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## Chapter 1

### Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism (*American Beauty*)

Performatism may be defined most simply as an epoch in which a unified concept of sign and strategies of closure have begun to compete directly with – and displace – the split concept of sign and the strategies of boundary transgression typical of postmodernism. In postmodernism – as hardly needs to be explained in great detail any more – the formal closure of the art work is continually being undermined by narrative or visual devices that create an immanent, inescapable state of undecidability regarding the truth status of some part of that work. Hence a postmodern building might create its own peculiar architectonic effect by placing an art nouveau swirl next to a modernist right angle, ironically suggesting that it is obligated to both styles and to neither. And, a postmodern novel or movie might present two equally plausible, parallel plot lines that remain undecidable within the confines of the novel. Turning to a higher authorial position to solve this quandary is of little help. For the authorial intent behind the work is what is responsible for this inner undecidability in the first place: it simply sends us back to our point of departure. To escape this conundrum, we are forced to turn outside it – to an open, uncontrollable context. Author, work, and reader all tumble into an endless regress of referral that has no particular fix point, goal, or center.

This strategy has a direct theoretical counterpart in Derrida's deconstruction of Kant's *ergon*, the presumed center or essence of the work.<sup>1</sup> Derrida shows that any talk of intrinsic aesthetic value depends on that value being set off from the "extraneous" context around it by means of a frame. The frame, which at first seems an ornamental afterthought to the painting, reveals itself as its crucial, undecidable precondition; it is that place which is both inside and out, where text and context meet in a way that is both absolutely cru-

cial to the work's makeup and impossible to determine in advance. Any claim that a painting, text, or building is unified and closed can easily be shown to fall into this same trap. Through the frame, the presumed closure of the work is always already dependent on the context around it, which is itself everything other than a coherent whole. Thus even if the work's creator did somehow manage to create a unified effect, it would, through the frame, already be dependent on some aspect of the context around it. Any way you look at it, the prospects for creating a new, autonomous monist aesthetic are nil – at least from the standpoint of the dominant postmodern and post-structuralist mindset.

### *Performatist Framing*

Given this basic – and epistemologically well-founded – suspicion of concepts like intrinsic inner space, closure, and unity, how do performatist works go about establishing a new oneness without falling into old metaphysical traps? The answer lies in a new, radical empowerment of the frame using a blend of aesthetic and archaic, forcible devices. Performatist works are set up in such a way that the reader or viewer at first has no choice but to opt for a single, compulsory solution to the problems raised within the work at hand. The author, in other words, imposes a certain solution on us using dogmatic, ritual, or some other coercive means. This has two immediate effects. The coercive frame cuts us off, at least temporarily, from the context around it and forces us back into the work. Once we are inside, we are made to identify with some person, act or situation in a way that is plausible only within the confines of the work as a whole. In this way performatism gets to have its postmetaphysical cake and eat it too. On the one hand, you're practically forced to identify with something implausible or unbelievable within the frame – to *believe* in spite of yourself – but on the other, you still *feel* the coercive force causing this identification to take place, and intellectually you remain aware of the particularity of the argument at hand. Metaphysical skepticism and irony aren't eliminated, but are held in check by the frame. At the same time, the reader must always negotiate some kind of trade-off

between the positive aesthetic identification and the dogmatic, coercive means used to achieve it.<sup>2</sup>

The forced, artificial unification of a work takes place using what I call *double framing*. This in turn breaks down into two interlocking devices that I call the *outer frame* (or *work frame*) and the *inner frame* (or *originary scene*). The outer frame imposes some sort of unequivocal resolution to the problems raised in the work on the reader or viewer. A good example of this is the conclusion of *American Beauty*, which is probably the first popular mainstream movie in a rigorously monist mode. At the end of the movie, the hero, Lester Burnham, is murdered and in effect becomes one with nature. Floating over his old neighborhood as an invisible voice, he extols the beauty of his past life and suggests that we, too, will someday come to the same conclusion after we've also died. You don't have to have studied rocket science – or deconstruction – to figure out what's fishy about this kind of argument. The film's director has arbitrarily endowed an ordinary character with supernatural powers and asked us to accept his literal and figurative point of view as the film's authoritative happy ending. As secular viewers we will be disinclined to believe that Lester can really speak to us when he's dead; as critical thinkers we will be skeptical of his claim that the petty world of middle-class America portrayed in the film is really beautiful. However, if you are at all serious about analyzing the movie as it stands, you have little choice but to accept this authorially certified argument as an indispensable part of the film as a whole.

The dogmatic implausibility of the film's outer frame or denouement does two things. It cuts us off – at least temporarily – from the endlessly open, uncontrollable context around it, and it forces us back *into* the work in order to confirm or deny Lester's odd, authoritative assertion about the beauty of life. In such a case we will encounter two basic possibilities. Either some sort of irony will undercut the outer frame from within and break up the artificially framed unity, or we will find a crucial scene (or inner frame) confirming the outer frame's coercive logic. Whether or not a "lock" or "fit" develops between outer and inner frame will determine whether we experience a work as a total object of closed identification or as an exercise in endless,

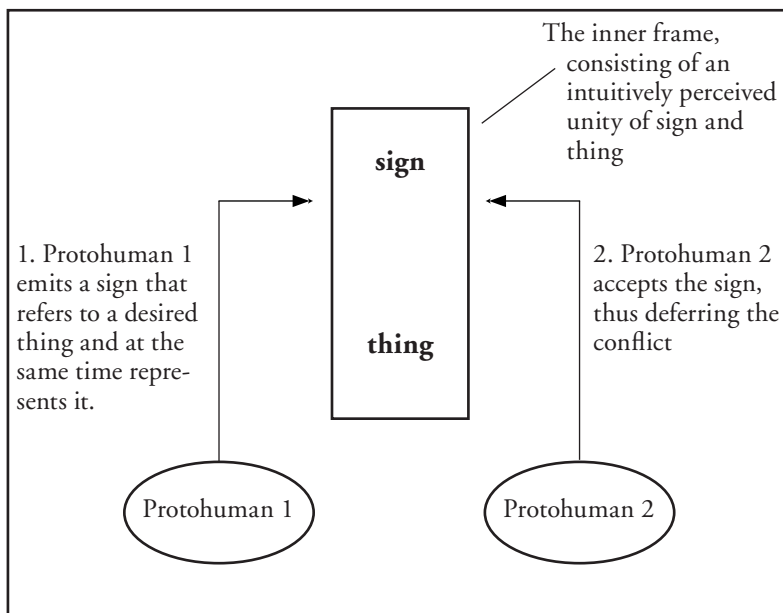
ironic regress. Obviously, this opposition between the locked frame and ironic decentering is not a cut-and-dried affair. There is always a certain amount of tension between the fit between the frames and our legitimate metaphysical and ideological skepticism. However, we are now being offered a specific *choice* as to the outcome of a reading or viewing rather than being condemned from the start to a misreading or misprision.

Whereas the outer frame has an arbitrary or dogmatic quality and seems to be imposed from above, the inner frame or scene is grounded in an *originary scene*: it reduces human behavior to what seems to be a very basic or elementary circle of unity with nature and/or with other people. Although this reduction can take place under very different external conditions, I have found that it almost invariably involves some element of what Eric Gans calls *ostensivity*. Since Gans's notion is the most elegant semiotic expression of the new monism, it's worth looking at it in more detail.<sup>3</sup>

Gans posits the existence of an originary scene in which two protohumans, who up to now have no language, become involved in a potentially violent, uncontrollable conflict over some object – something that René Girard calls mimetic rivalry.<sup>4</sup> Under normal circumstances a violent struggle would result, with one protohuman asserting himself over the other by means of physical force. In this particular case, however, one of the potential combatants emits a sound intended to represent the desired object. If the second protohuman in turn accepts this sound as a representation or substitute for the desired object, the sound becomes a sign and the conflict may be temporarily deferred. The two antagonists have transcended their animal status by agreeing on a sign representing and temporarily replacing a bone of contention; through their act of spontaneous agreement they also lay the foundations for all future acts of semiosis, and hence for all culture and ritual. At the same time, because of its violence-deferring power, the ostensive sign acquires a supernatural valence. Its co-creators, who are unable to reflect on their own role in its creation, ascribe it a transcendent origin, or what Gans calls the name-of-God. The point is not whether the sign is *really* of divine origin; it's that the sign *could be*; it marks not only the boundary line between the human and the

animal but also between the immanent, real world and an outside, possibly transcendent one. Although empirically unprovable one way or another, the transcendent explanation of the sign remains an originary fact that we, too, as secular individuals have no choice but to take seriously.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in his hypothetical scenario Gans suggests that the originary sign is also perceived as beautiful because it allows us to oscillate between contemplating the sign standing for the thing and the thing as it is represented by the sign. We imagine through the sign that we might possess the thing but at the same time recognize the thing's inaccessibility to us, its mediated or semiotic quality.<sup>6</sup>

The diagram below shows how the originary scene arises as a double frame – the inner frame of the sign makes possible the outer frame of the human, which in turn makes it possible to generate still more signs or inner frames.



