Postmodernism in the Past Tense

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Je suis absolument persuadée, et c'est là le principal argument de mon étude, que le temps est venu de parler du postmodernisme au passé. „Qu'était-ce que le postmodernisme?" plutôt que „Qu'est-ce que le postmodernisme?" semble être le problème-clé de ce début de XXIème siècle. Dans une évaluation rétrospective, le postmodernisme ressemble à un véhicule de transit que toutes les aires culturelles sont obligées d'emprunter pendant un temps plus ou moins long pour sortir de la Modernité. La postmodernité s'étendait à une aire de faits culturels impossibles à gérer au moyen d'un seul système de référence. Dans une perspective temporelle plus large, la situation nous laisse encore plus perplexes: elle mène à des impasses conceptuelles telle l'épineuse relation moderne/postmoderne/contemporain. Cela étant, le genre proche de la soi-disant postmodernité fut la bizare axiomatique d'un *au-delà* qui a imposé un changement herméneutique radical des discours culturels – qu'ils fussent scientifiques, religieux, artistiques ou littéraires.

Once upon a time there was a preposterous cultural frenzy, usually known as *Postmodernism* or, slightly differently, *Postmodernity*. By that time, almost every imaginable hardcover or paperback, academic or popular study, high art or consumerist product was expected to somehow put on display this mesmerizing utterance. In a newspaper of that time, you would notice a"*Postmodernist building for sale!"*

As it was meant to happen, with the passing of time, the ultimate expression of *Postmodernism* constantly kept evading us and clothing itself into mystery. Highly overrated and far too frequently used or abused, the increasingly flexible and extensive notion developed into confusion, nothingness and a speculative void.

Starting about a decade ago, the trend has visibly changed. In this respect, even an occasional lexical x ray exam of cultural titles could prove symptomatic and revealing. I quote at random: "*beyond postmodernism, neo-post-modernism, post- or even past-postmodernism, after postmodernism*" and so on. Subtitles are reading: "*In memoriam",* or have a strong touch of epitaphs. Some authors already venture to present "the state of the notion" very bluntly:

*"*Now that Postmodernism is dead and we're in the process of finally burying it, something else is starting to take hold in the cultural imagination and I propose that we call this new phenomenon Avant-Pop."(America. Mark, Olsen Lance 1995, 3)

It seems quite clear that from now on we can talk about Postmodernism in the past tense: "*What was postmodernism?"* is a more familiar question than "*What is postmodernism?"*

A possible answer is that Postmodernity had been something like a break, a passage, an interval, an interregnum, a stop-gap, an interim or an in-between Modernity, on one hand, and something different, which was expected to follow thereafter, on the other. Now, in retrospect, we are able to contemplate this once unforeseeable future as our near past. In more than one respect postmodernism now resembles a transit vehicle, which almost all cultural areas had to ride for certain lapses of time in order to escape Modernity. After which they all took turns to abandon it. As a matter of fact, between mid sixties and late eighties, "postmodern" was no more no less than the synonym of *Now* or Nowadays.

There was moreover an ambiguous subtext to the discussion in the confusion between the *postmodern age* – as an intellectual set of options as well as a period chronologically following modernity – and, on the other hand, the existence of *postmodernism* as a style of expression and as an artistic program on the other.

As far as its first hypostasis is concerned, special emphasis should be put on the strong pressure and influence of science: thermodynamics (Prigogine, Stengers,1979) and their "*la nouvelle alliance*"; mathematics and pshysics with Heisenberg's equations, fuzzy logic and fuzzy systems, the uncertainties of quantum pshysics, non-Euclidian geometry and especially Mandelbrot's thesis of the infinite fractal dimensions of the Britain coastline. Mandelbrot, as a case in point, has been canonized by Lyotard as a practitioner of postmodern science. His fractals have become an icon of the chaotic processes that sum up the endless fragmentations of postmodernity. (Mandelbrot, 1977). It challenged the Euclidean strategy of approximating the ideal and unchanging forms of the world and replaced them with a geometry of endless change and differentiation. Equally it challenged cultural topographies and the realm of values – thus becoming the genetic impulse of the so called "*Aesthetic of chaos*".

