

# Media and Visual Culture through the Paradigms of Modernism(s): from Modernism through Postmodernism to Post-postmodernism and Hypermodernism

Darko Baštovanović<sup>1\*</sup>, Branka Bešević Gajić<sup>2</sup>, Stevan Lutovac<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet of the Minister for Reconciliation, Regional Cooperation, and Social Stability of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [darko1bastovanovic@gmail.com](mailto:darko1bastovanovic@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Management, Sremski Karlovci, [branka.besevicgajic@famns.edu.rs](mailto:branka.besevicgajic@famns.edu.rs)

**Abstract:** Departing from the premise that postmodernism does not disappear in the course of the historical demise of cultural–epistemological paradigms but is instead transversally incorporated into a new metanarrative of techno-aesthetic hypermodernity, this paper reconfigures the categorical foundations for the analysis of visual and media culture within the context of the post-postmodern transition. Its central thesis does not imply either a regressive reaffirmation of modernist formalism or a normative repair of postmodern fragmentation, but rather the articulation of an epistemologically expanded field within which postmodern poetics—including the simulacral, intertextual, pastiche-based, spectacular, and rhizomatic—are refunctionalized as the techno-ontological infrastructure of a new visual regime. Relying methodologically on heterogeneous yet compatible conceptual modules (assemblage / visual code / cyberspace / algorithmic affectivity), the authors approach media culture not as a phenomenological epiphenomenon, but as an apparatus-based formation of subjectivity in which the aesthetic, the political, and the technological are not separated, but operationalized through modes of digitally mediated (self-)representation. Within this discursive framework, the postmodern no longer exists as a historically “past” concept, but as a semiotic code undergoing algorithmic mutation—reconfigured within a hypermodern environment in which visibility has become the primary mode of affective and cognitive articulation of reality.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, hypermodernism, culture, paradigm, discourse, fragmentation.

## Coordinates of Introductory Contextualization

The endeavour of the authors of this manuscript is directed toward the formation of a theoretical synopsis within which postmodernism is positioned as a culturally mediatized paradigm whose energy, although dispersed, continues to resonate within the structure of the present.

\*Corresponding author: Darko Baštovanović, [darko1bastovanovic@gmail.com](mailto:darko1bastovanovic@gmail.com)



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The writing does not proceed from the standpoint of historical retrospection nor from metaperspectival abstraction, but rather as an effort to conceptualize a particular density of experience: experience that has already been technically shaped, medially coded, and visually inscribed. The position of postmodernism within the contemporary mind is not that of a weakened theoretical fashion, but persists as a dynamic cultural repertoire, preserved in patterns of perception, in the grammars of everyday life, and in narrative modes that continue to structure our expectations of reality.

Postmodernism emerges and endures through media infrastructures, just as one might have formerly said that culture reflects epochal consciousness, here the media configuration appears as an ontological precondition for cultural articulation. Within this range, visual culture becomes more than an iconic practice: it constitutes a space for negotiation with reality, a regime for the production of events, and a mode of modeling what is recognized as “real.” What we refer to as media is not exhausted by their technical role of mediation, but includes the entire spectrum of materiality, codes, narrative structures, economies of attention, and, above all, registers of perception.

The encounter between postmodernism and media culture does not occur within the horizon of mutual interaction, but within a matrix of co-emergence. Media are neither platform, nor tool, nor “channel”, their functioning is not transmissive, but epistemological. They do not process reality; they configure it. The event ceases to be an ontological point upon which the subject is affectively inscribed: it appears in the form of a simulated scene, pre-formatted, often visually spectacularized, within which experience has already displaced its intensity. The media image does not follow the event – it is the event itself. Under these conditions, what is perceived as postmodern does not persist in theoretical paraphrases, but in productions of affective codes that circulate between technological replication and visual hyperpresence. The space of perception is no longer a space of introspection, but a terrain on which recombination of signs, cues, and echo-traces of reality occurs. The subject, in this context, no longer exists as a self-determining agency, but as a nodal point within a network of apparatuses, processors, interfaces, algorithms, and optical-digital assemblies that redefine what is sensory, what is possible, and what is conceivable.

In considering visual culture, one must begin from the ontological assumption that the visual is not reductively reducible to an image, nor to the act of “seeing” in the sense of perceptual activity, but is rather a complex and multilayered event in which codes of power, narratives of knowledge, and practices of subjectivity intersect. Within this discursive span, visual culture does not articulate representations alone, but also forms of relation to reality, distributions of visibility, arrangements of what may/may not be seen, what is authorized to be observed, and what remains in the blind spot of historical vision. It produces and is produced by that which can, in anthropological and media terms, be called the economy of seeing.

The capacity to see, to be seen, and to be recognized as a subject of vision is neither universal nor neutral. It is historically differentiated, always politically burdened, and technologically conditioned. It is precisely these distributions of power over the visible that constitute visual culture as a zone of conflict / negotiation / instrumentalization. The traditional understanding of the visual as an archetypal, all-seeing, divinely authorized position of knowledge, in the contemporary era, is extended into the domain of technological superstructure through surveillance systems, algorithmic facial recognition, and visual analyses of behavior. Visuality here is directly linked to knowledge and to power. The one who sees does not merely observe; they codify, govern, archive, and intervene.

Within this framework, postmodernism appears as a cultural form that has, in a sense, predesignated itself for reabsorption, not as an ideology of the end, but as a meta-discursive system that carries

within its core its own auto-immunity, its own consent to self-dethronement. The question of succession is no longer a question of truth, but a question of operativity: which conceptual apparatus succeeds in explaining contemporary cultural and media formations that are simultaneously post-postmodern and hypermodern?

The question of the hypermodernization of the postmodern is thus not posed as a theoretical inflation, but as a real cultural condition: what does it mean when postmodernism itself, that metaphysical archive of fragmentation, irony, simulation, and intertextuality, is subjected to technological expansion in the domain of algorithmic processing of affect, within an environment pre-mapped through the digital traces of subjects? The answer may lie in a distinction that remains insufficiently articulated: between postmodernity (as a historical period), postmodernism (as a conceptual-discursive apparatus), and postmodernization (as a socio-technological process).

Taking this tripartite distinction into account, this paper directs its focus toward several key theoretical coordinates: not as a retrospective interpretation, but rather as an experimental displacement: the rhizomatic matrix and assemblage in the analysis of visual communications; the graphic revolution as a radicalization of technological representation; pseudo-events as a spectacular dislocation of the real; hyperreality as a logic that substitutes for experience; simulacra as operational units of cultural production; pastiche as an aesthetic of repetition without origin; and intertextuality as a discursive mechanism without center. Each of these concepts will not be treated as a historically closed category, but as a living point of accessing and open to reflection within a post-postmodern condition of culture that is continuously undergoing hypermodernization.