The outer frame, consisting of the newly created human collective and bounded by an unknowable transcendent outside

It is revealing to compare the originary monist sign with the notion of double origin common to poststructuralism. A salient feature of the originary, ostensive sign is that it has no meaning. Rather than automatically presupposing a relation with a binary opposite, as deconstructive theory requires,<sup>7</sup> it is a name referring first and foremost back to its own successful performance – the deferral of the imminent, potentially deadly conflict and the founding of language, cult, culture, and beauty. The ostensive sign is a *performative tautology*, a simultaneous, spontaneously generated linguistic projection that works in spite of the obvious conflicts and contradictions contained within it. Thus you could argue with a certain justification that the struggle for the desired object is only deferred, and that the multiple projection marked by the originary sign is ultimately one of mutual self-deceit. And, you could also object that the real work of culture begins only after more complex, semantic signs have been added on to the simple, originary one. All these assertions would be true. However, you would still have to concede that a synthetic, unified, object-focused projection – and not an epistemological aporia – stands at the beginning of all culture and continues to condition each individual act of language.

Although it's possible to muster both paleo-anthropological as well as ethnological evidence for Gans's hypothesis,<sup>8</sup> neither is crucial to my own argumentation. From my specifically aesthetic and historical point of view, the ostensive is quite simply the most elegant and parsimonious monist answer that we have to the notion of dual origin marked by *différance* and its many terminological cousins. The ostensive sign and the originary scene provide the minimal tool that can help us describe other monist strategies as they cut through the endless regress and irony of postmodern culture and play out new, constructed narratives of origin in contemporary narrative and thematic guises. The ostensive promises to be to the new epoch what *différance* was to the old one: a minimal formulation of the dominant concept of sign that manifests itself in everything from lowly pop culture to high-flown literary theory.

In the case of *American Beauty*, this originary scene centers around the white plastic bag which is filmed by Ricky Fitts and which later

floats through the air during Lester's farewell address. As Ricky's utterances make clear, he sees in the bag nothing less than an embodiment of the divine:

It was one of those days when it's a minute away from snowing. And there's this electricity in the air, you can almost hear it, right? And this bag was just... dancing with me. Like a little kid begging me to play with it. For fifteen minutes. That's the day I realized that there was this entire life behind things, and this incredibly benevolent force that wanted me to know there was no reason to be afraid. Ever.<sup>9</sup>

It's also important to remember that Ricky shares Lester's complete tranquility of mind as well as his specific way of partaking of the world's beauty in all its plenitude (Ricky: "Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world I feel like I can't take it... and my heart is going to cave in"; Lester: "[...] it's hard to stay mad, when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst..."<sup>10</sup>). Obviously, the scene with the white plastic bag doesn't display literally all the features of the ostensive as described by Gans. Ricky and Jane are lovers and not antagonists, and the plastic bag is only the filmed reproduction of the original which Ricky plays again because he "needs to remember."<sup>11</sup> However, the scene still embodies a basic unifying, thing-oriented projection shared by Ricky, Jane and, ultimately, Lester (in fact, you could maintain that Lester actually *is* the plastic bag, since he becomes one with that animate, divine principle of which Ricky has spoken earlier).

Now, you *could* argue that the plastic bag is nothing more than a cheap token of the consumer culture that is satirized elsewhere in the film and that Ricky is simply projecting his own wishful thinking onto it. In terms of a purely epistemological critique you would even be *right*. The problem remains, however, that within the total frame of the work this wishful thinking is confirmed on a higher, authorial level in Lester's farewell speech as well as in terms of plot, when he passes into an animate, beautiful, and comforting nature. If you

insist on rejecting the basic premise contained in both the inner and outer frame, you'll find yourself in an unpleasant bind. You'll have "exposed" the work on a dispassionate epistemological level but you'll have missed out on the aesthetic mixture of pleasure and anguish derived from identifying with central characters and scenes.

Even the tragic denouement – Lester's murder by Colonel Fitts – doesn't suffice to break up the movie's immanent argumentation. In effect, Colonel Fitts murders Lester because he follows his liberating example – and is then disappointed to discover that Lester isn't a closet homosexual like himself. The problem is not that Colonel Fitts is evil; it's that he doesn't find the right "fit" within the frame of the movie's world (his violent "fit" is the flip side of this disappointment). *American Beauty*, like all performatist works I'll be discussing in the following pages, is set towards metaphysical optimism. Even though crucial events in it may be violent or have an annihilating effect on individual characters, both perpetrators and victims have the chance of fitting into a greater, redemptive whole, even if the time and point of entry may be deferred for certain characters.

### *Performatist Subjectivity*

Because of its focus on unity, performatism also allows for a new, positively conceived – but not unproblematic – type of subjectivity. As a reaction to the plight of the postmodern subject, who is constantly being pulled apart and misled by signs in the surrounding context, the performatist subject is constructed in such a way that it is dense or opaque relative to its milieu. This opacity is, admittedly, ambivalent, since it achieves a closed unity at the expense of participation in a viable social environment of some kind. Moreover, the closed, opaque subject runs the risk of incurring the enmity of its surroundings by virtue of its very singularity and inscrutability. In some cases, this can be resolved – as in the originary scene – by spontaneously arriving at a common projection together with a potential opponent. This may be expressed as a *reconciliatory*, *amatory*, or *erotic scene*, depending on the circumstances. However, if the milieu turns violently against the singular subject, we will have a *sacrificial scene* that results not



only in the subject's elimination from the frame but also in its deification, in its being made a focal point of identification and imitation for other characters or the reader/viewer after it has been expelled from the scene.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, this is what happens to Lester. His "senseless" hedonist behavior is successfully imitated by Colonel Fitts – who then makes Lester the scapegoat for their lack of sexual compatibility. Shortly before his death, Lester himself transcends his original hedonism by not seducing Angela; in death he becomes a narrating deity at one with the outer frame of the movie as a whole.

I can't emphasize enough that in performatism the subject's newly won opacity or denseness is constructed and doesn't represent a natural, pre-existing essence. Sometimes this constructedness is intentional – as in the case of Lester, who deliberately sets out to act like a teenager. However, it can also be completely involuntary, as in the Russian movie *The Cuckoo* (*Kukushka*),<sup>13</sup> where circumstances throw together three people who speak three different languages. As a result, they are unable to communicate with one another except through ostensive signs, which is to say by pointing at present objects and trying to arrive at a common projection or meaning beneath the threshold of conventional, semantically organized language. In these and other cases the constructed singularity is fairly trivial or even accidental – acting like a teenager or not happening to speak someone else's language are not positive traits in themselves. Performatism, while reinstating the subject as a *construct*, doesn't ascribe it any particular idealized or essential features before the fact. If the conditions are however right – and the metaphysical optimism of the new aesthetic tacitly ensures that they are – such subjects can become figures of identification. This identification can appear in a multitude of guises, but the structure of the ostensive scene suggests two basic possibilities: the subject can be involved in a sacrificial act that transcends the narrow frame of the self and invites emulation by others, or the subject can transcend itself and enter into a reconciliatory, amatory, or erotic relationship with another subject who reciprocates that move in some way. This singular, identificatory performance, in turn, invites others to emulate it at a later point in time and under different circumstances.

