a "first-degree" original: the existence of the former depends on the one of the latter. It is, so to speak, ontologically *contained* in the first. But, from a narrative point of view, it tells a *broader* story, so that *the contained contains the container*. This is the first paradox, perhaps too subtle to be noticed at once, but one putting the premises for all that comes next. Pumbaa's warning, about the dangers of putting things "out of order" (a pun, meaning both 'contrary to natural order' and 'not working'), is self-referential: a description, from within the film, of the deconstructionist attitude of the film itself, and of the possible confusing effect it can have. Timon's use of French language ("*au contraire*"), is a clear homage to French philosophy, the homeland of Deconstructionism. But the last line of the dialogue is what really gives us pause: the characters' talking of their life *when they are not on the screen* draws our attention towards something we wouldn't usually think about while watching a film: their reality status. In so doing, it ruptures what in literature is known as the "willing suspension of disbelief": a tacit pact between the author and the reader, where the latter suspends his common sense concerning possible implausibilities within the narrative in order to enjoy the reading. What for example consents us, in this case, to perceive as perfectly 'normal' a scene where two animals are sitting in armchairs, watching a film, and talking about it. And the real paradox, here, is that precisely their talking about their *actual* life is what breaks such a well-honed mechanism, forcing us to recognize their fictionality.

According to Brian McHale, the main feature of postmodern fiction, what he calls its "dominant", is that its poetics is dominated by *ontological* issues, as opposed to modern fiction, mainly directed towards *epistemological* issues. It does so by systematically and self-consciously shifting our attention from *what* is described to *how* it describes it. And, by doing so, it poses in question the relationship between fiction and reality, sign and referent. This kind of self-consciousness, and implied self-referentiality, is something we can generalize to the postmodern culture at large. While modernism

was more concerned about the world ‘out there,’ about how much we can know what we see, and how much we can meaningfully describe it, postmodernism turns its gaze from the outside to the inside. Actually, to the gaze itself. If, as often has been suggested, postmodernism can be seen in many respects as a continuation, and amplification, of what was already present in modern sensibility, on the contrary this reversal could justify the idea of a postmodern *turn*: an abrupt interruption of a long tradition dating back at least to Renaissance, as theorized by the words of Leon Battista Alberti when he described paintings as *windows* on the world, from which to see *facts* as they *are*. By turning inward, the postmodern gaze loses its referent. But it is not just a question of using language self-referentially, rather of discovering that language is inherently self-referential, that it never really touches what it should stand for. At best, it redoubles reality, superimposing a layer of signs whose meaning cannot be explained but by other sign. The *window* turns into a *mirror*: as Maurice Blanchot poetically puts it, “... there is no longer a limit of reference. The world and the book eternally and infinitely send back their reflected images. This indefinite power of mirroring [...] will then be all that we will find, dizzily, at the bottom of our desire to understand”.

The effect of this infinite recoiling so powerfully described by Blanchot is dizzying, like the act of looking at the infinitely multiplied image of yourself from between two mirrors. This is what happens when the referent becomes *self*-referent. There is, in critical theory, a precise definition for this phenomenon: it’s called ‘*mise-en-abyme*’.<sup>1</sup> An effect of self-referentiality, a *mise-en-abyme* happens in particular whenever – in an image, or a text, or a film – the contents contain the container, as iconically exemplified in the famous advertising of Droste cocoa<sup>2</sup>. [Fig. 1]

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<sup>1</sup> See: Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (1977), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> The *mise-en-abyme* is also known as “Droste Effect”.

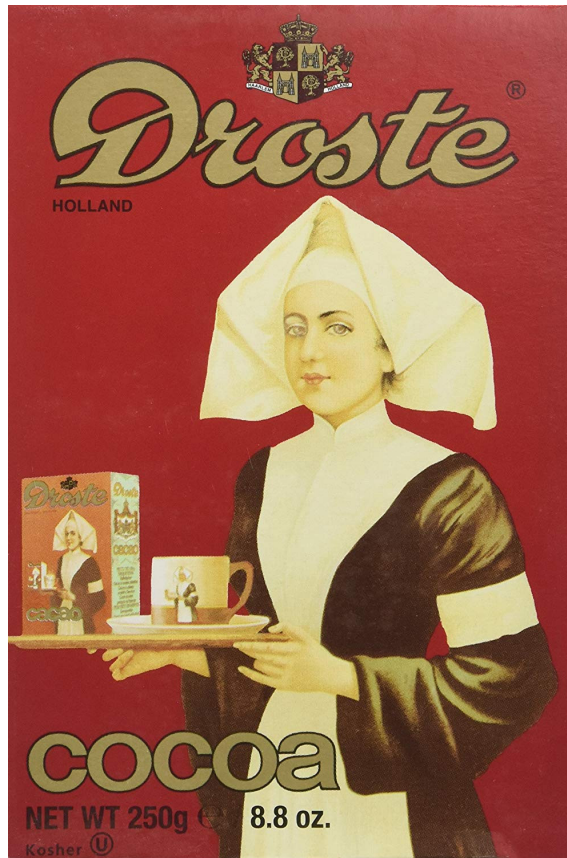


Fig.1 Jan Misset, Droste cocoa packaging (1904)