### **Paraproximities of (Modern)ism(s)**

Any serious reflection on the (post)modern requires a prior disentanglement of its internal conceptual tension not as a sterile taxonomy, but as a gesture of lucid differentiation between an epistemological horizon / a discursive formation / a socio-technological process. The conceptual triad postmodernity / postmodernism / postmodernization does not function as a neutral classification, but rather as a symptom of ontological and semiopolitical displacements that demand to be thought not in the form of the signified, but within a regime of the performativity of meaning.

Postmodernity is not exhausted as a “post-modern” stage but is articulated as a constitutive rupture within the linear logic of Enlightenment rationalism, destabilizing the axes of unity / universality / eschatological progression, it inaugurates an epochal imbalance: a topology of fluidity, the dominance of discontinuity, and the proliferation of multiple realities. Within this field of ontological stratification, postmodernism does not arrive as an “expression” or “reflection,” but as a productive dispositif of meaning – an operative cultural apparatus that generates modes of articulation of the postmodern imaginary through aesthetic / academic / political codes. It does not interpret reality, but produces its possibilities, mapping it through a language of fragments, ironic displacements, and narrative interferences.

Postmodernization, by contrast, does not operate symbolically, but infrastructurally: as a series of techno-economic, communicational, and institutional mutations that naturalize the logic of the postmodern, transforming it into a quotidian ontopolitics, a mechanism of subjectivation, algorithmic socialization, and cultural economy. This tripartite differentiation is theoretically articulated by authors such as Simon Susen, Zygmunt Bauman, David Harvey, and Fredric Jameson, each of whom insists on non-negligible shifts between these terms: Jameson conceives postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism;

Harvey emphasizes its spatio-temporal reorganizations, while Bauman maps its ethical collapse through the metaphors of liquidity / precarity / fracture.

Susen describes the “postmodern turn” as a paradigmatic shift from the Enlightenment belief in the relative determinacy of both the natural and the social world toward an increasingly widespread post-Enlightenment conviction in the radical indeterminacy of material and symbolic forms of existence. Crucially, he does not treat this shift as a mere change in a “style of thinking,” but as a set of interrelated transformations that reconfigure the very conditions of social-scientific explanation, namely, what counts as valid knowledge, how methodological justification is established, where causality is located, and how political agency is conceived. For this reason, Susen disaggregates the turn into five distinct “turns” (the relativistic turn in epistemology, the interpretive turn in methodology, the cultural turn in sociology, the contingent turn in historiography, and the autonomist turn in politics), thereby providing a precise map of how the postmodern “enters” scientific procedures and political horizons, rather than remaining merely a label for fragmentation, irony, or intertextuality (Susen, 2015).

Bauman, by contrast, insists that the key nerve of postmodernity lies precisely in the crisis of “old, comforting certainties”: a condition in which the principles and assumptions upon which we once relied are called into question, and life is experienced in the register of contingency, insecurity, and ambivalence. In such circumstances, ethical–political orientation becomes increasingly difficult to anchor in stable codes and universal guarantees. In this sense, Bauman’s diagnosis of postmodernity is not only a description of cultural pluralization, but also an elaboration of the experience of living without stable points of reference. He links the notion of ambivalence to the modern impulse to classify and order the world (language, order, boundaries), as well as to the persistent “return” of undecidability that this impulse generates as its shadow. This is significant because it allows us to read the postmodern not merely as a process of aestheticization and fragmentation, but as a moral–social condition in which normative certainty disintegrates, and responsibility and choice become “heavier” precisely because they are no longer covered by firm rules (Bauman, 1991).

Jean-François Lyotard, justifiably positioned as a major prophet of the disintegration of universalist apparatuses of legitimation and as a theoretical architect of epistemic dislocation, does not approach the phenomenon of postmodernity as a superficial cultural change / aesthetic mutation / ideological reaction, but rather postulates it as an ontological, cognitive rupture within the very infrastructure of knowledge, its production, circulation, and validation. His key diagnostic gesture in *The Postmodern Condition (La Condition postmoderne, 1979)*, often simplistically reduced to the phrase “incredulity toward metanarratives”, should be read neither as a philosophical relativization nor as a merely heuristic description of a moment, but as a theoretical seismograph registering the structural exhaustion of discursive totalities / rationalist universalisms / teleological horizons in an epoch dominated by dispersed, non-linear, multi-channel modes of knowledge articulation that no longer seek truth, but rather operational functionality / situated applicability / pragmatic efficiency within communicational, technical, and informational regimes that no longer recognize a hierarchical vertical of legitimation.

In the disintegration of metanarratives, the loss of their legitimating force becomes manifest: discursive models that once organized horizons of meaning, religious, ideological, modernist, no longer perform the function that sustained them. Modernism is not an exception within this process; its decline unfolds through two parallel stratifications. One belongs to the political matrix, within which humanity was imagined as the collective bearer of a historical mission of emancipation, as a subject capable of trans-

forming the world through the force of a universal project. The other pertains to the philosophical articulation of modernism, in which knowledge is posited as an end in itself, as a mechanism expected to produce emancipation through its very accumulation. Lyotard clearly demonstrates that the modernist order loses its weight at the moment when emphasis shifts from purpose to technical execution. The postwar acceleration of technological means separates the production of knowledge from its former value-laden functions; knowledge is no longer conceived as a universal emancipatory resource, but as a component of a techno-system that primarily generates performative effects. Political universalism is thus left without a subject, and the philosophical ideal of knowledge without a convincing emancipatory foundation. In this disintegration, the modernist metanarrative does not disappear as an idea, but as a mode of world-connection: it no longer provides a shared horizon of meaning, nor does it articulate the relationship between action, purpose, and a common future. It remains as the residue of an epistemic matrix whose operativity finds no grounding in contemporary regimes of experience, where reality is no longer organized through totalizing narratives, but through technical protocols, fragmentary perspectives, and shifts in the structure of the visible.

By contrast, Jameson does not accept postmodernism merely as an “incredulity” toward metanarratives in the Lyotardian sense, but dialectically insists on reading it as both a periodizing concept and as the cultural logic of late (multinational) capitalism, more precisely, as a historically specific regime of cultural production in which changes in aesthetics, perception, representation, and everyday symbolic economy cannot be treated as a self-sufficient “autonomy of culture,” but rather as the mode through which the totality of social relations (under conditions of late capitalism) appears, is distributed, and reproduced at the level of culture. It is for this reason that the characteristics Jameson foregrounds are precisely those that can only be thought together: the new “flatness” or depthlessness and the culture of the image/simulacrum; the weakening of historicity (both in relation to public history and in private temporality); the “schizophrenic” structure of time (in the Lacanian register), which produces syntaxes without stable continuity; and a new affective ground (“the waning of affect”) that transforms the very way in which the subject registers intensity, seriousness, and depth of experience. In other words, where Lyotard’s gesture of rupture seeks to demonstrate the collapse of legitimating totalities, Jameson seeks to show that this very “collapse” can itself be explained as a functional expression of a broader systemic transformation—that the postmodern is both symptom and form of the logic of the commodity, media, and spectacle in late capitalism, in which aesthetics does not appear as the “victory” of culture over the economy, but as the mode through which the economy (as a total social relation) colonizes cultural production and turns it into its most sensitive sensorium.