Cutting through the otherwise huge bibliography gathered on the matter reveals almost as many if not more postmodernisms as there are geographical areas, cultures, fields of speculation and creation. The Babel-like polysemy of the notion finally triggered conflicting reactions that suspected postmodernism of clearly incompatible tendencies: it seemed guilty of harboring an excessive historicism and at the same time a pernicious anachronism, of a nihilistic radicalism as well as of a nostalgic conservatism, of a commercialism that verges kitsch but also of an elitist arrogance and so on and so forth.

Postmodernity covered an area of cultural facts impossible to master by means of a unique reference system. It became a generic homonymy feeding a considerable confusion and consequently it left several fundamental questions open to discussion:

– When exactly did postmodernity emerge? Was it immediately after World War Two or rather after the exhaustion of the post-war radical and exclusive neo-modernisms?

– Did we witness a self sufficient cultural age or just a steppingstone into a new century as well as into a new millennium?

– With respect to modernity, was postmodernity an exclusivist movement or was it on the contrary, an inclusive, accumulative one?

– As far as artistic creations (the languages of arts) are concerned, was there any postmodernist reality accessible to genuine perception or were we dealing with an intellectual product in search for an empiric *raison d'être*?

This aside to complicate matters even further, the notion stretched its significance from the phenomenological sphere to that of axiology, where it became a basis for sharp value judgment. Seen from opposite angles, the same qualities became cause of both when judged by the standards and norms of postmodernity.

Put in a broader temporal perspective the situation seems even more tricky, leading to conceptual dead ends such as the relationship: modern/postmodern/contemporary. Consequently Arthur Danto maintains that it is much better to talk about a post-historical contemporaneity emerging "After the Death of Art", when no other discernible direction likely to be of help is emerging:

"In any case, the distinction between the modern and the contemporary did not become clear until well into the seventies and eighties. Contemporary art would for a long time continue *to be the modern art produced by our contemporaries*. At some point, they clearly stopped being a satisfactory way of thinking, as evidenced by the need to invent the term "postmodern". However, perhaps "postmodern" was too strong a term, too closely identified with a certain sector of contemporary art. In truth, the term "postmodern" really does seem to me to designate a certain style we can learn to recognize, the way we learn to recognize instances of the baroque or of the rococo." (Danto 1997, 11)

According to Danto, postmodernism marks a specific style and we have already passed this first age of the progressive death of art: the primeval moment following the genuine question: *Why I am a work of art?* or *When it is art?* But clearly this moment is still a historical and hence an obsolete one on our way moving towards *Who knows where…*

Conceived oppositionally, as the negation of everything bourgeois, Modernist freedom could have dreamed completely new worlds within art. The term postmodernism referred to a departure from both high Modernism and the neo-avant-gardes. In the absence of foundational truths and values, that Modernity spurns, could any principle of solidarity be found? Fragmentation subjectivism, anarchy, perpetual conflict and anomie seemed the inevitable consequence of the breakdown of religious and philosophical certitude.

In a specific way, postmodernism extended the anarchistic attacks against humanist foundations, against the existing order and against the explicit quest for a true pluralism. It celebrated heterogeneity; it revived earliest visions of a unified world and undermined monoliths wherever they were. Due to the overwhelming number of modernist style models, there have been as many forms of postmodernism as there had been high modernisms in place. Postmodernism was thus progressively moving towards relativism. In the idioms of various arts, postmodern pluralism – occasionally labeled as eclecticism – took shape by virtue of its own law, which was specifically the apocalyptic belief that "*anything goes",* the fatalistic modernist belief that "*nothing works*", turned upside down.