*TLK ½* is case in point, but it doesn't stop at that. Like its father/son *TLK*, *TLK ½* also has an archetype: Tom Stoppard's theatrical piece *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (hereinafter *R&G*), premiered in 1966, one of the first and most famous postmodern plays ever written<sup>3</sup>. Now, this play is also meta-fictional: it is the theatrical piece *Hamlet* seen from the eyes of two side characters, staged in a theatre, mostly during the representation of *The Mousetrap*, which is a theatrical piece played within the *Hamlet*. In mathematical terms, we could say that *TLK ½* stands to *TLK* as *R&G* stands to *Hamlet*. So *TLK ½* is a 'chiastic' *mise-en-abyme*. Or, always in mathematical terms, the equivalent of infinity raised to the power of infinity. Which is mind-boggling, as it should be. Here too, *R&G* is chosen by *TLK ½* as an archetype: the two share the same 'mood,' not the plot. Many adjectives used by critics to describe *R&G* could safely portray *TLK ½* too, as in "fragmenting," "defamiliarizing," "displacing," ...<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *TLK ½* is "sort of a "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" for the pre-teen set." The Lion King 1½, Review, *Movieretriver*, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> "Many critics have described this as an exercise in postmodernism, fragmenting, defamiliarizing, and displacing as it does one of the most canonical texts of English literature and Western culture; Roger Sale also regards it as an act of depoliticization". Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Routledge, London, 2006. pp. 56-57. Genette too, in *Palimpsests*, talks about *R&G*: *Palimpsests*, cit., pp. 292-293.

But then, once again, each one walks his own, each one 'imprisoned' in the plot they are embedding (and embedded in).

*TLK ½'s* broader plot is quickly told: it begins depicting Timon's grim life, within a community of fellow-meerkats, in a desertic land. Since the meerkats are "so low on the food chain<sup>5</sup>," the community is rigidly organized in teams excavating tunnels underground twenty-four hours a day, to avoid predatory hyenas (the song "Digga Tunnah," marking the workers' automated movements, is one of the film's best accomplishments). Timon's character is portrayed as the typical unruly fellow who doesn't fit in, an 'out of the box' guy unable to accomplish what 'common people' expects from him. After messing things up a couple of times, he decides to leave the community (and his possessive mother) to find his own path in life. On the way, he meets wise old mandrill Rafiki, who bestows on him one of his trademark maxims of wisdom: to find yourself – he says – you must "look beyond what you see." Timon takes the advice literally and this is why he begins a quest infinite by definition, in the company of Pumbaa, whom he met and teamed-up in the meantime. From there on, the plot converges with *TLK's* master narrative, touching upon its key episodes and supplementing them from a sideways glance, in a syncopated and anti-climatic way. But it is precisely here, when it abandons even an excuse for a plot, that the film reveals its true nature, by deconstructing all the tacit epistemological assumptions of the master narrative it parasitically lives on.

In *R&G*, right at the beginning, the play shows us Guildenstern in the act of playing head or tails with Rosencrantz. He tosses a coin for ninety-two times in a row, each time getting inexorably head. It is a long, spellbinding and unnerving scene, as such attracting the attention of many commentators. The probability of obtaining head after ninety-two tosses is one in five octillions. As to say impossible: but only in a world where each toss is chronologically bound to each other, not if each toss is isolated, unchained from the others. So, since the beginning, the play depicts a condition of *suspended time*, one where all the following events from Shakespeare's tragedy float, like fragments failing to cohere in a sensible whole. The remote control in the hands of Timon and Pumbaa is *TLK ½'s* equivalent for the coin tossing, a device by which time becomes *spatialized*: either reversed or fast-forwarded, all events virtually co-present<sup>6</sup>, and the master narrative is undermined. Time is also *stopped* at will: every time the plot reaches a peak of particular intensity, one of the two spectators freezes the image under some pretext: commenting on the events portrayed, saying things like "do you mind if I pause for a second?", going to get some snacks while the other picks his nose<sup>7</sup>. The overall intended effect is highly anti-climatic.

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<sup>5</sup> Timon's words.

<sup>6</sup> "Time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial. Our relationship to the past is now a spatial one". Fredric Jameson, in Anders Stephanson, "Regarding Postmodernism. A Conversation with Fredric Jameson", *Social Text*, n. 17, 1987. p. 32.