Harvey argues that what we designate as the postmodern condition does not amount to a mere “change in taste,” but rather to a profound displacement of the coordinates of experience—above all through the transformation of the experience of time and space, through the collapse of trust in a stable linkage between scientific and moral judgments, and through a specific shift of focus: aesthetics (image / performance / visibility) displaces ethics as the primary object of social and intellectual concern. In this configuration, images dominate narratives, while ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and the idea of a unified politics. At the same time, explanatory frameworks are relocated: from material and political-economic foundations toward considerations of autonomous cultural and political practices, as if the “weight” of causality had migrated from structure to style, from production to the symbolic, from economy to rhetoric.

Yet Harvey simultaneously insists that such shifts are by no means historically unprecedented. His outline suggests that similar “regime changes” recur, and that even the most recent version remains fully accessible to historical-materialist analysis, theoretically elaborable through the metanarrative of capitalist development formulated by Marx. From this perspective, postmodernism, in Harvey’s framework, is not merely a cultural label but a historically and geographically specific condition and it is precisely here that he opens the question of its nature: whether it is to be understood as a symptom/pathology or as a sign (portent) of a deeper and broader revolution in human affairs than those already produced by the historical geography of capitalism (Harvey, 1990: 327–390).

Dominic Strinati, examining the structural shifts in the formation of the symbolic order of the late twentieth century, identifies five fundamental aspects of postmodernism, not as a stylistic repertoire or cultural trend, but as a symptomatic crystallization of deep disturbances in regimes of meaning. Within this horizon, the postmodern appears not as a thematic change, but as an epistemological mutation: the collapse of verticality, the pluralization of norms, and the decline of the credibility of systems of totalizing meaning. According to Strinati, the five characteristics of postmodernism may be outlined as follows:

1. The annulment of the distinction between the social / the cultural / the experiential.

Instead of a functional opposition between institutional frameworks, aesthetic forms, and existential experience, the postmodern regime of meaning introduces a mutual translatability of codes—social relations are aesthetically staged, cultural artifacts become normative matrices, and experience is refracted through patterns of representation. The production of norms is no longer distinguishable from their performance, nor is it possible to discern where form ends and order begins.

2. The primacy of expression, that is, affect, over content.

The visual impulse, formal redundancy, and affective saturation acquire priority over conceptual articulation or cognitive coherence. Trust in inner meaning is replaced by trust in surface effect / stylistic deviation / gestural citationality. Meaning is no longer discovered; it is assembled and multiplied through montage and repetition, through the rhythmization of form, without obligation to deeper reference.

3. The mixing of elites.

Axiological distinctions between cultural elevation, media populism, and everyday banality are dissolved. The high is no longer elevated, the low no longer marginal. Both are incorporated into the same flow of cultural capital redistribution and symbolic consumption. The horizon of hierarchy disappears, replaced by a horizon of hybridity, a field of intersecting signs deprived of historical gravity.

4. The fragmentation of space, time, and presence.

Traditional coordinates of location, geographical / chronological / corporeal, are destabilized. Spaces are no longer constructed, but compressed; time no longer flows, but fractures; presence is no longer an event, but a dislocated trace. The subject no longer inhabits continuity, but circulates among disjunctive points that do not presuppose one another.

5. The disintegration of metanarratives / binding truths / universal forms.

Trust in unifying narratives that once guaranteed meaning disappears—not because they have become dysfunctional, but because they have become unconvincing. The authority of ideas / systems / progress is not dismantled through negation, but exhausted through iteration. In place of meaning, we encounter flow; in place of grounding, overlap; in place of answers, a change of position within the discursive matrix.

The annulment of the distinction between the social / the cultural / the everyday, as conceptualized by Strinati (2004: 211–212), does not represent an epistemological nuance but a symptomatic mutation

in which mass media become the key regulatory mechanisms of social reproduction. Within this configuration, popular culture does not function as a secondary sphere of symbolic expression, but as a dominant apparatus of affective–perceptual normalization—a techno-symbolic infrastructure operating through iconic transcriptions of the real. Signs, images, and imaginaries no longer act as transmissive carriers of meaning, but as operative instances of the codification of reality: they direct affect, map perception, and format experience. Subjectivity is not articulated through reflexive distance, but is generated within an algorithmic regime of orchestration: through spectacular montages, narrative loops, and affective transparency. The media image does not arrive as a representation of the event, but as its prosthetic substitution, pre-generated within a regime of hypervisibility and perceptual automatism. The social is no longer the precondition of the cultural, but its derived function, while culture is no longer consumed as meaning, but internalized as a normative grid of everyday subjectivation. Postmodernity in Strinati's framework does not interpret media saturation; it derives its theoretical form from it: an attempt to understand a society saturated with signs, affect, and hyperproduction of images.

In the configuration of postmodernity analytically dissected by the Marxist philosopher of autonomist provenance Franco Berardi, alias Bifo Berardi, what is at stake is neither an aesthetic shift of paradigm nor an epistemological skepticism toward totalizing discourses, but a profound transformation of the ontological and affective conditions of subjectivation within the regime of semicapitalism—a regime in which labor is de-ontologized, communication instrumentalized, and language emptied of meaning through the permanent acceleration of rhythms of production, reception, and circulation. Here, postmodernity does not appear as a philosophical marker of the relativization of truth, but as a historical condition of collective derealization, depressive saturation, and psycho-affective disintegration that can no longer be interpreted through a hermeneutics of meaning, but rather through an analysis of frequency, intensity, and overload.

The affective structure of the postmodern subject does not emerge from oppression, but from constant integration into the machinery of the sign, through the mobilization of language, the exploitation of attention, and the emotional coding of consciousness, the subject no longer operates within the opposition freedom/repression, but within the horizon of uninterrupted inclusion, availability, and connectivity. The postmodern subject does not participate as a being of difference, but as a node within a network of affective compatibilities, as a semio-emotional machine that no longer interprets the world, but mediates it. In this sense, communication loses every form of reflexive distinction and becomes an algorithmically distributed force, designed not to express meaning, but to produce affective effects, to generate response, trigger desire, and mobilize energy that no longer condenses into political identity, but dissipates through dispersive flows of desire, panic, and exhaustion (Berardi, 2014: 88).