Under the circumstances, the either genuine or phony claim of pristine invention was irreversibly lost. Postmodernity rendered legitimate the return to any former method, any former status, any former technique or manner as a simple pre-requisite. Any already existing formula in the cultural repertoire could be promoted and brought back onto the scene. Postmodernism shrewdly played the card of memory. Cultural successorship – the creator as an heir of the *already created* – was granted value and became one of the few artistic norms still observed.

Yet, as far as literature was concerned, there were at least a few features to be found that could conveniently converge under the postmodern sky. Among them, tolerance and the drive towards compromise in the aesthetic area. After having contended for the territory of fiction ever since Cervantes, the so-called two "Great-Traditions" eventually managed to co-exist and even to cooperate, both theoretically and practically. One is the allegedly mimetic reference to the world and the other open self-reflection.

The unprecedented diversity of recipes is also worth mentioning. It allowed for the thriller to coexist with the speculative essay; the autobiography with the historical document and the bookish fantasy; kitsch neo-sentimentalism with meta-fiction etc. The era of postmodern sign also marked the revival of story telling and of imagination, hence the strong impact of fantasy not only on the public but especially on the pontiffs of theory. In this particular respect, postmodern literary practice failed to produce the appropriate analytic instruments for specialized, professional reading. Its theoretic effort towards generalization or towards specific analysis, interpretation and evaluation was doomed to failure.

On a speculative level, post modernity had been perceived as a post-metaphysical and definitely as a pan-linguistic age. Therefore, postmodernism is hardly conceivable without continental post-structuralism – Derrida, Barthes, Foucault and so on. By its strategies of reading – that have become lumped together under the term "*deconstruction*" – postmodernism demonstrated that texts always contain the very elements that they most wish to deny possessing (Foster, Hal, 1983, X-XVI).

The very core of the American deconstruction was its rich stock of implicit or explicit hypotheses on language and on linguistic practice. By the time when deconstruction took to central American stage as a newborn star, Richard Rorty – whom Harold Bloom used to identify as the most interesting living American philosopher – was being engaged in a personal campaign of subversion, targeting the alleged *foundationalism* of the occidental epistemology. That is not to mention his emphatic obsession, especially during the eighties, with the strong acting potential of language and even with its unavoidable "privatization" – if we may say so.

In his turn, John R. Searle was probably the best-articulated commentator and the most formidable overseas interlocutor of Jacques Derrida. In a well-known series of polemic exchanges with Searle, the French philosopher, in obvious self-defense, retorted that he had been misunderstood and even misread, careful at the same time to avoid any hint as to any more appropriate interpretation of his allegations.

The import of the derridean hypotheses on the American shore, via the harbor of Baltimore and from there directly into the departments of French and English, without passing through the customs of the American philosophy, was harshly questioned by Searle. The Berkeley professor of the philosophy of mind and language targeted especially Derrida's quasi-total ignorance by of the modern philosophy of language, beginning with Frege, followed by Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Tarski or Quine (Searle, John R. 1995).

Although he insisted on conducting an assault on both the linguistic and the philosophical pre-suppositions of the so-called occidental "logocentrism", Derrida remains, no less than Husserl himself a pre-wittgensteinian philosopher. Therefore the rather traditionalist guru of deconstruction could only claim the title of absolute innovator in the area of the obscure and

over-metaphorized philosophical discourse. As Mihaly Szegedy-Maszak maintains, to translate Derrida into some languages isn't much easier than to recreate a poetic text.

To take another revealing deconstructionist case in point, for the pontifical deconstructionist Paul de Man the personal concept of *mere reading* continued to function as a milestone of what we might call an anti-theoretical theory. Paradoxically enough, it promotes a plain allergy to totalitarian theory that became itself the most totalitarian of dogmas. To be more specific, *mere reading* is a speculative device, so far removed from texts that their literariness becomes invisible and eventually irrelevant to the professional reader.

Paul de Man enormously overrates figurative potential of language pre-existing the process of production and reception of meanings (Mann, Paul de, 1983). These peculiar types of reading ended up by completely neutralizing any potential and actual difference between literary and non-literary texts, in particular that occurring between literary and philosophical ones. In any case, de Man displays an arrogant lack of interest in the specific objects of his interpretation – even when they happen to belong to poets as outstanding as Holderlin. As a principle, the literary, philosophical or scientific status of a text is absolutely irrelevant in comparison to its position as a device producing meaning.