Much has been said about the spatialization of time, but perhaps the best way to understand it is to read a short passage in a Kurt Vonnegut's novel, rendering it in a perfect allegory: "The most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadoreans can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. When a Tralfamadorean sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadoreans say about dead people, which is 'So it goes.'" Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughter Five, or The Children's Crusade* (1969), Dial Press, New York, 2005. pp. 33–34.

<sup>7</sup> In one case, just when images are showing Timon's uncle running for his life, Pumbaa sits on the remote and mistakenly switches to QVC shopping channel, ending up on a leather goods commercial: "Suede is the look for this fall. *Of course, that is what's happening* in every magazine". My emphasis.



Moreover, as the plot unfolds, we discover that the two buddies were unacknowledged witness to all the key events of the saga: Simba's presentation on Pride Rock, Scar's neo-nazi conspiracy with the hyenas, Mufasa's death. But, engrossed in looking for what lies "beyond what you see," they never see – nor realize – what is really going on! In a specific case, they alter unknowingly the course of the facts as we knew them, and this is perhaps the film's most telling scene: we discover now that all the animals kneeling around Pride Rock, at the beginning of the story, were not acting out of respect for the future king, but fainting as an effect of one of Pumbaa's legendary farts. So we are left with one scene with two antithetic meanings, each one true in its own universe. But since the two universes are conflated here in one, what gets broken is the master principle of all western logic: the law of noncontradiction. After linearity, progress, and teleology, causality too goes down the drain; and with them, all the basic dichotomies that strung together all the master narrative's facts in a consistent and quasi-deterministic string of events, leading the premises to their logical outcomes. If *TLK* was a novel about being and becoming, here the being is questioned and the becoming has disappeared.

The point is, there is no becoming without being, and being has remained *out there*, untouched by a language who has discovered itself as an autonomous system, with its own rules and conventions. During the whole film, the authors never fail to remind us that what we are watching is precisely that: a film. They do it in multiple ways: by delving in its intertextuality<sup>8</sup>, in a turmoil of quotations from other films (*Casablanca*, *The Blues Brothers*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, to mention just a few); and, by exposing cinematographic language – and by implication all language – as inherently metaphorical. There is a scene when Pumbaa's running is shot in slow-motion: a mock quote of Simba's epic come-back in *TLK*. Only, this time he is not in slow-motion, but just running slowly, to allow Timon to catch up with him. In another scene, Timon complains that he is unable to concentrate because the film's soundtrack is too loud. The catchphrase of the film, Rafiki's "look beyond what you see", is also the key to its understanding: the authors themselves suggest so, by making Timon's mother warn Rafiki about the dangers of talking in metaphors. The lesson we can draw is that, actually, we must look 'within what we see': i.e. we must never forget that we are not attending to a story, but a film telling a story.

The film's ending scenes are consistent with the overall setting. After Simba and Scar's showdown – and, here again, the violent fight and Scar's subsequent death is just glimpsed from far away – Timon and Pumbaa, together with the whole meerkats' community, leave Pride Rock and move back to the Hakuna Matata, the heavenly place in the jungle named after the eponymous song. There they are joined by Simba, who – just ascended to the throne – has apparently forsaken his duties to go and live forever with his friends, in the pure bliss of suspended time: de-commitment as the only possible rule of life is the new pedagogical message.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes Hamlet's irresoluteness as the tragic effect of witnessing the "horror or absurdity of existence"<sup>9</sup>. Here we can understand – he adds – how art is the only "sorceress" enabling us to go on with our lives, providing us with the notions of "the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity"<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" (1969), and "The Bounded Text" (1969), in *Desire in Language*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980, pp. 36–91, where it was introduced to describe how, in texts, meaning is shaped by their implicit relationship with other texts. The concept has little to do with matters reciprocal influence between authors, whereas is central as a device to undermine the authority of authors' intentionality.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Vintage, New York 1967, p. 60. Nietzsche's emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Following Nietzsche's hint we could say that, paradoxically, *TLK ½* is much more akin to *Hamlet* than *TLK* was, even if *Hamlet* was the latter's chosen archetype. Inaction – in *TLK* – is only temporary, and horror does not prevent Simba from punishing the bad guys and restoring the proper order of things. If the general mood is tense and dramatic, much more than you might expect from a children's cartoon, nonetheless it can never reach the overwhelming sublime, because man (the lion) remains firmly in charge of his destiny. To the contrary, *TLK ½*'s comic attitude brings absurdity, of events no longer relating to each other, to the only possible outcome: self-ironic detachment, story without history.