Language within the postmodern constellation functions as a technical matrix of affect rather than as a symbolic medium of representation: meaning is not stabilized through dialogue, but is volatile and consumable, illuminated only in micro-moments of semantic interference, while consciousness itself no longer functions as a stable bearer of identity, but as a surface continuously oscillating between rhythm, impulse, and demand. Within such a dispositif, postmodernity becomes the name for the collapse of collective temporal orientation: the linearity of chronos is replaced by asynchronous sequences of input, parallel emotional streams, and altered regimes of anticipation, in which the subject does not project the future, but endures an accelerated present as a field of constant reorganization of its own presence. Positioned within this semio-affective field, the subject no longer operates within the code of critical distance, but within the logic of permanent availability, where postmodernity no longer signifies pluralism but

disorientation in excess, no longer irony but the inability to distinguish between the serious and the banal, no longer difference but fatigue from difference itself. In this context, Berardi's analysis of postmodernity does not constitute a deconstruction of meaning, but a diagnosis of its metabolic collapse, the breakdown of the symbolic economy in which affect is produced without narrative, and narrative is consumed without experience (Berardi, 2012: 119). Subjectivity is thus reorganized in accordance with the techno-communicative imperatives of market rationality: the postmodern self is no longer an existential singularity, but an extension of platforms, a profiled point of reaction, an accelerative function of emotional processing. Its political potential is not abolished through violence, but diluted by rhythm, rhetorically, informationally, affectively.

Starting from the understanding that postmodernism cannot be separated either from its epochal configuration or from the theoretical model through which society is conceptualized, Denzin identifies a series of tendencies that define postmodern social analytics. Classical systemic constructions lose their grounding; society is no longer imagined as a closed totality, but as a set of dispersed processes without a stable center. At the core emerges the problem of legitimacy under conditions of technologically accelerated and medially saturated culture, where experience moves through filters, codes, and technical substrates rather than through immediacy.

The theoretical apparatus distances itself from earlier methodological forms – phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, and critical models – because these frameworks no longer encompass transformations in social configurations. Language becomes the key analytical field: it is here that patterns of relations, distributions of power, modes of perception, and figures of subjectivity are formed. Along the same line runs the interrogation of scientific knowledge and the realist assumptions that accompanied social interpretations of late capitalism; the question is no longer what science claims, but how knowledge is produced, circulated, and legitimized. The subject is examined through the arrangement of discursive, affective, and technical practices, without presupposing a unified or self-contained position. Commodity acquires theoretical weight as a site where the reconfiguration of social relations becomes visible through commodity forms, consumption, and stylized everyday life. Metanarratives that once oriented cultural and social life lose their function; everyday existence no longer rests upon stable symbolic anchors. In this development, skepticism also arises toward rationalist models of emancipation, since promises of consensus, liberatory knowledge, and universal communication are no longer matched by the structures of the contemporary social order. Analysis therefore shifts toward fields in which society, language, and the subject are shaped through technological, media, and power regimes that define contemporary reality.

If there exists a regime in which postmodernity ceases to be a stylistic artifact and assumes the status of a techno-epistemological configuration of subjectivity production, its reading through the twin frameworks of Han's psychopolitics (Byung-Chul Han) and Virilio's dromology (Paul Virilio) opens a space for diagnosing visibility not as a representational mediator, but as an affective–dromological apparatus of discipline. In Han's account, power no longer functions through externalized prohibition, but through internalized obligation, the subject is not silenced, but compulsorily activated; not within a regime of censorship, but within an economy of permanent exposure and performative presence (Han, 2017). Within this framework, visibility does not appear as a field of recognition, but as a grid that incessantly demands confirmation, form allows no shelter, and transparency, instead of truth, produces flattening: everything becomes visible and thus consumed; everything is available, and therefore nothing remains (Han, 2015). There is no longer a gaze that requires distance, but a gaze as self-surveillance: the subject is no longer the subject of the gaze, but the subject of exposure, pressed by the light of visibility to the point of burnout.

In a parallel line of thought, in Virilio's work visuality loses its referential point, because what appears as an image no longer derives from reality, but from speed. The image does not follow the event; it replaces it. It is the visual residue of catastrophe, accelerated to the point of suppressing reflection, transformed into a logistics of light, a transmission that threatens to erase the distinction between appearance, representation, and destruction (Virilio, 1977). In this key, the dromological apparatus does not articulate the image as a carrier of meaning, but as a precursor of collapse—technology does not produce representation, but generates intensity that already contains self-destruction within itself (Virilio, 2005). The image is no longer secondary, no longer consequential; it is the event itself in its optical mutation, an accelerated form that does not allow the formation of experience. At the intersection of Han's affective-transparent matrix and Virilio's light-accelerational infrastructure, visuality is articulated as an algorithmic regime of affective determination, as a technical arrangement of enforced visibility. The subject is torn between the grid that marks it as an object of display and the rhythm that disables it from establishing itself as a subject of reflection. Visual culture, within this coded horizon, functions as a distributive network of attention and an operative zone of the exhaustion of presence—not as a symbolic medium of meaning exchange, but as a semiotic-economic apparatus for the manipulation of the visible, without remainder, without depth, without slowness.

### **Dimensionality(ies) of Mechanical Reproduction**

In the contemporary age of technical reproduction, the manner in which works of art exist and circulate undergoes a radical transformation. The development of technologies such as photography, film, and digital visual practices has resulted in the image no longer being bound to a single original nor to privileged spaces of viewing. Instead, works of art enter a regime of mass accessibility in which the boundaries between the exclusive and the general, between private contemplation and public distribution, are erased. This shift not only redefines the relationship between audiences and art, but also the very foundations of artistic existence, what Benjamin identified as the loss of the work's "aura."

Yet this aura, as Benjamin emphasizes, does not disappear without residue: it remains as a testimony to the spatial, temporal, and cultural embeddedness of the original, its history and its ritual use. In this sense, technical reproduction does not abolish art, but relocates it within a new regime of visibility, where presence is no longer determined by place, but by flow, availability, and context of use. From this perspective, a space opens for understanding how not only the status of the artwork has changed, but also the ways in which it is perceived, consumed, and evaluated.

Benjamin points out that at the moment when the art object can be technically reproduced without limitation, the very structure of its existence is transformed: film, photography, and graphic visual practices produce images that no longer depend on a unique original nor on the restricted access that once defined their cultural status. Reproduction introduces a regime in which the work exits the enclosed space of privileged viewing and enters mass circulation; accessibility expands to the point at which the distinction between "those who have access" and "those who do not" is abolished. Yet something remains with the original object that reproduction cannot appropriate: its concrete position in time, the material history of its movement, the traces of the conditions under which it was produced and preserved, and the specific presence that distinguishes it from any copy.