The most interesting reactions to postmodernism or postmodernity belonged to the left side of the political arena. Interestingly enough, when it comes to evaluating postmodernism from a Marxist standpoint, the borderline that separates the waters coincides with the former Iron Curtain. Western leftists felt an attraction to the postmodernist contempt for canonized values and to its distrust of humanist-universalist narratives. The so-called postmodern complicity with the consumerist lifestyles evident in certain tolerance of kitsch caused a weaker reaction in the leftist spheres of Western Europe.

In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, postmodernism was perversely singled out as a symptom of the irreversible decay of late capitalism. By and large postmodernism was very different in each geo-political eastern area. A few distinctive features, which are hardly present in the Western sphere, were, however shared by all Eastern European postmodernisms.

One of these was the attitude towards the *Proletkult* and towards the forced ideologisation of national cultures, after the soviet take over of Eastern and South-eastern Europe. Bolshevism pretended to completely erase whatever existed before its advent. Its negativist and retorting strategy was in fact just as violent as the European modernist radicalisms of all colors and flavors. Communism introduced itself as the strong politics of modernization, to be extended from industry and agriculture to people and their fundamental values. Almost everything about communism was striving to be *New*: the New industry, the New economics, the New ruling power, the New social relations and first and foremost the so-called and over praised New Man.

As far as The Communist Manifesto is concerned, among the researches there is agreement that it is, I quote:"the founding text of an internationalist political modernism, now over one hundred and fifty years old" (Osborne, John, 2000, 63).

Ever since the beginning, the culture of capital has been identified as the systemic instantiation of a Mephistophelean spirit of negation. What is the *Communist Manifesto* in this context – in which "the sorcerer" of modern society has regained a certain crucial measure

of control over its powers – but, as Berman puts it " the Archetype of a century of modernist manifestos and movements… the first modernist work of art" (Berman, Marshall, 1982, 89).

The New order and the New Man who was supposed to bring it about were to be followed by a *New Literature* as well. A literature which succeeded in getting rid of all its traditions and should search for new standards, new canons, new criteria, new genres and forms, new themes and new styles of expression. The renewal of realism was also included in this overall remodeling plan: "socialist realism" was born as a result and what it had in common with the former vanguards were the nonconformist anti-bourgeois radical options.

In Romania, for instance, efforts to recapture the "vanguards tradition" from between the wars were evident for a short period of a so-called "thaw" between 1965 and 1971 – the year when Ceaușescu launched his Cultural Revolution "*à la chinoise*". It was in this context that the postmodern theme emerged in the Romanian intellectual milieus of the early eighties. The youngest writers of the eighties – the " textualist generation", who had had taken advantage of the conjunction between French textualism and some western leftist, even Maoist ideologies – started to claim in retrospect by the end of the decade, a postmodern drive. Their debut as postmodernists was an articulated effort to recapture and revamp whatever was worth resuscitating in an alleged forerunner of local postmodernism. This was the beginning of an interesting game between the writers and the ruling power and its censorship. Eventually they were stigmatized as pro-American, decadent, cosmopolitan, bourgeois, western mercenaries. Simultaneously postmodernism became a fetish and succeeded in establishing strong links between literature and the other arts and cultural areas – such as architecture or urban studies.

Some East-Central European countries, especially in the last decade before the fall of communism, witnessed the spectacular advent of a "nominalist" brand of postmodernism: an emphatically theoretical program with little or no empirical application in literary production.

This was related to the attitudes towards Postmodernism adopted by Western versus Eastern leftist ideologues. It was in fact the reluctance of postmodern attitudes, options, rhetoric to adopt any of the prevailing Great Narratives that communist totalitarianism (especially in its most radical form in Romania) perceived as the greatest threat.