But the Hakuna Matata is only the happy ending of the film watched within the film, while another happy ending is coming to wrap it up. Timon and Pumbaa's silhouettes start talking again while the images of the 'grand finale' (Timon's words) fade in the background, when suddenly a crowd of people begins to invade the movie theater: first Timon's mother, with Rafiki and Simba, then... Mickey Mouse, Snow White and the seven dwarves, Aladdin, Donald Duck, Goofy, Lily and the Tramp, Alice and the Mad Hatter, Donald Duck, Peter Pan, Dumbo, Sleeping Beauty with the three fairies, and many others it becomes difficult to distinguish. A myriad of characters, from worlds we used to think as ontologically apart, all come together in a single place, adding to the feeling of unreality haunting us since the beginning. Everybody wants to watch the movie again, the remote clicks and the images start rewinding. At first Timon disagrees, then he surrenders: "hakuna matata", he says. Lights off, the film starts all over again. "*Nants ingonyama bagithi Baba...*"

With the suspended time of the fiction encapsulated in the suspended time of the meta-fiction, the *mise-en-abyme* is put *en abyme*. Cartoon characters' life expectancy is virtually infinite, so these voluntary prisoners of language could keep watching the movie forever, till the end of time.

### Spider-Man's Web of Worlds

Fourteen years later. Another movie, another mantra.

"All right, let's do this one last time. My name is Peter Parker. I was bitten by a radioactive spider and, for ten years, I've been the one and only Spider-Man. I'm pretty sure you know the rest. I saved a bunch of people, fell in love, saved the city, and then I saved the city again..." And the *mise-en-abyme* is already served *en abyme*, *in medias res*, at the start of the movie. Meanwhile, the doubt whether this is by no means the beginning of the film (or the only real one, if any) is besieging the viewer. These words immediately suggest this is not a simple movie in the Spider-Man franchise. On the other hand, assuming Spider-Man is not unique is not really a negligible thing. There is trouble ahead, at least on the theoretical side.

In a blending of self-confident and apologetic tone for being yet another Spider-Man movie, Peter Parker introduces himself in a sort of meta-textual prologue, mocking the chance of an origin story to be original. Of course this is not an original story. Perhaps, not even a story. Rather, this is a highly sophisticated narrative device, under the guise of an animated movie – probably the more fitting media for carrying it out. Facing such a work, epistemic certainties falter and fall – especially for those who still think of a real physical world made up of "brute facts", with one univocal meaning and gazing point.

If the aim of *TLK ½*'s 'chiastic' *mise-en-abyme* seemed to be one of shaking all the collective confidence in the traditional aesthetics of textual exclusivity and autonomy, while opening issues about the relationship between sign and referent, facts and fiction, here the stakes are higher. *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018, hereinafter *SMSV*) goes beyond, striving for a deepened analytical role towards the mature outcomes of postmodern culture – being itself one of them. An aware older audience target, a

science-fiction character part of a varied franchise, as well as the greater distance from first postmodern narrative turn, give the chance to do it.

Starting from what seems to be a perfect understanding of the deconstructionist and Lyotardian lessons, the movie boosts their topics to explore how broad the concept of world can be, walking a tightrope between epistemology and ontology. Thus, the plot runs a straight course from the beginning to the end. But the course is straight only on the surface, while hiding the turmoil laying beneath. Indeed, *SMSV* offers many and multiple levels of storytelling, crossing-overs, rebootings, and options for different routes, to broach reality's multiplicity. By doing so, the movie sequences put on stage the main topics of fiction theory, a field emerging at the crossroads between literary criticism and philosophy, by applying possible worlds theory to literature. Yet, the real goal seems one of reflecting on constructivist epistemology, its radical relativism "that eventuates something akin to irrealism<sup>11</sup>," and its power to make and re-make real worlds. Welcoming us in such a sort of 'Hakuna Matata' universe "under rigorous restraint<sup>12</sup>," where almost "anything goes<sup>13</sup>," *SMSV* plunges us – like Alice – in a wonderland where we necessarily shall face up some "trouble with Truth<sup>14</sup>."

After the weird introduction, some reassuring elements come out. Spider-Man (or rather, the one currently on-screen, doing the emo dance from Spider-Man 3) seems to be there to comfort the viewer by making a list of his multiple ways of being in the real world, stopping (maybe we should say pausing) the ontological questions about his uniqueness. A burst of mishmash quotations and extradiegetic<sup>15</sup> elements is proudly shown: "We don't really talk about this. Look, I'm a comic book, I'm a cereal, did a Christmas album. I have an excellent theme song. And a so-so popsicle. I mean, I've looked worse. But after everything, I still love being Spider-Man. I mean, who wouldn't? So no matter how many hits I take, I always find a way to come back. Because the only thing standing between this city and oblivion is me. There's only one Spider-Man. And you're looking at him."

The images accompanying the speech quickly skim through different levels of reality, different existences, and moments of the character, overturning the levels. First of all, Spider-Man takes for granted his very existence in a comic book, where he originally was born, as if he was a real person to which the comic is inspired. Then, he shows the merchandising and the theme of the 1967 cartoon series. The melted down portrait-popsicle is a real photograph (not a cartoon effect), as well as the image of the '60s theme is a real old TV clip. In few seconds, the movie raises many narrative and ontological issues. In particular, the frames where he records the Christmas music album (listened by a character within the film) open the deep question of his possible existence offstage. On the other side, the comic book, the popsicle picture, and the old TV pictures (in 4:3 ratio) are ironic about the particular narrative situation the film itself is entrenched in.