Benjamin links this layer to auraticity, not as a mystified surplus of meaning, but as the result of the fact that the original is bound to a precise spatial and traditional framework, to customs of display, to cultural rituals that determine how it is approached and within what environment it acquires meaning. The artwork is never given neutrally: its perception is shaped by the gallery, the sanctuary, the ceremonial space, familial inheritance, constellations that constitute its unrepeatability. Reproductive technologies dismantle this framework and introduce a different regime of visibility: the image no longer requires a ritual space in order to be seen, sound no longer demands the concert hall, and the work is no longer bound to a specific environment that defines it. Mass distribution shifts the center of gravity from ritual to exhibition, from privileged space to media flow. In such a transformation, the boundaries that once defined the difference between the original act and its multiplied echo disappear, while visual culture enters a state in which presence is no longer a matter of place, but of accessibility and circulation.

It can therefore be argued that the distribution of artistic content, particularly through digital technologies that enable unlimited reproduction and instantaneous availability, does not function merely as a technical channel of transmission, but as a mechanism of ideological interpellation, one that introduces, integrates, and positions the individual within a structure of passive reception and standardized cultural consumption. Reproduction in this context does not signify only the technical multiplication of the original, but also its systemic integration into flows characterized by continuity, rapid turnover, and the functional neutralization of meaning, leading to the perception of the artwork no longer as a singular object of experience, but as a serial content unit embedded within the logic of distribution.

Within such a configuration, the subject no longer approaches art as an event, as a space of active intellectual engagement but as an object of consumption, while the structure of perception is shaped by parameters dictated by availability, portability, and distributional efficiency. The role of viewers is thereby redefined: they become consumers of cultural material that has already been semantically pre-structured, temporally condensed, and aesthetically balanced to produce immediate satisfaction, but not cognitive or affective destabilization. In other words, ideological interpellation in this context does not operate through explicit repression, but through form, through a regime of representation in which artistic content is modified so as to lose what Benjamin designates as auraticity: spatial embeddedness, temporal irrepeatability, and ritual differentiation of access.

Instead of an artistic object that constitutes the subject, we encounter a series of cultural units that shape patterns of consumption, transforming the experience of art from hermeneutic to logistical, from contemplative to automated. In this context, mass distribution functions as an apparatus of cultural rationalization that selectively neutralizes the resistance of the image—its capacity to establish distance, to pose a demand, or to provoke a disturbance in perception—and instead organizes conditions in which viewing unfolds as a process without interruption, without intensity, and without the necessity of cognitive participation.

It should also be emphasized that, while Benjamin recognizes in the de-auratization of the artwork an ambivalent yet potentially emancipatory process, a process through which art is released from ritual enclosure and rendered accessible to collective experience, Adorno (together with Horkheimer) insists that this potential is already neutralized in advance by the logic of capitalist production, that is, integrated into the system of the culture industry, which does not employ reproduction in order to democratize perception, but rather to standardize, homogenize, and depoliticize it. For Adorno, mass reproduction does not dismantle, power hierarchies, but rather reshapes them into a subtler yet more effective form: artistic

contents are serialized, formally differentiated yet structurally identical, thereby producing what he designates as pseudo-individualization: the illusion of choice within a strictly delimited spectrum of the possible. Where Benjamin discerns the possibility that technically reproduced art might become a means of political articulation and collective perception, Adorno identifies a mechanism through which the subject is adjusted to the existing order, one in which the critical potential of art is displaced by its function of entertainment and relief, reproducing social passivity. The difference between these two approaches can therefore be understood as a distinction between dialectical hope and structural pessimism. Benjamin's understanding of technical reproduction remains open to historical contingency, to the possibility that media apparatuses might be deployed against their own internal logic, whereas Adorno proceeds from the assumption that the very form of mass culture is already inseparable from the relations of production that generate it. In this sense, the loss of aura in Benjamin signifies a transformation of the regime of artistic existence, while in Adorno the same process marks the definitive subordination of art to the laws of exchange, whereby the artwork ceases to function as a site of negativity and resistance and becomes a functional element of the cultural economy. This divergence reveals a crucial difference in their respective conceptions of the subject: in Benjamin, the subject still retains the possibility of an active relation to the reproduced image, the possibility of a political rearticulation of perception, whereas in Adorno the subject is already largely shaped by the very mechanisms of reception, formatted through the patterns of industrially produced culture. Mass distribution, accordingly, remains for Benjamin an ambivalent field of struggle, while for Adorno it assumes the character of a closed system in which the emancipatory potential of art is reduced to a minimum.

Within the hypermodern visual regime, this dispute between Benjamin and Adorno ceases to be merely a theoretical "old score" and becomes a description of everyday reality: images are no longer reproduced because they can be, but because they must circulate. Platforms, as infrastructures of visibility, assume the role once occupied by institutions of exhibition, only now the "site" of the image is neither the gallery nor the cinema but the feed, and its duration is no longer determined by the time of reception but by the rhythm of scrolling and micro-decisions of attention. In this sense, Benjamin's de-auratization today acquires an algorithmic version: aura is not lost solely through multiplication, but through the conversion of presence into metrics (reach, retention, engagement), where the "visible" is that which is statistically most likely to hold attention. Adorno's pseudo-individualization, by contrast, becomes almost literal: content personalization produces the illusion of singular choice, while in reality it operates through a standardized repertoire merely repackaged, according to profile, habit, and market-legible emotion.

The relationship between the artwork and technical reproduction thus forms a complex dialectical framework in which elements of transformation, loss, and potential redistribution of meaning appear simultaneously. Benjamin observes that the process of de-auratization does not necessarily lead to a complete impoverishment of aesthetic experience, but rather opens possibilities for its repositioning within the context of mass perception. By contrast, within the critique of the culture industry articulated by Horkheimer and Adorno, the same process is understood as a mechanism of cultural standardization, integrated into the logic of reproducing social domination. In both cases, technical reproduction cannot be treated as a neutral technology of transmission, but must be grasped as a factor that reshapes the ontological status of the artwork, the structure of its reception, and the position of the subject who encounters it. In this sense, contemporary regimes of visibility do not exhaust themselves in the mere availability of images, but generate new forms of relations to art, relations that no longer rest upon ritualized, spatially

defined encounters, but upon conditions of distribution, automation, and perceptual economy. The possibility of aesthetic experience under such conditions remains open, but is no longer guaranteed by form, space, or tradition; it depends instead on the configuration in which the image appears, as well as on the ways in which it is approached, used, interpreted, or ignored.

### **Theorizing the Rhizomatic Structure of Visual Culture**

Precisely because contemporary regimes of visibility operate as networks of distribution, recommendation, and redirection of attention, analytical frameworks grounded in linear causalities and hierarchical “sources” prove insufficient (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3–7). It is no longer a matter of an image “originating somewhere” and then “acting elsewhere,” but of meaning being produced in movement through the linking of nodes, the interception of flows, and the overlapping of codes that are not neatly ordered by levels. In other words, if hypermodern visibility constitutes an infrastructure of circulation, then its understanding must likewise be networked. Here the rhizome emerges as an epistemological minimum: not as a metaphor, but as a means of mapping a culture that is no longer vertically organized, but laterally distributed, through flows, connections, and lines of flight.