It is also worth noting that the notion of constructed subjectivity is not just reserved for fictional schemes. It has a very real counterpart in Erving Goffman's "frame analysis" which studies ritualized micro-situations in everyday life.<sup>14</sup> Like Derrida, Goffman proceeds from an ironic and sometimes rather cynical metaposition from which he demonstrates the unpredictable and ultimately uncontrollable shifts of reference between different codes or frames (what he calls "keying"<sup>15</sup>). However, unlike Derrida, Goffman also makes very clear that everyday human interaction is rooted in what one observer called a "common focus on a physical scene of action"<sup>16</sup> prior to language. For Goffman, language is always anchored in some way in such scenes by means of indexical or deictic signs ("that there," "this here" etc.) not immediately applicable to other situations. And, unlike the Derridean approach, which begins and ends with a notion of frame-as-paradox, Goffman's is generative and originary: he suggests the existence of "primary frameworks" out of which develop still further, more complex frames or modulations of those frames. These primary frameworks are especially interesting for performatism because they allow us to make an initial decision about events in reality and render "what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful."<sup>17</sup> The frameworks include an explicit sacral dimension, the "astounding complex," which suggests that the first question we ask about any unusual action or event is whether it might have a supernatural origin.<sup>18</sup> Other primary frameworks relate to "stunts" (whether an action is a well-executed performance or trick) "flubs" (whether an action is a mistake) "fortuitousness" (whether an action is a matter of luck) and what Goffman calls "tension" (whether an action involving the body has an officially condoned social character or a sexual, proscribed one).<sup>19</sup> The frameworks help us decide, for example, whether the quick upward movement of someone's right arm is a religious blessing, a move in sport, an accident, or a natural reflex.

As Goffman emphasizes, however, several frameworks can come into consideration at any one time, and the transformations of the basic frames or codes – their "keying" – makes it virtually impossible to limit any action to a fixed, one-to-one relation. Goffman's frames,

although not stable points of reference are, however, more than just the accidental, transient incisions in the stream of human discourse envisioned by Derrida. In fact, you could say that they are anchored in reality in a way comparable to Eric Gans's notion of the originary scene, which is based on a spontaneous agreement to defer mimetic rivalry through the emission of an ostensive sign (also a kind of index sign pointing to a concrete, present thing and surrounded by a minimal frame of social consensus). Taken this way, the ostensive scene would provide the originary ground missing from Goffman's theory, which does not try to explain how the "astounding complex" came about in the first place, or why it is even a *primus inter pares* within its own category.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, Goffman's theory and observations serve to remind us that ritual and sacrality continue to play a key role in everyday life.

Goffman's notion of frames is also useful in thinking about performatist subjectivity and plot development. At first, Goffman's subject might appear to be purely postmodern – the mere effect of a multitude of overlapping and shifting frames not reducible to one single kernel or core. However, the "Goffperson" is never so consumed by the discourse it uses so much as to lose all sense of orientation or decorum.<sup>21</sup> As Goffman dryly remarks at the beginning of *Frame Analysis*, "all the world is not a stage."<sup>22</sup> Just because we slip in and out of complex sets of overlapping roles doesn't mean that we get hopelessly lost in them, or that fact and fiction are *really* equivalent, or that the *possibility* that something can be fabricated means that our everyday faith in it must be vitiated. Our ability to find a firm "footing" or "anchoring" (Goffman's terms) in social interaction is possible because, unlike the poststructuralists, Goffman also sees social frames in a ritual, sacral dimension.<sup>23</sup> This is rather different from a commonsense, namby-pamby trust in convention which a poststructuralist would have no problem confirming as a fact of social life. Indeed, Goffman, following Durkheim, goes so far as to say that social interaction hinges on a tacit agreement in everyday interactions to deify individual subjects: "Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance."<sup>24</sup> Society, in other words, is held together by individual subjects using frames

in a way that both enhance their own “divine” status and uphold the decorum necessary to allow others to do the same. This Durkheimian theme, which suggests that originary or archaic religion has a social, rather than a cognitive, function, and that secular society’s functional underpinnings are ultimately religious, can be found explicitly in monist thinkers like Gans and Sloterdijk and implicitly in many performatist narratives.<sup>25</sup>

By citing Goffman I don’t want to suggest that performatist plots are more realistic or sociologically true to life than postmodern ones. Performatist plots are however very often centered on breaches of a frame that lead to a subject’s being deified either in the transcendent, literal sense – as in *American Beauty* – or in a more figurative, social one. One interesting example of the latter is Thomas Vinterberg’s Dogma 95 movie *The Celebration*, in which the main protagonist disrupts the frame of a family gathering to accuse his father of having molested him as a child. By sacrificing himself – by placing himself at the center of attention and repeatedly causing himself to be expelled from the family celebration – he eventually brings the other family members over to his side; the father, by now himself demonized, is forced permanently out of the family circle.<sup>26</sup> These cases demonstrate what I call a *narrative performance*: it marks the ability of a subject to transcend a frame in some way, usually by breaking through it at some point and/or reversing its basic parameters (in *The Celebration* the son doesn’t replace the father at the center of power; having forced out the patriarch, he opts to remain on the periphery of the family group). A good formal definition of the “performance” in performatism is that it *demonstrates with aesthetic means the possibility of transcending the conditions of a given frame* (whether in a “realistic,” social or psychological mode or in a fantastic, preternatural one).

At this point, a good deconstructionist would interject that if this is so, then the ultimate proof of a performatist work would be its ability to transcend itself, i.e., to become something entirely different from what it was to begin with. In purely epistemological terms this objection is irrefutable. However, it misses the point. For the new epoch works first and foremost on an aesthetic, identificatory level, to create an attitude of beautiful belief, and not on a cognitive, critical one. If

the performance is successful, then the reader too will identify with it more or less involuntarily – even if he or she still remains incredulous about its basic premises. The reader is “framed” in such a way that belief trumps cognition.

### *Theist Plots*

Because of its emphasis on transcending coercive frames rather than continually transgressing porous, constantly shifting boundaries (as is the case in postmodernism), performatism acquires a distinctly *theist* cast. The basic plot common to all theist theologies is that a personified male creator sets up a frame (the world) into which he plunks inferior beings made in his own image; their task is in turn is to transcend the frame and return to unify with the creator by imitating his perfection in some particular way. Deism, by contrast, suggests that there is a breakdown of some kind in a unified origin which in turn generates signs whose traces human beings must follow back to their source; the basic plot structure is one of tracking signs in their feminine formlessness and not imitating a transcendent father-figure or phallus. I don't wish to launch once more into the frequently made comparison between postmodernism/poststructuralism and gnosticism or the Cabbala. Rather, I would like to focus on how the new monist aesthetic revives theist myths and reworks them in contemporary settings. Like other such performatist appropriations these are obligated first to the logic of an aesthetic, authorial imperative and only secondarily (if at all) to a dogmatic source. Performatism is an aesthetic reaction to postmodernism's one-sidedly deist bias and not an old time camp meeting.

Since there are countless variants on the main theist plot I'll restrict my remarks to five patterns that have been appearing regularly in the last few years: *playing God*; *escaping from a frame*; *returning to the father*; *transcending through self-sacrifice*; and *perfecting the self*. These plot constructs are almost invariably ironic in the sense that they couple an archaic theist myth with contemporary, secular twists that don't jive well with received dogma. Performatism, in other words, creates a secondary, aesthetically motivated dogma and makes

it into the outer frame of a particular work. Although the irony of this dogma is always apparent – its dogmatism is invariably a created, artificial one running counter to tradition – it doesn't vitiate itself or "cross itself out" by virtue of this contradiction. Rather, as indicated earlier, it points the viewer or reader back into the work itself to inner scenes which in turn create a tautological lock or bind with the fixed outer premise. The difference between postmodern and performatist works is not that one is ironic and the other is not. Rather, it's that performatist irony is internal, circular, or scenic: it keeps you focused on a set, "dogmatically" defined discrepancy rather than casting you out into an infinite regress of belated misjudgments of what is going on in and around the work.

In terms of plot, *playing God* is perhaps the most direct way of emulating a transcendent, personified source. A fine example of this is the movie *Amelie*, in which the eponymous heroine sets up little, contrived situations that help unhappy people change their lives for the better (or, in one case, to punish a despotic bully). In contrast to what one might expect from religious tradition, this doesn't lead to acts of hubris and abuse of power on the part of Amelie. Quite the contrary: although she is successfully able to help others with her little traps, she isn't able to find true love herself. Only after her friends and co-workers conspire to apply her tactics to her herself is she able to get together with a monist Mr. Right (whose hobby consists of making ripped-up representations whole – he pastes together pictures torn up and discarded by people using automatic photo machines in train stations). Playing God, in other words, only works after a group has imitated the theist creatrix and projected her own strategy back onto herself. The theist, active role is dependent on its acceptance and reapplication by a social collective.