A situation that, according to Henry Jenkins, "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get *dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience*<sup>16</sup>." Typically, inside the same franchise different media make their

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1978. p. x.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> The expression "anything goes" in this kind of argument, refers, of course, to its employ by Paul Feyerabend in its book *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, New Left Book, London & New York, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Nelson Goodman, *cit.*, pp. 17–20.

<sup>15</sup> In narratology, the term "extradiegetic" means "external to the fictional world of the narrative.

<sup>16</sup> Italics in the original. Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101", *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, 2007. However, the main Jenkins concept definition is: "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best [...] Each

contribution to the unfolding of the main story by offering the public more and more stories taking place in the same storyworld. Robust marketing and merchandising strategies thrive at the forefront of this battle, exploiting the popularity of single-medium successful narratives. This means that, in the last decades, what has been called ‘transmedia storytelling’ has affected a peculiar narrative aesthetic, especially in conglomerates like Marvel or DC Comics, in particular in superhero storyworlds as those of Spider-Man’s or Batman’s.

As a wholly result of such a vogue, *SMSV* exploits the vein itself to make fun of it at the same time. This allows *SMSV*’s creators to put in place even a sort of ‘*meta-mise-en-abyme*’: an upper level meta-textual discourse ironizing about itself and the typical postmodern narrative devices. Such intertwining of levels happens in several ways during the movie, blending more than one narrative device and crossing different ontological levels in a sort of complex, un-hierarchical Matryoshka effect. For example, during the action – before the raid to the Alchemax headquarter – the characters refer to their deeds on the comic books of origin, using the drawn strips by way of tutorial and giving rise to a complex overlapping of narrative devices and crossing of reality levels. So the main level of narration combines at least to another media part of the same franchise: a worlds blending, an external analepsis<sup>17</sup>, and a *mise-en-abyme* at the same time.

Another essential feature of that scene, pivotal for this argument, must be taken into account: by referring to their comic books to collect advice about their next move, the characters gain access to their very feats in a sort of frozen, circular time. The timeless, deconstructed present of postmodernity is what allows their contemporary existence in comics *and* on the scene, showing how chronological time has abdicated in favor of reversibility, and circularity<sup>18</sup>. The rebooting plot with different routes makes of *SMSV* a masterpiece of deconstructed, circular time.

The “you know the rest” motif of *SMSV* is a powerful and resourceful formula. In particular, the motto is a key for focusing on more than one feature of the movie. Indeed, it is a highly effective deconstructive tool, as well as working as a secure anchor toward the entire narrative ecosystem of the long-lasting Spider-Man franchise. Of course, the script can use it because the story of almost every Spider-Man is well-known by the audience. Likewise, the reboot is the primary device to deconstruct the plot, hinting that there is no ‘absolute story’ of the Spider-Man, least of all a “one and only” Spider-Man.

In this light, the movie seems to go far beyond the coordinated entertainment experience described by Jenkins, despite using and subtly teasing it. Rather, here the transmedial game seems closer to Marsha Kinder’s concept of “network”, where subjects are sliding signifiers, and their movement beyond the boundaries “requires us to look more closely at the cultural and historical specificity of the particular combination<sup>19</sup>”. In such a complex ecosystem, intertextual literacy is the key to survive to what media demand from us. Against the overwhelming sensory overload to process, we should become comfortable with the idea of *not* getting the whole picture. Such is the experience boost on every level by *SMSV* both aesthetics and intellectual overflowing. Across its continuous re-mirroring, *SMSV* is the plastic demonstration of what deconstructionism calls “dissemination of meaning”. The opulence of identities, quotations, and different points of view, each one reverberating and modifying the other, outdates the mere fiction continuity distributed across different storylines – typical of superhero universes, not to mention the still popular idea of storytelling as a self-contained narrative object.

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franchise entry needs to be self-contained [...]” Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York, 2006. pp. 95–96.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Catherine Burgass “A Brief Story of Postmodern Plot.” in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 30, 2000.

The mazy and amazing ‘genealogy’ from Hamlet’s stage to the Timon’s remote-control made *TLK½* a postmodern toon, perhaps *the* postmodern toon. But, in the true spirit of postmodernity, *SMSV* succeeds in adding a ‘post’ to the post. Here, postmodernity is not only personified, but self-consciously and ironically looking at its own fragmented, overwhelming identity. *TLK½*’s children have grown up in that postmodern sentimental education, so they will have no hesitations to face here the maelstrom of deconstruction of truths and identity that never stops rebooting itself.