In the analysis of contemporary visual and media practices, the concept of the rhizome, as articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, introduces a productive epistemological distinction in relation to traditional, hierarchically structured models of knowledge. Opposed to the model of the “tree of knowledge”, which rests upon the assumption of a stable foundation, vertical organization, and a logic of derivation, the rhizome functions as a structuration without center, without primary cause, and without teleological orientation. Within this framework, knowledge is not constructed from a single source toward ever higher branches, but expands horizontally, multidirectionally, and unpredictably, through a multiplicity of connected yet non-substantialized points. In the field of visual culture, rhizomatic logic enables a fundamentally different approach to structures of representation. Rather than proceeding from clear binary oppositions (image/reality, original/copy, author/viewer), the rhizome opens a space for analyzing flows that resist stable coding and cannot be reduced to linear causal patterns. Visual practice, in this context, is not understood as the outcome of a linear production of meaning, but as a domain in which meanings circulate through networks of affective, cultural, and technological relations that are not easily mapped or fixed.

The rhizome is not composed of static elements but of lines, more precisely, of three basic types of connectivity identified by Deleuze and Guattari: rigid lines of segmentation, flexible lines of destabilization, and lines of flight. The first type refers to structures that organize subjectivity and cultural production through stable binary oppositions – male/female, private/public, elite/popular – relations that are naturalized and maintained through the systemic distribution of power. The second type encompasses unstable, fluctuating connections that function as internal disturbances within rigid structures. These are not necessarily revolutionary, but they undermine the stability of identities and open spaces for overlap and ambivalence. The third type, lines of flight, designates flows that fully escape existing structures and open the possibility for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity, meaning, and practice. These are flows that do not seek to transform what exists, but to exceed it.

From a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, it may therefore be concluded that the application of rhizomatic analysis within the domain of contemporary visual culture entails abandoning stable categorical

frameworks and shifting the analytical focus toward processes of connection, networking, and displacement. The subject is not positioned as a stable point of perception or meaning, but as a temporary node within a network of affective and symbolic flows. Within this framework, the visual image no longer retains the authority of representation; rather, it functions as a point of passage, displacement, or interruption within a network of meanings that does not strive for closure, but for openness and continuous reorganization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 13–25).

However, it is necessary to note that Manuel DeLanda's reading of the Deleuzian tradition (including the concept of the rhizome) enters a terrain in which philosophical topology is deliberately "lowered" to the level of material and social configurations. In this move, the rhizomatic ceases to function as a stylistic figure and begins to resemble an operational map for describing real assemblages: cities, markets, institutions, digital networks, logistics, technical standards, interfaces, affective regimes, everything that is usually separated into "technology" and "society" is reconceptualized as a composite assemblage in which heterogeneous elements are held together not because they were predesigned within a single overarching idea, but because, in practice, they become linked, stabilized, deteriorate, and are re-linked.

It is precisely here that DeLanda opens a particularly productive perspective on the rhizome: the rhizome is not merely a way in which meaning circulates, but a way in which social reality itself is composed—layer by layer, across thresholds, through changes in density and speed. In this sense, rhizomatic logic does not imply the absence of form; rather, it indicates that form emerges as the result of local connections and temporary stabilizations, rather than as the execution of a centrally designed schema. When translated into the field of visual culture, the image can thus be read as an event that is simultaneously aesthetic and infrastructural: it exists as content, but also as compression, format, distribution protocol, platform optimization, visibility metrics, archiving, and recommendation. These components are not secondary; they constitute the assemblage within which the visual becomes operative at all. DeLanda's style often appears colder, almost engineering-like, but it is precisely this analytical distance that proves useful in demonstrating that the rhizomatic is not merely a metaphor of "networks," but a set of real compositions of power, in which visibility is produced through technical and social parameters, and the subject emerges as a function of entry into an assemblage as a point through which flows pass, and as a point shaped by what the assemblage permits at any given moment (DeLanda, 2006: 4–5).

This rhizomatic sequence must be complemented by Brian Massumi's reflections, in which the rhizome is approached as an affective nerve. Here, philosophical topology is displaced into the register of micro-movements of attention, intensities, and transitions between perception and reaction. One of Massumi's key interventions lies precisely in this shift: the connection is no longer only semantic or informational, but also bodily and affective. Rhizomatic expansion thus does not consist merely in the multiplication of points, but in the multiplication of impulses, "triggers," and state-shifts, allowing the network to be read as a map of intensity variations rather than solely as a map of meanings (Massumi, 2002: 23–45; esp. 27–28, 35). Massumi consistently insists that affect is not the same as emotion, since emotion is already culturally articulated, named, and integrated into narrative form, whereas affect remains pre-narrative—fast, slippery, a transition that occurs before it can be captured in language. In this sense, the rhizome becomes a way of thinking visual culture as a continuous redistribution of intensities across images, sounds, frames, edits, notifications, rhythms of repetition and interruption. In the digital regime, this can be read through what is often trivialized as "scrolling": scrolling is not merely a movement, but a micro-politics of attention, continuous switching, brief suspension, and passage, in which not only content changes but the state of the subject itself. Massumi's contribution to the understanding of the rhizome can

thus be read as an insistence that the network is not a neutral “structure,” but operates according to affective logics: it produces moods, shifts thresholds of tolerance, normalizes saturation, disciplines through excess, and guides the subject into a mode of constant “connection” with something that has not yet become thought. When Massumi speaks of mapping, it is not the mapping of stable entities, but the mapping of transitions, stumbles, accelerations, decelerations, jumps in intensity, and even lines of flight that need not be heroic, but may be small and almost imperceptible, yet still powerful enough to redirect attention, desire, and interpretation, without the need to be closed into a single “lesson” (Massumi, 2002: 23–45).

Along this line of inquiry, it is also important to engage the work of Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska, who approach media as processes rather than objects, or as a “living” ecology (in the sense of being dynamic and evolutionary). Their framework both extends and structurally consolidates the rhizomatic perspective precisely at the point where a reduction of media to tools or channels is to be avoided. Media become environments, and environments become active participants in the production of meaning. From this perspective, the rhizome can be read as a media ecology in which it is no longer possible to neatly separate “technology” from “culture,” “image” from “distribution,” or “subject” from infrastructure, since all of these instances emerge together, through mutual feedback loops. Kember and Zylińska insist that what is “new” in new media does not reside solely in devices or platforms, but in the reorganization of relations—in shifts in regimes of mediation, speed, accessibility, and in the transformation of how reality is experienced as being “mediated by default.” Here, the rhizomatic acquires a quieter yet persistent dimension: connection is not spectacle, but the everyday infrastructure of life. Visual culture thus becomes the site where this infrastructure appears as habit, automatism, an economy of attention, and as the translation of experience into a format designed for circulation. Their contribution to rhizomatic thinking can be mobilized to show that visual culture does not emerge only within the “sphere of representation,” but within media ecologies that operate through routines, availability, continuous readiness for production and sharing, and through the micro-protocols of everyday life (record, post, react, move on). In this sense, rhizomatic multiplication of connections need not be framed as the euphoria of multiplicity, but rather as a condition in which both ethics and aesthetics are displaced, since the question is no longer only what an image “means,” but what it does, how it circulates, to whom it belongs, and how it shapes the subject who participates in its circulation (Kember and Zylińska, 2012: 1–6).