This basic problem of playing God – that even as a self-appointed creator you can't create happiness for yourself and others by fiat – is treated at length in Lars von Trier's Dogma 95 movie *Idiots*. There, a group of young Danes living together in a commune go about their town pretending to be social workers taking care of mentally retarded patients. At first the group's excursions serve little more than to expose the vanity and insecurity of bourgeois existence by

transgressing against basic social decorum – a plot device that is still entirely in keeping with postmodernism’s favoring of critical simulation over smug projections about what is “real.” As the movie moves on, though, it becomes clear that the real aim of the group is a kind of radical self-therapy. The ultimate goal proclaimed by the group’s messianistic leader is not to shock total strangers by simulating mental retardation at the most embarrassing possible moment – and thus simply to confirm your own otherness – but to do so in your *own* familial and social sphere. Ultimately, the only member of the group who succeeds in doing this is a shy, insecure young woman who has just lost her baby. By drooling and slobbering like a retarded child at her stiff, unfeeling family’s coffee hour she creates an ostensive sign of solidarity with the dead infant while at the same time breaking with the emotional indifference of her insufferable bourgeois family. This transcendent narrative performance aimed at establishing a sense of self – and not the theist imperative per se – is what makes the work performative.

Another well-established theist plot device is *escaping from a frame*, analogous to the task that a monotheist God places before people trapped in the world of His making. The work of art closest to this archetype is undoubtedly the Canadian cult movie *Cube*, in which seven people find themselves placed for no apparent reason in a gigantic labyrinth of cubes which they have to get out of before they starve to death. The only person who succeeds is, significantly, autistic; he is someone who is socially dysfunctional while having the surest sense of his own self. (The positive reduction of subjectivity to a minimal, invulnerable core of selfhood is impossible in postmodernism, where the subject can experience itself only in terms of *other* signs set by an infinitely receding symbolic Other.) This ubiquitous plot device linking transcendence and the overcoming of closed space can be found in a whole slew of works that will be treated in more detail later in the book; these include the movies *Panic Room* and *Russian Ark* (Chapter Three) as well as Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi* and Olga Tokarczuk’s short story “Hotel Capital” (Chapter Two).

A more personified, gender-specific variant of the same myth is the plot involving a *return to the Father* (or the *Mother*, as the case

may be<sup>27</sup>). As a rule, in performatism we find highly constructed father-son relationships involving a parity or reversal of strength rather than the oppressive, phallic rule of the Father assumed by Lacan and his feminist interpreters. The most notable example of a constructed return is the movie version of *Cider House Rules*, in which the father-figure, Dr. Larch, uses his position as director of an orphanage to set up one of his charges, Homer Wells, as an ersatz-son. Both part ways over a typical theist dilemma – the son thinks that Dr. Larch’s practice of performing abortions means playing God in a negative sense. However, both are reconciled after Homer is himself forced to play God and choose between performing an abortion and delivering an incestuously conceived child. Armed with a phony CV concocted by Dr. Larch, who has in the meantime died, Homer completes the cycle and returns to head the orphanage as a new, benevolent theist creator/destroyer.

A positive transfer of power between fathers and sons is also evident in Ingo Schulze’s *Simple Stories* (see Chapter Two) as well as in movies like *The Celebration* and *American Beauty*. In the latter, the true father-figure of the movie turns out to be Ricky Fitts, whom both Lester and Colonel Fitts imitate (Lester takes dope-dealing Ricky as his hedonist idol and the Colonel tries to imitate his son’s presumed affair with Lester). In the fictional world of the movie, both these projections are psychologically false but have a metaphysically true focus: Ricky, in spite of his cynical hobbies, is a kind of living portal to God and beauty. As he himself says regarding his video of a dead homeless woman: “When you see something like that, it’s like God is looking right at you, just for a second. And if you’re careful, you can look right back.” And what he sees when he looks right back is “beauty.”<sup>28</sup> Evidently, a basic metaphysical optimism is at work here suggesting that it is always possible for sons to reverse positions of relative weakness vis-à-vis their fathers or Father. Ricky’s ability to look back at God would be impossible in a Lacanian or Foucauldian world where the Gaze or panoptical vision can never be returned in any sort of adequate, let alone aesthetically satisfying way.<sup>29</sup>

Another important performatist plot motif is that of *transcending through self-sacrifice*. In postmodernism, the victim is always the



peripheralized other of a hegemonial, oppressive center; the victim more or less automatically acquires moral and epistemological superiority by virtue of its decentered, peripatetic status as the near helpless target of whatever force the center exerts on it.<sup>30</sup> In performatism, victims are once more *centered*; that is, we are made to focus on them as objects of positive identification rather than as markers of endlessly receding alterity and resistance. Here as elsewhere in the new monism, this recentring is itself an eccentric move that is markedly at odds with religious tradition.

Two of the most radical exponents of sacrificial centering are the Dogma 95 directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. In Vinterberg's *The Celebration* it is the suicide of the hero's sister that motivates his own less drastic act of exposing himself to public embarrassment; in this way the absent, absolute victim is once more recentered in a way that makes her sacrifice negotiable with the collective – and allows the expulsion of the morally debased patriarch from its midst. Thus the traditional mediating role of Christ – the hero's name is Christian, in case anyone has missed the point – is expanded to include a unity of male and female working towards the common goal of evacuating a corrupt, exploitative center. Similarly, almost every movie made by Lars von Trier centers around acts of female self-sacrifice. The most drastic example is his auteur tearjerker *Dancer in the Dark*, where we are set up in a deliberately heavy-handed way to identify with the final sacrificial transaction of the heroine – trading off her own life to save the sight of her son. A complete reversal in terms of plot construction is von Trier's no-less dogmatic *Dogville*, where a female victim is able to return to a fatherly center of criminal power – and responds by promptly wiping out her tormentors down to the last man, woman, and child.

As is the case with the father-son relationship, performatism suggests a *reversibility* of center-periphery or victim-perpetrator positions that isn't possible in postmodernism, where alterity leads to victimization and victimization to still more alterity (and where nobody in his or her right mind would even bother to identify with the "hegemonial" center). Generally speaking, performatism is no less critical of abuses of power in the center than is postmodernism. However, it recognizes

the *identificatory* value of sacrificial centering that is completely alien to the ethos of postmodernism, which can only conceive of viable moral positions being established on the run and on the periphery of the social order. Performatism, by contrast, allows for a centering that establishes a proximity between victims and perpetrators – and allows perpetrators, too, to become the object of reader or viewer identification. In Chapter Two I will treat a typical postmodern victimary scenario, Ali Smith's *Hotel World* and its performatist antipode, Olga Tokarczuk's "The Hotel Capital," and examine the moral problems involved in a framed erotic relationship between victim and perpetrator in my discussion of Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*.

Performatist plots don't necessarily have to tap into Western, monotheist myths. A plot pattern in works drawing on Eastern philosophy and religion is that of *perfecting the self*, usually in the sense of communing with an animate nature or entering or approaching Nirvana. This takes place most explicitly in Jim Jarmusch's movie *Ghost Dog* and Viktor Pelevin's novel *Buddha's Little Finger*,<sup>31</sup> which is arguably the most important work of post-Soviet fiction in Russia to date. In *Ghost Dog* the eponymous hero, a black ghetto dweller, adheres rigidly to the Samurai code of the *Hagakure* requiring absolute obeisance to a "master"; in this case, circumstances have obligated him to serve a low-level Mafia family member as a hired killer. Even after he has been betrayed by his mafia employers (whom he then systematically eliminates), his strict code of honor doesn't allow him to betray his "master," who in the end shoots him without the hero offering any resistance. Before deliberately sacrificing himself, Ghost Dog however manages to pass on his code of honor to a small girl who will presumably continue to develop it in a less violent way. Ghost Dog can only develop so far within the confines of a rigidly framed self, which the hero voluntarily gives up after its possibilities have been expended; his conscious self-sacrifice serves to further the perfection of the world as a whole.<sup>32</sup> At the end of Pelevin's novel, by contrast, the hero and his sidekick leave a burlesque, dually constructed world and enter directly into Nirvana (a plot resolution repeated in many other of his works). Many readers choose to ignore these authoritative monist resolutions and treat his novels and stories as exercises in undecidable postmodern

irony. However, it would seem that he is entirely serious in his desire to force readers to adopt a Buddhist mindset – if only within an aesthetic frame that flirts with the possibility of converting the reader in real life.