Building fictitious realities has always been an intrinsically human activity<sup>20</sup>. Just think both the children’s ability to promote a stick in a hobby horse<sup>21</sup> and to the Homo Sapiens mythopoeic skills to imagine things or stories blended to reality, giving birth to fictions, myths, godheads to share through language<sup>22</sup>. But even if this attitude is fully part of our cognitive life, modern rational thinking has sought to reduce it as something slightly more than a simple form of entertainment<sup>23</sup>. Postmodernity sensitivity has brought this talent back into the spotlight, proudly exhibiting our linguistic nature. So, although we are accustomed to any kind of intertwined stories – since they are hardwired in our mental capacities, focusing on such an attitude is a typical postmodern concern, systematically explored and elevated into an aesthetic only in the last decades.

The postmodern narrative turn, the mediatic supply explosion and, even more, the philosophical achievements and acknowledgment of infinite perspectives from which reality can be described, give rise to what Marie-Laure Ryan defines as a genuine “aesthetics of proliferation<sup>24</sup>.” Contemporary cultural scenario implements several ranges of possible relations between worlds, texts, and stories, sorted by Ryan in three main forms<sup>25</sup>. In the “*narrative proliferation*,” multiple stories are told about the same world, while in the “*ontological proliferation*,” many worlds sprout within the same story, often supported by the modal logic and the concept of possible worlds<sup>26</sup>. And, in “*textual and medial proliferation*,” many different texts and media converge around the same world. Thanks to a plot seemingly built *ad hoc* for the task, *SMSV* comes out as a champion in the aesthetics of proliferation: it complies with all three the forms at the same time, blending them in the same work.

In science-fiction, as when talking about possible worlds, coherence is crucial in the establishment of truth conditions. In essence, it is what makes a world consistent, allowing the franchise continuity<sup>27</sup>. The huge Super-Collider machine built by the villain Kingpin – to access parallel universes and bring back his dead family – is at the core of the events, both as the cause and the solution. It is the plot device letting the Spider-Men and their worlds meet, and making the movie consistent – at least in a sci-fi cartoon narrative horizon. By doing so, the plot introduces the possibility of multiple realities, but – above all – the implicit core message: there is no absolute reality, just like there is no one absolute story of the Spider-Man. In other words, none of the seven Spider-Men (plus two, in the *mise-en-abyme* bonus scene at the end of the credits<sup>28</sup>), presented with their peculiar qualities, props, graphic and ontological rules, can claim the right to be “the one and only Spider-Man.” By tacitly dismissing the thought there was anything inherently special about Peter Parker, and weakening by many deconstructive strategies of the unique identity of Spider-Man<sup>29</sup>, the film suggests that there are no absolute truths, nor privileged

<sup>27</sup> DiGiovanna observe how “In following up from Goodman’s adoption of the Tarski truth conditions, worldmaking is where the artist is more concerned with creating the truth conditions for fictional texts than with the creation of the texts.” James DiGiovanna, James. “Worldmaking as Art Form.” cit. p.116.

<sup>28</sup> Spider-Man 2099 (from Marvel’s Earth-928) meets in this bonus scene the first Spider-Man in the original Marvel’s Earth-67 cartoon.

<sup>29</sup> Just think of the scene of Spider-Man I memorial service, in which his wife Mary Jane Watson talks to a pained crowd of people masked as Spider-man. The acme of her speech is, “We all have powers of our own, in one way or another. We are all Spider-Man. And we’re all counting on you.”

perspective.

Such an admission not only closes Alberti's window on the one world: it opens a new, more complex and inclusive gaze on a reality made by a multiplicity of finite, singular, and self-aware points of view, seizing a wealth of possibilities previously unknown. Such a second-degree postmodern gaze wholly shifts the attention from the object observed to the observer, zeroing any neutral representation or description.

*SMSV* underlines such a statement through its graphics, providing a practical demonstration of the fact that "tools of representation are never neutral<sup>30</sup>." Thus, the drawing style of each character maintains the peculiar ontological properties of its world (medium). For instance, the Spider-Man Noir<sup>31</sup>, inspired by Humphrey Bogart's thirties movies, is rigorously monochromatic. And his incapability to solve the Rubik Cube puzzle suggests that he does not perceive colors at all, absent as they are in his personal comic world. Likewise, Spider-Ham<sup>32</sup> – a pig who looks like an old Looney Tunes character – appears faded, uses enormous funny props (huge wooden hammers, anvils, etc.), speaks in odd confused ways, and – of course – emits bizarre sounds. Furthermore, graphic disturbances and noises sometimes burst into the screen during the action, standing for tiny incongruences between co-existing worlds. What at first glance might seem wholly inconsistent, is instead ontologically consistent with both the world (and the medium) of each character and enforces the pluralistic aesthetics of the entire movie.