Despite the obvious lack of substance of postmodern literary production, the East European advocates of postmodernism instrumentalized it into an implicit retort to the communist agenda. The writers tried to question – at least on a theoretical level – the myth of the unique valid ideology, the worshipping of Marxism as the only coherent explanatory theory and as the true representative of contemporary humanism.

After December '89, in Romania the recaptured will to synchronize with the West gave Romania postmodernism certain impetus. The visible result was a sort of carnivalization of postmodernism as it acquired a somewhat vulgar appeal. It was in the early nineties that postmodernism became the synonym of everything good, enjoyable and holding favorable overall connotations. Students of humanities and social sciences paid little attention to any course, which did not feature in its title the "*passe-partout*" notion.

On a purely theoretical level, the imitation of feminist, post-colonialist, and multiculturalist discourses helped to keep the postmodern obsession alive, in a two way relationship of mutual lending and borrowing of "fancy" concepts. Similarly, the creative practices of the youngest

generation of writers betrayed the early symptoms of the foretold death of postmodernism, whose twilight was drawing near with the end of the century and of the millennium.

No name has been found yet for the innovative practices that called themselves symptoms of a "new sensibility", allegedly nourished by the innovations in media and communication technology. Recent manifestos of this generation claim that the forthcoming literature will send the "vegetable garden metaphysics" along with the inconsistent fantasies of urban modernism and especially the emphatically self-reflexive "postmodern tradition" of the 80s straight into the rubbish bin of history.

Postmodernism has been, above all, a particular way of seeing, which resided on our contact lenses we see everything through for a while. Its only touchable manifestation is to be found in the very studies on postmodernity. Has our way of see changed of late?

Some tell tales facts encourage us to be acquiescent, mainly as a response to what appear to be new challenges, some of which are in fact new faces of the resurrected eternal dilemmas of literariness and of culture as a whole. At least the cultural output of the new media – the so-called "*mediagenic reality*", the "*cyberspace*", the *"virtual reality"*, *and "the hypertext"* – seems in bad need of appropriate analytic categories. A possible and desirable adjustment of the good old postmodern concepts was attempted but it didn't work. (Ryan Marie-Laure, 1999).

Some of the venerable "gurus" of deconstruction tried very hard to become the early prophets of the specific type of culture manufactured by the new media. Up to a certain point, the development of the so-called electronic writing was mistakenly considered a consequence and an illustration of the earlier hypotheses of Jacques Derrida and of Jean Baudrillard, regarding textuality, representation and the media. Nowadays and from a theoretically rigorous perspective, such attempts are as disputable as they are risky.

One branch of late post-structuralism was making great and constant efforts to keep up with the pace of the boom of computer based intellectual production. In this context, particularly Derrida and Baudrillard are publically self-appointed theorists of the new technologies. The abusive way in which Baudrillard assimilates VR (the Virtual Reality) as a hypostasis of the hyper-reality is becoming increasingly obvious. Starting with his book *America* (1986) the French theorist describes television and theme-parks such as *Disneyland* as ideal types of a distopic non-reality or of a third degree imagined reality, a view which remains highly questionable. By the same token, Derrida redefines the category of virtuality for his own use especially in his various commentz on spectral realities or on hallucinatory substance of some political representations, in a manner than could – and it did – stir the sarcastic reactions of some professionnals specializing in the area.

Even the above cursory remarks on the situation warn us against the risky equivalences between virtual reality (VR), on the one hand, and the spatial dimension of the visual reality, on the other. The most dangerous temptation is the inference of axiomatic affinities between electronic writing and the postmodern aesthetics. Alternatively, to put it differently, most dangerous is the hypothesis of a direct relation between the postmodern theories and the electronic textuality.

I must confess it is appealing to approach literature in the framework of dichotomies such as linearity versus spatiality; the text as an experience of profoundness versus the text as an

experience of surface; hermeneutic depth versus surfing, the hierarchical versus the free structure of the text, order versus chaos, continuity versus fragmentation and so on. The next step is to proclaim the equivalence of every second element of the oppositions above as converging symptoms of postmodernity and of the electronic textuality.