### *Theist Narrative*

Because of their dogmatic posture performatist narratives create certain odd configurations that stand out against the background of both traditional and postmodern story-telling techniques. One of the most curious such devices is first-person authorial narration, an “impossible” device in which a narrator equipped with powers similar to those of an all-powerful, omniscient author forces his or her own authoritative point of view upon us in what is usually a circular or tautological way.<sup>33</sup> A prime example of this can be found in the narrative structure of *American Beauty*. At the film’s beginning we see the bird’s-eye view of a small town and hear a detached, almost meditative voice saying: “My name is Lester Burnham. This is my neighborhood. This is my street. This... is my life. I’m forty-two years old. In less than a year I’ll be dead.” As the first scene of the film appears, Lester’s voice adds: “Of course, I don’t know that yet.”<sup>34</sup> Lester’s tranquility is made possible by the holism of the narrative framework, which is oblivious to the difference between implicit author and character – and hence to death itself.

In this way even the evacuation or destruction of characters serves to strengthen the whole; after his murder by Colonel Fitts Lester dissolves into the authorial frame, from which he reemerges to introduce the story from a personal perspective in which he is again murdered. The act of narrating itself becomes a circular, enclosed act of belief that cannot be made the object of a metaphysical critique or deconstruction without destroying the substance of the work itself (*Life of Pi*, which is treated at length in Chapter Two, has a similar structure, as does Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*<sup>35</sup>). The narrative is constructed in such a way that the viewer has no choice but to transcend his or her own disbelief and accept the performance represented by the film as a kind of aesthetically mediated apriori. This transformation of the

viewing or reading process into an involuntary act of belief stands in direct contrast to the postmodern mode of the virtual, where the observer can't believe *anything* because ontological parameters like author, narrator, and character have been dissolved in an impenetrable web of paradoxical assignations and cross-references (as happens to the hapless private detective Quinn in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*).

In terms of reader response, performatist narratives must create an ironclad construct whose inner lock or fit cannot be broken by the reader without destroying the work as a whole. The performatist narrative, in other words, *makes you decide* for a certain posture vis-à-vis the text, whereas the no less manipulative postmodern device of undecidability *keeps you from deciding* what posture to take. The master of this "idiot-proof" narrative form in performatism is Viktor Pelevin, who revels in tricking readers into assuming positions that turn out to be Buddhist ones forcing them to transcend their everyday secular mindset. Of these, the most insidious is perhaps the (as of now untranslated) short story "Tambourine of the Lower World."<sup>36</sup> There the reader, in the course of a rambling monologue on Brezhnev, light rays, mirrors, and death, is encouraged to memorize the curious phrase contained in the title. At the end of the story the narrator reveals that he has constructed a prismatic device activated precisely by this phrase and focusing a mental death ray on the reader; the ray may however be deactivated by sending 1,000 dollars to a dubious-sounding address. Those who treat this threat as a joke are encouraged to "divide up your time into hours and try not to think of the phrase 'tambourine of the lower world' for exactly sixty seconds."<sup>37</sup> As in most of his other short stories, Pelevin forces the reader to enter involuntarily into the Buddhist project of transcending the material world entirely; in addition, the story demonstrates the impossibility of forgetting a mental image or projection after it has been framed within a short span of time.

Many readers still consider Pelevin to be postmodern because of his narrative playfulness and satirical jabs at post-Soviet society; they also distrust the motives of the real-life author, who undeniably indulges in self-mystification. However, a wealth of stories – including "serious" ones like his "Ontology of Childhood"<sup>38</sup> – makes clear that

his focus remains consistently on the Buddhist goal of self-annihilation and not on the eternal regress of the subject common to postmodernism. Thus in the short story “Hermit and Six-Toes”<sup>39</sup> we are party to a series of mystical dialogues pertaining to life in what seems to be a dismal prison camp. Towards the end of the story we discover however that the two protagonists are chickens who are eventually able to “transcend” by training themselves to fly out of their pen. Here, as in many other cases in performatism, we are forced to occupy a superior, theist perspective towards “lower” characters. The manifest ability of these lower characters to transcend is then reflected back onto us as a performative imperative: as a challenge to become something completely different from what we are now. (This device can be found in *American Beauty* as well as the Coen Brothers’ *The Man Who Wasn’t There*, which I’ll examine in greater detail in Chapter Three.)

Obviously, not all performatist narratives depend on these kind of one-shot tricks ascribing impossible acts of transcendence to narrators, characters, and texts. However, even in “realistic” works we can observe that first-person narrators and central, weak characters tend to become invested with more and more authorial authority as the work progresses – a development that is directly at odds with the tendency of postmodern heroes and heroines to unravel, split up, or dissolve in outside contexts (and with the tendency of the authorial positions accompanying them to do the same). Because the analysis of psychologically motivated narrative in performatism requires a careful consideration of character development as a whole, I’ll return to the problem of authorial empowerment of “weak” characters in more detail in my treatments of individual literary works, most notably Ingo Schulze’s *Simple Stories* and Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader* as well as Olga Tokarczuk’s “The Hotel Capital” (Chapter Two).

### *Theist Creation in Architecture and the Visual Arts*

The theist mode is not only active in narrative, but manifests itself strikingly in architectonic structures suggesting that the omnipotent hand of a higher being is at work – an architect playing God rather than playing hard to get, as is the case in postmodernism. As in

performatist narrative, the basic aim of this new kind of architecture is to evoke a constructed or artificial experience of transcendence in the viewer; you are supposed to feel the powerful, preterhuman hand of the architect rather than reflect on the interplay of ornamentally familiar forms, as in postmodernism, or be transformed by a compelling functional principle, as in modernism. I have isolated at least nine different devices that the new architecture uses to impress this sublime feeling of transcendence upon the viewer; they'll be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. For the time being it will suffice to note that most can be subsumed under the concept of what might be called "transcendent functionalism" or "transcendent ornamentalism." Performatist architecture takes individual spatial features or forms that are already familiar from architectural history and uses them in a way that accentuates the possibility of the impossible rather than ironic knowledge of the undecidable. Hence in the new architectures building parts may move (static becomes dynamic), triangular structures are tilted (stable becomes unstable), a glass, purely ornamental facade is placed in front of the real facade (a solid plane dematerializes), or egg or oval shapes are employed (suggesting imperfect originary wholeness rather than rigid geometric functionality). Large chunks may also be sliced out of a building (suggesting the hand of a theist creator); empty frames may imply the act of theist construction as such while transcending the opposition between inside and out. Instead of irony and play we are confronted with a "saturated," paradoxical experience of sublimity and beauty that forces us to change our intuitive perception of seemingly quotidian "givens."<sup>40</sup> Buildings of this kind may seem to point at, topple on, aim at, or otherwise threaten their users even as they suggest the possibility of a transcendent, incomprehensible force at work. Simple, but no longer rigidly geometric forms like ovals or lemon shapes suggest originary harmony and beauty rather than functional, mathematically dictated rigor. These structures can be said to *perform* in the sense that they induce us to experience these sublime feelings using obviously constructed, artificial means. This sublimity is in turn *postmetaphysical*; it is the result of specifically aesthetic, artificial strategies and need not have any specific theological pretensions.