By dismantling any chance of a neutral description and subjecting representation to individuality, we rediscover ourselves as a subjects, and unmask that one Truth we had been immersed in to live with "calm, security and consistency," as Nietzsche wrote<sup>33</sup>. The objective facts framed by Alberti's window will never come back: each fact will be framed into a theory, a speech, a world. And such awareness allows to discover how, thanks to language, we can build frames at will. The movie never stops rebooting itself, and everything is put in quotation marks, because in the postmodern, constructionist horizon, "everything said is said by someone<sup>34</sup>."

With the concept of absolute truth wholly out of play, the typical postmodern reflection on sign and referent, fiction and reality, can take another step forward, involving the concept of 'world.' Here *SMSV* is at the forefront, suggesting a glimpse of how abundant and countless our inventories of reality can be. The term '*world*' usually means 'everything that exists,' depicting a totality of things, a "complete inventory<sup>35</sup>" of the whole. Yet, we know today how for humankind the material realm is not the only possible one, what with all the 'realities' that can be built and collectively shared in our minds: fictive realities, but not less effective for that. Humankind's main allies in such a task have always been the symbolic systems, language in particular, as the cartoon characters never cease to remind us.

Facing many realities, more than one inventory should be taken into account, but none of them all-encompassing. Hobgoblin, for instance, belongs to mythology and to Spider-Man's world, but he is not – at least for the moment – included into the realm inventories of *TLK* or Peanuts. And all these are

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "The revelation of order: Perspective and architectural representation." in *This Is Not Architecture: Media Constructions*, Taylor & Francis, London, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Created by writers David Hine and Fabrice Sapolsky and artist Carmine Di Giandomenico, Spider-man Noir first appeared in Spider-Man: Noir #1 in February 2009, the first part of a four-issue miniseries.

<sup>32</sup> Hailing from Marvel's Earth-8311, Spider-Ham was created by writer Tom DeFalco and artist Mark Armstrong. He debuts in a comedic one-shot comic entitled *Marvel Tails* in 1983. Spider-Ham was created by Tom DeFalco and Mark Armstrong.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873), in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, p. 252.

<sup>34</sup> Humberto R. Maturana, and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Shambhala, Boston and London, 1992, pp. 26–27.

<sup>35</sup> C.D. Broad, *Scientific thought*. K. Paul-Trench-Trubner, London, 1923. p. 242.

intuitively different from those of Emma Bovary or the theories of Einstein or Darwin (worlds does not pertain just the fiction<sup>36</sup>). Nevertheless, we cannot exclude *a priori* any possible future blending of them – as in the ‘gran finale’ of *TLK*½ or as in *SMSV*, nor consider them just a narrative chance. Indeed, according to Goodman, such realities built by symbolic systems are not “multiple possible alternatives to a single actual world but of multiple actual worlds<sup>37</sup>.”

*SMSV*'s attitude of closing everything in quotation marks, shifting our attention from *what* is described to *how* it is described, reminds us how “we are confined to ways of describing whatever is described<sup>38</sup>.” Thus, in the absence of neutral language<sup>39</sup>, each description of the world actually presents us with a different world: there is a world for each different way of combining and building symbolic systems and, from a “solemn and severe master”, truth becomes a “docile and obedient servant,” as Goodman synthetically assesses the situation<sup>40</sup>. Of course, worldmaking goes “under rigorous restraint,” and, as in sci-fi, consistency is the first rule. In essence, nobody makes “a world by putting symbols together at random than a carpenter makes a chair by putting pieces of wood together at random<sup>41</sup>.” But that is the beauty of the game, and, as human constructions, such worlds’ status depends upon their explorers who, in turn, become worlds-builders in a multiple dance of continuous switching of roles. *SMSV* offers us a brand-new world, collecting old friends from existing worlds, since “worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking.” As a movie that is going on rebooting itself<sup>42</sup>.

### Neverending Postmodernity

No art has ever been modern like architecture. During its ‘heroic years’ (and this characterization is already symptomatic), architecture has never known a ‘negative side’, weakening – or at least tempering – from within modernism’s faith in progress and in art’s role to achieve it: there is no architectural equivalent for Duchamp’s derisive attitude, or even Joyce’s disruptive experiments, both widely considered from hindsight to have been harbingers of postmodernism<sup>43</sup>. This is why architectural postmodernism has often been considered a well-rounded phenomenon, easy to define and to place historically<sup>44</sup>; one avoiding the pitfalls you may stumble into while trying to define its deeds among the other arts. In architecture, to be *postmodern* has meant – for about a decade – to be *against* modern. Plain and simple. Yet, this could be a formalist reading of a movement that in turn has been accused and subsequently condemned for its formalism.