Unfortunately on closer scrutiny the presupposition that the borderline between modernity and the printed text, on the one side, and postmodernity and electronic textualism, on the other passes in between these two antinomic series is as inaccurate as it is deceptive – no more, in fact than a mere fallacy. As a matter of fact, the new means of communication are playing on both teams and, when examined from this point of view they appear to be complementary. At this point a "Chicken or the Egg" question becomes unavoidable: Are the new concepts generated by the new technologies best fitted to the preexisting postmodern literature? Or is it the other way around is this type of literature stimulated especially by the devices of modern technology – as the novels of Thomas Pynchon or of Don DeLlilo in particular seem to suggest?

Talking about *Avant-sensibility, Mediascape, Mediagenic Reality, Information Superhighway* we have to bear in mind that every time new faces of very old dilemas of language and literature re-emerge automatically. (Landlow, George, P. Delaney , Paul, 1993).

The very concept of virtuality provides a case in point. Its destiny bears the mark of an old manicheism, whose roots descend towards the scholastico-aristotelian bynome *in actu* versus *in potentia* , both present in the two faces of the reputedly postmodern virtual space: on the one hand the counterfeit (the product of "to fake") and on the other the simulacrum, the illusion, the specular reflection, the endless generation (the product of "to make").

Another slipery concept tentatively appropriated by postmodernism, *Cyberspace*, had a spectacular carrier in the most unexpected cultural areas – strating with art theories and finishing with advertising or with the columnist discourses. Very few really know that we are dealing with a mere epistemological metaphor coined by the writer William Gibson in the early eighties, in a famous paragraph of 33 words, placed on the 3rd page of the first novel of the trilogy that includes *Neuromancer* (Gibson, William, 1984)*, Count zero* (Gibson,William,1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Gibson, William*,* 1988). Later on in a famous and often quoted public statement the novelist himself made a revealing remark concerning the spatial substance at which his concept was pointing: *"There is no there, there."* Free of any cultural tradition the empty recipient of this concept has since the very beginning functioned as a pure virtuality or as a dream catalyst. In fact, almost the completely terminological bunch that has its sources in Gibson's book has a rich ludic dimension. Its potential is to highlight the hidden theatrality of the world produced by the computers, playing on the double meaning of the word *performance*.

According to one of the leading figures of the "Avant-Pop", an alleged successor of postmodernism:

"Most of the early practitioners of Postmodernism, who came into active adult consciousness in the fifties, sixties and early seventies, tried desperately to keep themselves away from the forefront of the newly powerful Mediagenic *Reality* that was rapidly becoming the place where most of our social exchange was taking place. Postmodernism found

it overtaken by the popular media engine that eventually killed it and from its remains, Avant-Pop is now born." (*America*. Mark, Lance Olsen. 1995, 11).

As a matter of fact, the effort to identify new patterns of significance in the electronic literature – called by some "postmodern" – can be seen as the last episode of a quest as old as European culture itself. During its different ages, the European culture asigned the mission of symbolizing the ideal Model of the wholeness to one type of cultural product after another. In the Middle Ages it was *The Cathedral*; during the Enlightenment it was the *Encyclopedia;* for modernity it was *the Book* of Mallarmé – and may be the novel of Proust, in itself a verbal cathedral, as the author himself seemed to suggest in his essays on John Ruskin; for Postmodernity it was the *Endless utopian intertextuality* where even the tyniest part reflects the structure of the whole.

This kind of endless textuality requires a theoretically unlimited interpretation and postmodernity abused of this concept in every possible respect., especially due to its devices of *mere reading*. In the early nineties, this type of abuse is identified by Eco as "*overinterpretation*" and closely questioned in his public and published dialogues with Jonathan Culler, Richard Rorty and Christine Brook-Rose.

According to Stefan Collini, the editor of Eco' exchanges with the above-mentioned theorists, he thus expressed his protest against what he sees as the perverse "appropriation of the idea of unlimited semiosis" (Eco, Umberto, 1992, 8).