### **Postmodern Hyperreality/Simulacra**

For the French theorist Jean Baudrillard, one of the defining features of postmodern society is simulation and hyperreality. More specifically, reality, in Baudrillard’s framework, is always already mediated and reproduced, not merely as a technical fact, but as a structural condition of contemporary experience, in which the real does not appear “before” the sign, but is constituted through the regimes of its multiplication and circulation. Accordingly, Baudrillard defines the simulacrum as a copy of a copy, that is, a reproduced form detached from any relation to an original, which “stands on its own” and ultimately assumes the function of the original, replacing it as a reference point. The simulacrum is, therefore, reality without origin, hyperreality that, in Baudrillard’s words, “substitutes signs of the real for the real itself,” producing a condition in which reality is no longer measured against its source, but according to the operational plausibility and effects of its signs (Baudrillard, 1983: 4).

In this disposition, Baudrillard emphasizes that subjects are usually unaware of the degree to which simulation displaces and reshapes the relationship between the real and the hyperreal: the problem is not simply that “there are too many images,” but that the very ontological difference between what is and what is represented gradually dissolves in favor of a regime in which representation ceases to be secondary and becomes primary. Virtual reality (in a broader sense: media- and technology-mediated realities) radically alters our conception of the world precisely because it introduces models of experience in which reality is not merely “followed” but pre-formatted, so that we live in a society where simulation of reality displaces the idea of “pure” reality, not violently, but through habit, availability, speed, and standardized perception.

In this context, the simulacrum becomes “true” not because it corresponds to reality, but because reality increasingly appears only in the form of simulacra: the world is saturated with signs and symbols in which the real is displaced by the hyperreal, and the difference between the actual and the imaginary becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, as both operate within the same semiotic and media regime. The consequence is that human experience increasingly takes the form of the simulation of reality, rather than an immediate relation to reality as such: what is perceived, remembered, and shared is not the event “in itself,” but the event in its formatted, coded, and distributively prepared version. Simulation is closely tied to the development of mass culture, because mass culture does not stand “beside” reality as decoration, but produces the prevailing reality through patterns of visibility, recognition narratives, and symbolic schemes that guide attention, affect, and interpretation, so that hyperreality cannot be treated as mere illusion, but as an effective matrix of the contemporary social world (Baudrillard, 1983: 4).

Ergo, from Baudrillard’s perspective, modernity no longer possesses the kind of “productive capacity” that once enabled the establishment of stable, teleologically and morally saturated referents in the name of the Enlightenment horizon, progress, humanity, emancipation, as endpoints of meaning that held the semantic order together. On the contrary, precisely when the real ceases to be a self-evident anchor (when one can speak of its disappearance/absence, or at least of its radical erosion), culture is pushed into a double constraint: either into full semantic nostalgia (an attempt to “restore” what has been lost), or into a panicked hypertrophy of the production of the “real”, where reality is no longer found, but fabricated, enforced, multiplied, and confirmed through the regime of oppressive simulation of hyperreality, that is, an “inventable” reality that demands to be the only, total, and unquestionable one (Baudrillard, 1983: 9–13).

In this configuration, postmodern culture no longer operates through the classical branching into real and unreal, nor through the distinction between true and false representation, because representation itself disperses within a continuum of the simulacra: not “yes/no,” but “more/less” perceptible, more/less convincing, more/less operational simulation freed from the “weight” of the real as an external criterion which floods the entire edifice of representation and turns it into a self-sufficient order of appearances. The image is no longer secondary to reality, nor is the appearance a mere defect of truth, but emerges as the only available “truth” to the extent that, outside the play of signs itself, there is no other external reference point that could guarantee veracity. Precisely because postmodern culture is no longer disciplined/limited/“constrained” by anything that could be registered outside itself, it breaks with representation per se—with the idea that representation must correspond to something external—and becomes unrestrained in constructing an invented universe without an external anchor, where the referent is not lost accidentally but is systematically superfluous: the real is not “mirrored,” but substituted, and meaning derives not from origin, but from circulation and self-confirmation of signs.

If one were to position, relative to Baudrillard, an author offering the closest “critical antecedent”, not in terms of identical concepts, but in the contextualization of revealing the same operative logic of contemporary/postmodern society, it would certainly be Herbert Marcuse. He analyzes, prior to Baudrillard, how reality is maintained not merely through force or ideology in the classical sense, but through the systemic production of needs, satisfactions, and interpretive frameworks that integrate the subject into the order by offering “freedom” as a format, rather than as rupture. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse is concrete: advanced industrial societies (and their later post-industrial forms) produce one-dimensionality as a narrowing of the horizon of thought and experience—society becomes “administered,” rationality becomes techno-political, and conflict and negativity are neutralized through integration. This means that mass culture and media do not function as neutral representations of the world, but as mechanisms that standardize expectations and reinforce existing relations by differentiating between the “needs” the system demands from the subject and those that would lead to genuine liberation. Marcuse introduces a key distinction: false needs – those that are induced, that “come from outside” through advertising, consumer lifestyles, the entertainment industry, and social conformity – are not merely an economic category, but a media-affective infrastructure: they organize what we desire, how we desire, and what we consider “normal” pleasure, so that social stability is produced by keeping the subject continuously in a regime of satisfaction that simultaneously liberates and disciplines (Marcuse, 1964).

We consider it necessary, on a theoretically productive level, to add that the repertoire of primordial/archetypal human stories, what in the broadest sense is called myth, has by no means been exhausted in the alleged “rationalization” of the modern age. On the contrary, it continues to reactivate and redistribute itself extremely efficiently through pop-cultural narratives, serving as a kind of narrative reservoir for recognition, identification, and affective world-binding (Barthes, 1972: 109–156). Here, myth should not be understood as a “relic” of the premodern, but as a specific narrative configuration in which divine/heroic/mystical actors, together with their metaphysical plots and worlds, do not stand outside the “real” world as mere phantasmagoria, but share with it the same dynamic plane—so that myth functions as a semantic generator, adding a figurative logic to the real (order of trials, call, transformation, punishment/reward, return), thereby stabilizing social experience in the form of stories that are “understood” before they are rationally analyzed.