In the visual arts, performatism has developed in reaction to concept art and what is often called anti-art, both of which one-sidedly dominated the art scene from the 1970s well into the 1990s. In a way comparable to that of narrative performatism, performatist art and photography visually bracket off concept and context and force viewers to accept the inner givens of the work at hand. Unlike modernism, where certain qualities such as flatness, abstraction, or reduction were considered essential expressions of beauty, in performatism these inner givens are constructs that are not reducible to any essential qualities. In turn, these constructs are forced on the viewer in such a way that he or she has no choice but to accept their autonomy from a context – which is to say their aestheticity. Vanessa Beecroft's closed, obsessive-compulsive nude performances, Thomas Demand's photographs of evocative cardboard interiors, and the action-packed, but weirdly incomprehensible paintings of Neo Rauch all share this same basic set towards reality. The inner space of the painting/photo/performance creates a new way of seeing or experiencing the world that can at first only be experienced in terms of a constructed aesthetic interior. If accepted by the viewer, this interiority may then be projected back onto the outside contexts around it. Interiority, then, determines context and not the other way around. Just how this works in visual, rather than narrative, terms will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

### *Performatist Sex*

In performatism there is a markedly different approach to sex and gender than is the case in postmodernism and poststructuralism. Poststructuralist theory, of course, emphasizes the primacy of belated, constructed, heterogeneous sexual role-playing (gender) over preexisting, binarily defined corporeal identity (sex). And, as usual, poststructuralism confronts us with an epistemological critique of essentialism or naturalization that at first glance seems hard to beat. Here we would appear to have two choices. The first is to dissolve sexuality and corporeality into an endless, unstable regress of discursive assignations – the happy hunting grounds of deconstruction and

postfeminism. The second is to stipulate exactly what the natural, preexisting features of sexuality would be in every case – an impossible task considering that the very signs we need to do this continually contaminate the presumably natural essence of sexuality with our own belatedly acquired cultural biases. The question arises as to how a monist concept of sexuality is possible that doesn't achieve unity by positing a neat fit between the stable, heterosexually founded binary opposition between male and female.

The key to performatist sexuality lies once more in double framing, in creating an artificial unity that forces us to accept temporarily the validity of peculiar sexual or erotic constructs while making them the focus of our involuntary identification. Here as elsewhere it's useful to take a quick look at postmodern theory and practice before turning to the alternative offered by performatism. In postfeminist theory (as exemplified by Judith Butler), a dominant, heterosexual field of power is thought to project its unified, hegemonic imperative onto subjects presenting heterogeneous substrates not reducible to a simple binary scheme of male/female. Due to the sheer force exerted by the hegemonic matrix resistance to this compartmentalization can take place only in weak, by definition unsuccessful performances that manage to turn some of the dominant system's coercive energy against itself without really placing it in doubt. The real discursive achievement is located less in the performance itself (which is a function of the dominant power matrix) than in a melancholy, metaphysically pessimistic metaposition that unflinchingly records the insufficiency of simulatory resistance while at the same time touting it as the only possible means of undermining the "heterosexual matrix." Ali Smith's *Hotel World*, which I use as a foil for a discussion of performatism in Chapter Two, has made this postfeminist metaposition into its main narrative premise.

Performatism as I understand it is less an ideological reaction to postfeminism than a strategic one. The point of performatism is not to roll back multifarious gender constellations into good old binary sex, but rather to frame or construct them in such a way that they stand out positively within the framework of the "heterosexual matrix" (or whatever other dominant power structure happens to be at hand). The main strategy involved in this is *centering the other*. Instead



of automatically equating the other with the marginal and the weak, performatism takes otherness and plops it directly into the middle of the interlocked frames I've already discussed above. Thus at the social center of *American Beauty* we find the “two Jims” – a hearty, healthy, happy gay pair who because of their unified, but plural, gendering can be all things to all characters (they chat about cultivating roses with Caroline and give tips on physical fitness to Lester). Many critics have noted how this positive portrayal of a gay partnership amidst manifestly unhappy heterosexual marriages parodies middle-class suburban values. However, from a performatist perspective it's even more important to emphasize that the two Jims also overcome the violent tension inherent in what Girard calls mimetic rivalry. As doubles in both name and sexual orientation, one would normally expect the two Jims at some point to incur the wrath of the collective (in Girardian thinking, twins and doubles embody the mimetic, contagious violence which society must constantly seek to assuage by victimizing scapegoats). In this case, though, exactly the opposite is true: the two Jims serve as a model not just for characters like Lester and Caroline but also, it would seem, for Colonel Fitts; the success of their relationship holds forth the promise of a successful “partnership” between the Colonel and Lester.

*American Beauty* takes the sameness contained in homosexual otherness and makes it the unified center of its metaphysical universe; mimesis becomes a positive, reconciliatory mechanism and not a dangerous, competitive one. Colonel Fitts doesn't murder Lester because of mimetic rivalry with someone else; he murders him because he is a disappointed lover – the most believable extenuating circumstance you can have in a metaphysically optimistic universe. By framing and centering homosexual relationships in this way – by giving them a “divine,” privileged position vis-à-vis heterosexual ones – *American Beauty* suggests a world in which gender and sex can be transcended entirely. Whether or not this will ever take place in the real world is entirely another matter. However, the performance marking it is centered for all to see, and its aesthetic mediation can make it palatable even to those who find the union of two same-sexed individuals distasteful in real life.

This centering of otherness in performatism applies not only to role-playing and gender, but also to genitalia and genetics. The standard argument advanced in this regard by Butler and other postfeminists is to freely acknowledge the existence of genetic and corporeal influence on discursively determined gender. However, close on the heels of this concession follows a clause effectively rendering it void. For if genetics and the body do act upon discourse, it is then our solemn epistemological duty to determine the exact point where this influence sets in – and that is something we can only do with the help of more heaping portions of non-natural discourse. Arguments supporting a corporeal or genetic privileging of nature over culture can then be neatly disposed of by pointing out the impossibility of ever being able to conceive of corporeality entirely outside of a continually proliferating, uncontrollable discourse that you yourself have been busy piling up in the first place.

Performatism doesn't "correct" this privileging of discourse by flatly propagating nature over nurture or calling for a return to good old binary heterosexuality. What it *does* do, though, is to frame corporeality – and in particular genitally defined corporeality – in such a way that genetic and genital issues are moved to the center of narrative frames and made into vehicles for a transcendent event. A prime example of this can be found once more in the basic plot structure of *American Beauty*. Lester sets up a hedonist frame around himself designed to culminate in the seduction of Angela Hays, who at first appears to be a little more than a slutty version of her homonymic cousin Lolita Haze. Upon realizing that Angela is a virgin (and a very insecure one, at that), Lester however retracts his phallic desire, transcending as he does so his own libidinal self to become something higher and more moral (indeed, you could say, he becomes an adult again). The fact that he is murdered immediately after that by Colonel Fitts doesn't diminish his feat. It simply means he can't be all things to all people at once – in a different context the very same act of chasteness exhibited vis-à-vis Angela turns out to be a mortal insult. In a postmodernist work, this sort of contextualization would vitiate Lester's attempt to establish himself as an autonomous subject. In performatism, however, this contextual paradoxality is explicitly *transcended*. Lester is deified at the movie's

end and enters into a higher, beautiful realm for which his multi-sexual chasteness seems an entirely appropriate rite of preparation.

Another quick way of highlighting the differences between postmodernism and performatism regarding sex is to key in on the topic of hermaphroditism. While not exactly a pressing social issue in itself, hermaphroditism has attracted the attention of such prominent theoreticians as Foucault and Butler because it seems to embody the main empirical premise behind postmodernism's concept of gender: namely, that our natural sexuality is a toss-up that a sinister set of encultured norms consistently causes to land on the heterosexual side of the coin. Foucault and Butler, to be sure, disagree on whether Herculine Barbin's hermaphroditism is the "happy limbo of non-identity"<sup>41</sup> (Foucault) or just another example of one-sided sexuality being forced on a hapless victim (Butler).<sup>42</sup> However, the root idea remains the same: the hermaphrodite is about as close as anyone can get to a state of reified otherness exposing the arbitrariness of prevailing heterosexual norms.<sup>43</sup>

The most programmatic performatist reaction to the postmodern concept of hermaphroditism has up to now been Jeffrey Eugenides' widely acclaimed novel *Middlesex*.<sup>44</sup> Eugenides, who is familiar with Foucault's arguments (and probably also Butler's), switches the frame of reference from one of undecidable, irreducible alterity to one of decidable, albeit defective unity. Eugenides' underage heroine makes a conscious decision to become a male, basing this choice on scientifically founded anatomical data that has been concealed from her by a typically postmodern doctor. Like Lester Burnham, she deliberately becomes a male with a (this time permanently) retracted penis, a man who by the end of the book is capable of loving without penetrating the object of his desire. Additionally, the hero proves to be a person capable of ethnic reconciliation. Of Greek ancestry, he eventually moves to Berlin where he lives amicably among the Turks who had once slaughtered his ancestors and indirectly set off the incestuous relation between his grandparents that led to his anatomical – but not intellectual – dualism.