To understand why, we could go back to Alberti’s window. Modern architecture bypassed any problems related to the gaze’s objectivity by advocating for itself the role of *changing* the world for the better, as opposed to the one of looking at it or even of simply being part of it. It could be argued that, if moral

<sup>36</sup> “The arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding, and thus that the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology. [...] Works of fiction in literature and their counterparts in other arts [...] play a prominent role in worldmaking: our worlds are no more a heritage from scientists, biographers, and historians than from novelists, playwrights and painters.” Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, cit. pp. 102–103.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Neurath call the neutral language ‘*tabula rasa*’. Cf. Otto Neurath, “Protokollsitze” in *Erkenntnis*, 3, 1932-1933. p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, cit. p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Ihab Hassan, *The Right Promethean Fire*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1980. p. 108.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987, pp. 279–287.



commitment was a character shared between all modern arts, this has been even truer for architecture, given its possibility of materially intervene upon reality. It is a fact that, however, not long after WWII, architecture – and art in general – lost this moral faith, so much so that postmodernism could be thought as a way of coping with the grief of such a loss. Confronted with the failures – in terms of banalization, alienation, and people’s marginalization – of the ‘rational’ and ‘radiant’ architectural policies favoured by general consensus, architecture experienced the hard way its powerlessness to deal with problems of eminently social and political nature. At the end of a road paved with good intentions, modern architecture discovered none other than itself, as a language with its own rules and conventions.

To think postmodern architecture mainly as a style, moreover a style looking at classicism as a stance against modernism, is a misunderstanding born from an excessive focus on its first steps and a refusal to look at the bigger picture. What actually happened is that, by losing the world outside as its founding referent, architecture became *self*-referential: here again, the window turned into a mirror. This was already clear within postmodern architecture’s most famous public event – Venice Biennale 1980 – suggested by Rem Koolhaas’, Frank Gehry’s, and Arata Isozaki’s minimalist façades alongside a jubilation of arches and columns facing the Strada Novissima. And it was definitely sanctioned by 1988 exhibition *Deconstructive Architecture*, at the MoMA, showing the works of seven most fashionable ‘starchitects’, all more or less inspired – as stated by the curator himself – by Soviet Constructivism. All, at the same time, deprived of whatever social and political impetus characterizing the Russian movement. To look today at the exhibition’s materials can give a fair explanation of why cynicism is considered another of postmodernism’s distinctive features<sup>45</sup>.

From then until now, architecture has literally emptied all the scraps lying in the big supermarket of modernist techniques, from Dadaist procedures to Arte Povera’s matterism.

The result is a sequence of new formalisms succeeding one another, each one supposedly putting forward a new ‘world’ of meanings replacing the other. However, since the historical reasons for their being as other than language (their referent) has been stripped away, each new world simply joins the others without replacing them. The result is a coexistence of multiple worlds that should stay ontologically apart, but manage to coexist pacifically, one alongside the other in the spatialized time of intertextuality. Moreover, the media through which architecture is mostly ‘consumed’ nowadays (magazines and the web), relentlessly recombine images, texts, and ideologies – themselves reduced to pure form. And architects’ already flourishing activity of worldmaking is thus exponentially multiplied.

So yes, perhaps *the* Postmodern, as a recognized architectural movement with its friends and foes, is dead. But postmodernity as a *condition* is still there and architecture is unescapably part of it. Postmodern as a willed outcome of the work of some authors has given way to postmodernity as a lived cultural environment. Mostly unconsciously, but no less effective for that. As Derrida often said, deconstruction is not something you intentionally put in place: it occurs [*ça arrive*]. We can find this characterization, between the other places, in the transcription of a speech given at a seminar called *Deconstruction is/in America*<sup>46</sup>. In the course of the speech, Derrida plays – as he usually does – with words, hinting at a certain point that – perhaps – Deconstruction *is* America. Perhaps it is – we could

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<sup>45</sup> Cf.: Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity*, Verso, London, 1997. p. 3.: “Cynicism appears in the place left empty by the mass cultural retreat from politics itself.”

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Time is Out of Joint”, in Anselm Haverkamp (ed.), *Deconstruction is/in America. A New Sense of the Political*, New York University Press, New York, 1995.



add – a cultural condition born in the homeland of global capitalism, to level all differences and abolish any ideology, and pave the way for the free circulation of goods and money. If true, this is the guarantee that postmodernity will live at least until global capitalism's modes of production and consumption will last.

### **Post-scriptum**

The authors of this paper have written their parts under the duress of COVID-19 pandemic spreading all over the world, each one confined in his house and dialoguing with the other only through the Internet. Nobody at the moment can predict how global capitalism will be affected by this epochal event and how much it will change itself to adapt. So perhaps this will be the last of their efforts to describe postmodernity as a relevant phenomenon of the present. It is true that, as David Lodge acutely pointed out, “history may be in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war<sup>47</sup>.”

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<sup>47</sup>David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroad*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1971. p. 33.

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