It is precisely for this reason that mythic themes, motifs, and components are widely present in media representation, in film, serialized programming, television formats, advertising, and commercial narratives, not as decoration, but as an operative script condensing complex social relations into shortcuts of meaning, transforming cultural values into recognizable figures and collective tensions into dramaturgical schemes. In this sense, myths continuously shape and reshape social life, its rituals, ceremonies, and institutional self-representations, enabling society to “narrate” itself through codes experienced as natural, self-evident, and emotionally compelling (Bart, 2019: 199–217).

In Bart’s framework, the visual sign does not reflect natural reality, but encodes it retrospectively imposing cultural semantics, organizing the legibility of the world, and producing “evidence” through connotative regimes experienced as self-evident. However, the moment this Barthesian logic of codification (the image as an apparatus of meaning) moves from the relatively stable regimes of mass media into the extremely fluid architecture of electronic communication and digital networks, the code no longer remains merely a layer of meaning “over” the real, but becomes the operative infrastructure of the text itself: what for Barthes was the naturalization of meaning through myth and connotation is here radicalized as re-textualization—the text no longer exists only in relation to other texts, but is continuously reshaped within

the very process of networked circulation, where the boundaries between reading and writing, reception and production, author and user dissolve within the interface regime, and the text assumes a nomadic, variable form that persists only as a temporary configuration in the perspective of the reader.

However, once one moves from the Bakhtinian (Mikhail Bakhtin) premise that a text “exists” only in dialogical interaction with other texts, within a context where both anterior and posterior planes of understanding are opened, into the extremely fluid, electronically accelerated textuality of digital networks, this conjuncture ceases to be merely relational (co-presence) and becomes transformative. Intertextual contact no longer ends at “touch,” but extends into reconfiguration: texts not only coexist within the networked milieu, but are re-textualized, rewritten/reconfigured as variable instances that dissolve across iterations of reading and use. For this reason, Epstein introduces the concept of the *textoide* as a virtual “nomadic” text – a text without a fixed ontological anchor outside the reader’s perspective, in which the reader (under conditions of digital circulation) shifts from the position of interpreter to that of operator/co-author, so that authorship increasingly appears as a function of the interface rather than as a stable intention preceding the text (Bakhtin, 2010: 162; Epstein, 2012: 70–71).

Within such a regime of “text-as-protocol,” a technological perspective in media analysis becomes not a supplementary optic but a necessary analytical ground—not because of any naïve celebration of technology, but because specific media (writing, the typewriter, film, television, the computer) are attributed with properties that generate concrete social and cultural consequences, primarily through their modes of operation and mediation, and only secondarily through the “content” that passes through those modes. In this respect, Jonathan Bignell is particularly useful in reminding us that media are not neutral channels, but cultural–technical forms that reorganize perception, rhythm, accessibility, and the boundaries between what is taken as message and what is taken as world. Here, technological agency undermines the distinctions required for critical distancing (self/other, medium/message, reality/representation), narrows the space of classical alienation and differentiation, and introduces a hybrid assemblage in which the human and the machine become increasingly difficult to separate as distinct instances (Bignell, 2000: 193–194). Within the same conceptual block, one can naturally situate the line of thought extending from Marshall McLuhan’s formulation of the medium as the message, via Friedrich Kittler (media as the historical a priori of what can be said/seen/recorded), to N. Katherine Hayles (media and computation as frameworks that shape what counts as meaning, embodiment, and cognition) and Lev Manovich (digital textuality as a material–informational assemblage and as an algorithmic regime of selection), for all of them, using different terminology, advance the same claim: in digital environments, text is no longer a “thing” but an event, and the event is no longer “outside the media” but emerges as a media-formatted reality.

## Conclusions

After conducting the theoretical taxonomy, it becomes evident that the object of our inquiry cannot be adequately described either through a linear narrative of “epochal succession” or through the comfortable demarcation between “modern” and “postmodern” cultural forms, because the contemporary visual-media regime behaves as a field in which paradigms are not abolished but displaced—they transversally reconfigure, inscribe themselves into one another, and, crucially, change function. The postmodern no longer appears as a historically “former” configuration, but as an operative code that, in a hypermodern environment, performs an infrastructural role, enabling reality to be articulated as legible, shareable, and affectively convincing. Hence, the key affirmation of this study lies precisely in showing that visual culture

is neither a mere reflection of society nor a neutral channel of meaning transmission, but an apparatus that produces the conditions under which an event is recognized as an event, identity as identity, and the “real” as that which can be thought, experienced, and confirmed, where aesthetic, political, and technological dimensions are not separated but appear as interdependent layers of the same apparatus, in which the subject is not established as a sovereign interpreter but as a variable position within protocols of visibility, attention rhythms, and distribution regimes.

In this apparatus, traditional oppositions (real/unreal, original/copy, true/false, author/reader) are confirmed as not disappearing because they are “theoretically disputed,” but because they become practically inoperative: contemporary reality is increasingly measured not against its origin, but against effects—whether something is sufficiently convincing, sufficiently stable in circulation, sufficiently compatible with already-formatted expectations and habits. The “real” is therefore not lost as a referent because it disappears, but because it is substituted by regimes of signs and images that assume its function, transforming reality into a continuum of operative confirmation and repetition. From this follows the study’s second confirmation: social stability and the reproduction of order no longer primarily rely on explicit coercion or prohibition, but on the production of compatible needs, desires, and interpretive frameworks, on normalization that occurs through form, through rhythm, through the abundance of availability, continuous stimulation, and the feeling of choice within an already limited spectrum of possibilities. Culture thus functions as a mechanism that simultaneously liberates and disciplines, offering pleasure that alleviates tension while consolidating existing coordinates of experience, so that critical potential is not abolished frontally but amortized through overload, acceleration, and the habit of registering everything while retaining little as cognitive destabilization.

Hence, the final synthesis of the study can be formulated as the affirmation that the hypermodern visual regime does not constitute a “new age” in the sense of a clean break, but a new configuration in which postmodern poetics are refunctionalized as techno-ontological infrastructure: fragmentation, citation, pastiche, spectacularization, networked connectivity, and algorithmic attention management do not appear as aesthetic figures to be observed from a distance, but as operative units of culture that produce reality in its everyday, mass-mediated, shareable form. In this sense, visibility becomes the primary mode of cognitive and affective articulation of reality, not because “the image is more important than the word,” but because the very structure of experience is reorganized through protocols of visibility, metrics of presence, and formats that determine what can be perceived, recognized, and used as “real.” It is precisely here that the confirmation of our starting point is found: the postmodern has not ended, but has changed its mode of existence. It has ceased to be a historical label and become a functional code in a state of continuous mutation, a code which, in the hypermodern milieu, is not exhausted in “style,” but operates as an infrastructure of mediation, as an apparatus that simultaneously organizes meaning, attention, affect, and social recognizability.

### **Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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