Rather than appealing to genetically encoded heterosexuality, performatism seeks to transcend sexual difference by resorting to

strategies ranging everywhere from chastity to genetic engineering to divine intervention. Instead of acting as a place of liminal undecidability and boundary transgression the body becomes a scene of potential unity, irrespective of the “input” involved. Thus in Olga Tokarczuk’s heavily Jungian novel *House of Day, House of Night*<sup>45</sup> we encounter the figure of Saint Kummernis, who is miraculously endowed with a girl’s body and Jesus’s head and who dies a martyr’s death because of it; in Michel Houellebecq’s *The Elementary Particles*<sup>46</sup> the main character succeeds in cloning a unisexed person who overcomes the sexual tension involved in conventional male-female relations. In one of the most absurd performatist plays with sexual identity, in the movie *Being John Malkovich*, a woman who is inhabiting John Malkovich’s “portal” manages to impregnate her girlfriend through the actor and have a child (who can in turn be used as a kind of vessel in which fortunate people can live forever once they have entrance to it). These are not mere gender shifts or weak, refractory “performances” creating small swirls in the power flow of a mighty heterosexual matrix, but whole, albeit incredible constructions of sexuality aimed at overcoming sexuality’s most frustrating and perplexing aspects. These transcendence-breeding frames are, in effect, a logical consequence of the radical dualist constructivism propagated by Butler. For once you kiss the corporeal world goodbye – once you start constructing gender relations willy-nilly without regard for their genetic or material substrate – there’s no reason why you shouldn’t go one step further and *reconstruct* these relations as monist ones that once more include the body within them. As long as your unified new construct focuses on transcending sexuality as we know it – and not simply on reinstalling the old binary, heterosexual opposition between male and female – you will be a sexual performatist. Because these monist constructs by definition allow for a secondary pluralism – each whole construct is different in its own way – there is no dearth of possibilities to construct sexuality anew without one-sidedly tipping the scales in favor of homosexuality by default (as does Butler’s postfeminism) or heterosexuality by decree (as does traditional Judeo-Christian culture). Performatism holds out the promise of a plurality of sexual preference in which body and soul *both* turn out to matter.

*Performatist Time and History*

Most scholars and critics today will readily admit that writing, film-making, art, and architecture are different today than they were back in, say, 1990, not to speak of 1985 or 1980. None of these observers, however, would dream of suggesting that these differences are epochal in nature – part of a massive paradigm shift fundamentally changing the way we regard and represent the world around us. Instead, in discussions of cultural trends we invariably encounter a kind of one-step-forward, one-step-back attitude towards anything laying a claim to innovation. Since in postmodern thinking everything New is by definition always already implicated in the Old, it's easy to dispose of performatism – or anything else promising novelty, for that matter – by dragging its individual concepts back into the good old briar patch of citations, traces, and uncontrollable filiations that make up postmodernism. This posthistorical “yes,-but” attitude is so entrenched in present-day criticism that even such vociferous monist opponents of posthistoricism as Walter Benn Michaels in American and Boris Groys in Germany haven't been able to counter it with positive programs of their own. After introducing a promising monist concept of the new in 2000, for example, Groys has not developed it further.<sup>47</sup> Michaels, for his part, ends a recent polemical book on a note of complete resignation, stating that “history, as of this writing, is still over.”<sup>48</sup>

Needless to say, I believe that history is nowhere close to being over. At the moment, history is being energetically pump-primed by writers, architects, artists and filmmakers who have – consciously or unconsciously – switched to a monist mindset and are working with frames and ostensivity to inaugurate a new, manifestly unpostmodern aesthetic of temporality. This performatist switch is generating new concepts of time in two crucial areas: in literary history itself and in cinematography, where temporal experience is aesthetically most palpable.

### *History*

Of the varied postmodern concepts of time and history that may be extracted from the writings of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Jameson and others, the most fundamental undoubtedly remains that of *différance* – the state of temporal and spatial undecidability in which, as Derrida cagily puts it, “one loses and wins on every turn.”<sup>49</sup> In *différance*, as hardly needs to be repeated at length any more, space and time are perceived as mutually conditioning one another from the very moment of their appearance as intelligible concepts in language. Mark a move in time and you’ll have created a new spatial position; create a new spatial position and you’ll have needed an increment of time to do it. Deconstruction intervenes to disrupt the “metaphysical” tendency to privilege one over the other and, of course, to destabilize any historical “ism” that would try to treat a discrete block of time as a “static and taxonomic tabularization,”<sup>50</sup> as Derrida calls it. The net effect, as we know, is a concept of history that is radically posthistorical and radically incremental, since the only thing that can really “happen” – the only true transcendent event – is the destruction of discourse itself. In the Derridean scenario even the buildup to nuclear war follows the pattern of *différance*, since it’s all just discourse – up to the point, at least, where the bombs actually go off.<sup>51</sup> Because there’s nothing outside of deconstructive discourse except death, being inside that discourse is, conversely, a kind of key to cultural immortality. And, because that discourse can never be superseded by anything short of death, using any *other* discourse that might come after it would presumably be like *being* dead. The difference between postmodern discourse of this kind and everything else isn’t just a matter of how you use signs to convey reality in a certain way: it’s a matter of intellectual life and death.

The monist notion of history I am suggesting here is not as deadly serious about its own truth claims as is current theory. Adopting a monist set towards the sign instead of a dualist one doesn’t mean that we’re going back to a naïve metaphysics deferring to God, History, Truth, Beauty, or some other comforting notion residing outside the purview of our discourse. The belief that material reality should be

incorporated into the sign instead of being excluded from it is a recurring feature of human thought that can be observed in Western culture since Antiquity; it is “true” only inasmuch as large groups of people adopt it for certain periods of time and stick to it until they get tired of it again.

At the same time, the epochal concept of history I would like to develop here is also not as arbitrarily personal as someone like Stanley Fish makes it out to be. People adopt a set towards signs “with” or “without” things well before they make the kind of free-wheeling, wildly diverging interpretations that led Fish to pose his famous query “is their a text in this class?”<sup>52</sup> At some point, everyone decides – usually intuitively – on whether to be a semiotic monist or a semiotic dualist. And, having done so, everyone also tends to stay that way for considerable lengths of time – whether due to a desire for internal consistency or due to sheer intellectual inertia. The issue at hand is not that a few scholars here and there have decided to adopt a monist mindset and apply it for their own personal or institutional ends; it’s that writers, moviemakers, and architects *all over* have adopted this mindset and are implementing it in works of art. The changes now occurring in culture are epochal in nature: they represent a fundamental shift in the way we approach the world. However, because of their obligation to postmodern norms, very few critics are in a position to accept that shift as something desirable, and still less to define it as an historical event, rather than as a mere set of incremental changes. This applies no less to those affecting a critical stance towards postmodernism. Although it has by now become fashionable to dismiss postmodernism as exhausted or obsolete, this attitude means nothing if it is not accompanied by a positive alternative position. If you can’t define the Other of postmodernism and write, think, and act in terms of that Other then you are – sorry to say – still a postmodernist.

In discussions of epochs it is always tempting to link normative shifts from dualism to monism (and back again) with larger trends in socio-political reality. In the case of postmodernism, the main representative of this materialist line of thought has been Fredric Jameson, who sought to escape the poststructuralist “prison-house of language” by welding a lucid, highly convincing account of postmodernism

onto the *Unterbau* of what he called late capitalism. Unfortunately for Jameson's thesis, late capitalism – its ominous name notwithstanding – has been looking increasingly robust with each passing year. The fact that postmodernism is petering out while global capitalism continues to boom suggests that Jameson's Marxist reading of cultural history is not much more prescient than the deconstructive one: it simply installs never-ending posthistory in the material realm outside the sign.