The necessity of setting axiomatic limits – whether they be communitarian, historic or both – is by no means new – especially not after the appearance of reader-oriented interpretation theories and their variants, including that of the Konstanz School. The leader of the latter, Hans Robert Jauss was relying strongly on a certain amount of authority of interpretive communities, which postmodernity has regarded with reluctance as oppressive instances. How can Eco succeed in riding his boat between Scylla and Charybda?

His first move was to challenge the allegedly postmodern anthem "Everything goes!"

"I have however decided that is possible to establish some limits beyond which it is possible to say that a given interpretation is a bad and far-fetched one. As a criterion, my quasi Popperian structure is perhaps too weak, but is sufficient in order to recognize that it *is not true that everything goes*." (Eco, Umberto, 1992, 144)

Eco's next step is to prove that there are several "degrees of acceptability of interpretations" (Eco, Umberto, 1992, 149), although, as a rule, people are using texts for implementing the most daring deconstructions.

Where do these degrees of acceptability come from? Howe do these criteria of evaluation work and are the interpretive communities implicitly following their guidelines?

A global and convenient answer is that we should put ourselves in the shoes of all previous interpreters; this is because every new interpretation automatically challenges any previous interpretation. Consequently, we are left to adopt the standpoint of "the history of the text's interpretations".

It is this history that provides us with the required degrees of certainty and uncertainty, some of them deeply rooted in a philological ground. There is a strong degree of certainty that Homer wrote before Dante. Based on this collective certainty Eco can argue "that the Homeric

texts were produced before the Divine Comedy and that it is difficult to interpret them as the intended allegory of the Passion of Christ." (Eco, Umberto, 1992, 150)

This suspicion towards the reputed infinity of free, deconstructionist-like interpretation is only one of the symptoms of an ongoing syndrome of over saturation. As always the flexible and versatile Eco is in vanguard and, this time, the vanguard is 'past-post-modernist '.

A Few Conclusive Remarks

After performing a requiem for the memory of postmodernism, in the process of being written, note by note, before our very eyes, on the music of contemporary culture, what can we expect follow up?

One possibility is a particular brand of revival and renewal of spirituality in all its possible dimensions and acceptions. Science is right now taking a u-turn towards cooperation and complementarity with all transcendental areas. By working together with those, responsible for the aesthetic and religious languages an acceptable distribution of the functions assigned to every one of these intermingled levels of reference should take place.

A key question still remains: where is the cornerstone of this comprehensive order to be found? Modernity relied on innovation and its *mot d'ordre* was in all respects *The New*. The postmodern negation was "*revisiting, memory and revival of everything already existing*". Both were driving in their own direction and both were playing the card of exhaustion. To go ahead the next trend will be in bad need of a foundation, a starting point, and a cornerstone. We can only presume that these will be searched and found in a beyond, a transcendence of meaning. What kind of "Beyond" or "Transcendence"? Perhaps an aesthetic and ethical one.

This axiomatic of beyond asks for a radical hermeneutic turn of all cultural – be they scientific, religious, artistic or literary – discourses. (Vattimo, Gianni, 1994, 42-56). The twenty-first century already seems to take a keen interest in a meaningful human life – the real and the transcendental ones. To approach it approaching it efficiently requires a committed integration of the aesthetic, the ethical, the historical, the formal and the spiritual dimensions of the manifold human creation.

For literary meta-discourses this implies a renewed interest in the dynamics, in the inertia and in the destiny of literary forms, in a significant connection with the languages and techniques of the other entire sister arts. And, first and foremost a redefinition of the context and a new dignity for the explanatory horizons of literary histories.

In a peculiar way Postmodernism was an Apocalypse – a last judgment of all the previous traditions. In the area of symbolic production, the end of the century and of the millennium overemphasized dramatically this eschatological feel.

After the death of postmodernism, in the aftermath of the required penitence and punishment, a new life is bound to arise.

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