Given the collapse of socialism and the present lack of any viable alternative to the capitalist mode of production, it is tempting to suggest that the turn towards globalization and the turn towards a monist culture are two sides of the same coin (this is, in fact, the position taken by Eric Gans with his ambitious notion of post-millennialism<sup>53</sup>). Since performatism is a theory of aesthetics – a theory of why we like certain things for no good practical reason – I don't find it necessary to make such far-reaching claims. It is true, of course, that many performatist works treated in this book feed off of problems arising through globalization and/or the collapse of socialism in Middle and Eastern Europe. However, it is also important to remember that there is no urgent *practical* reason why artists should not keep on thumbing their noses at capitalism using the tried-and-true strategies developed in postmodernism (Ali Smith's *Hotel World*, discussed in Chapter Two, is a good example of a "classic," politically correct postmodern approach to the subject).

In my view, the main reason for the switch to monism is that creative artists have become tired of recycling increasingly predictable postmodernist devices and have turned to its monist Other to construct alternatives – a move that ultimately knows no ideological boundaries. Hence, in the new monism we find a whole gamut of political positions, ranging from Eric Gans's strident neoconservatism to Arundhati Roy's Chomskian critique of American power politics. The criterion for performatism is ultimately not *whether* you are for or against global capitalism, but *how* you go about formulating your position within it. In Chapter Two, I'll discuss in more detail some literary works with historiographic and political implications. Roughly speaking, though, you can make out three positions here:



an accommodationist one that seeks to create warmed air pockets of spirituality within the glacial impassivity of global capitalism (Tokarczuk's "The Hotel Capital," Schulze's *Simple Stories*); a postcolonial one that focuses on creating beautiful unities amidst the moral and political ugliness of the capitalist system (Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog*); and a terrorist or sublime one, which toys on a fictional level with the possibility of doing away with capitalism altogether (Miloš Urban's *Sevenchurch* and Viktor Pelevin's *Buddha's Little Finger*). Finally, in the discussion of Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*, I'll show how Schlink tries to overcome the victimary politics arising out of the Holocaust and open up the possibility of individual subjects advancing in history frame by frame.

### *Cinematographic Time*

In aesthetic terms we experience time most intensely in the cinema. Here, too, performatism is changing the way time, space, and the medium of film interact. Up until now, sophisticated viewers have felt most comfortable with the deist notion of dispersed or disjointed time used by postmodernism. Because in deist thinking the spatial markers of divine origin – its signs or traces – are believed to proliferate incrementally and uncontrollably in every which way, the time in which that proliferation unfolds never has much of a chance to develop epic, drawn-out proportions.<sup>54</sup> In (post-)modern deist systems time is either being constantly sliced and diced by space, as in Derrida's *différance*, or removed from chronology and interiorized, as in Bergson's *durée* (which he links with the ability to engage in creative imagination per se). The most ingenious and productive postmodern theory of cinematic time, the one developed by Deleuze in his two "cinema" books, is more gracious in its attitude towards chronological time – he regards the epic "movement-image" of pre-war cinema and the "time-image" of postmodern cinema as different but equal.<sup>55</sup> However, it is obvious that Deleuze's sympathies lie with the neo-Bergsonian "time-image" that shatters the sensory-motor scheme "from the inside"<sup>56</sup> and causes time to go "out of joint."<sup>57</sup> Deleuze's opposition, which is grounded in an exacting and exhaustive treatment of 80 years

of cinematic innovation, would also seem to leave us in a typical post-historical bind. Either cinema can continue to produce the out-of-kilter time-images typical of the 1970s and '80s or it can fall back into the old sensory-motor patterns of pre-war film – or, even worse, recur to the pedestrian, merely chronological use of cinematic time that has always been a mainstay of popular movies. How can filmmakers create a cinematic time not based on the serial montage of sensory motor images or disjointed, temporal ones?

The answer, once more, lies in framing time in a way that is alien to postmodernism and poststructuralism. The focus is on *creating presence* – which is to say on doing something that the Derridean, epistemological critique of time considers impossible and the normative, Bergsonian-Deleuzian concept of time considers insipid.

Just how does this work? For a start, we are not dealing with a naive attempt to create a *primary* presence. There is no way that modern-day cinema-goers are going to be shocked, fooled, or cajoled into mixing up reality and its filmic representation. Performatist film does not try to convince us that it is representing reality in a more “real” or “authentic” way than any previous cinematic school or direction. Rather, performatist film functions by framing and contrasting two types of time: personal or human time and theist or authorial time. Put more concretely, the performatist film, using the usual coercive means, forces viewers to accept a certain segment of time as a unity or “chunk” while at the same time providing them with a temporal perspective that *transcends* that temporal unity. The relevant mode here is not epistemological and reflexive, but ontological and intuitive: it is the feeling of being present in a time frame that is qualitatively superior in some way to a previous one.

The most radical example of this is Aleksandr Sokurov’s movie *Russian Ark*, which consists of one 87-minute-long, completely uncut shot. While watching the movie, we are made to experience two times. The first is the real time of the cameraman as he slowly moves through the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg; the second is the “staged” time of the director as he places a whole series of historical figures and scenes from Russia’s czarist past in the path of the passing camera. On the one hand, we plunge with the cameraman into an ever-expanding

filmic present corresponding exactly to the real time of the filming procedure (there was no editing and hence no way of shortening or scrambling real time). On the other hand, the *mise en scène* confronts us with characters who can only be interpreted as emblems of transcendent, panchronological time: Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Pushkin, Nicholas II, and a hodge-podge of other figures taken from Russian history all appear within the same 87-minute sequence. The net effect (which I'll discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three) is that of a quotidian, real time allowing us to participate in a transcendent, suprahistorical one. The key to temporal experience here is the *en bloc* juxtaposition of theist and human time rather than the concatenation of countless time- or motion-saturated frames that forms the basis of Deleuzian film language. Also, needless to say, there's very little point in deconstructing this unreal presentation of historical figures in real time, because even the most simple-minded viewer has no trouble understanding that it's a one-time stunt – an artificial, aesthetic device. *Russian Ark* isn't trying to convince us with cognitive *arguments*; it's trying to make us *believe* by confronting us with a temporal *performance* that we have no way of avoiding – short of not going to see the movie at all.

A less radical, but in principle similar use of time is offered by *American Beauty*, which conveys the same basic device used in *Russian Ark* using much more conventional cinematographic means. Thus the bird's-eye-view establishing shot of *American Beauty*, where Lester Burnham introduces us to “my neighborhood...my street...my life,” seems at first little more than a hoary Hollywood device. However, it also marks Lester's transtemporal, transcendent perspective that we can only understand after we, like Lester, have left the everyday time frame of the story line at the movie's end. Besides providing us with a frame favoring panchronological over everyday time, the movie also encourages us, along with Lester and Ricky, to bracket and make present certain objects embodying transcendence – most notably Angela (in Lester's slow-motion erotic visions) and the white plastic bag or the dead bird (in Ricky's real-time videos). This bracketing of chronological time might at first seem to be nothing more than a familiar cinematographic device. In performatist terms, though, it marks

the unity of static, framed time and the transcendent time in which the deified Lester partakes – thus staking out a basic agreement between the outer and inner frame, between inner vision and supernatural experience. Conversely, quotidian time in *American Beauty* is framed in such a way that characters can transcend that time; the act of transcendence in turn provides an emotional basis for identifying with these characters. In Chapter Three, which treats performatist cinema, I'll go into more detail on the different ways that movies force both characters and ourselves to experience transcendence as a qualitative shift in spatially demarcated, temporal "chunks."

### *Summary*

Since my introductory discussion of performatism has covered a lot of ground, it seems helpful to close this chapter by summarizing what I consider to be the four basic features of performatism.

1. The basic semiotic mode of performatism is *monist*. It requires that things or thingness be integrated into the concept of sign. The most useful monist concept of sign I have been able to find up to now is Eric Gans's notion of the *ostensive*. Ostensivity means that at least two people, in order to defer violence in a situation of mimetic conflict, intuitively agree on a present sign that marks, deifies, and beautifies its own violence-deferring performance. This originary ostensive scene, in which the human, language, religion and aesthetics are all made present at once for the first time, is hypothetical. My own, specifically historical interpretation of the ostensive is that it embodies the semiotic mechanism generating the new epoch better than any other competing monist concept. The ostensive, in other words, marks the becoming-conscious of the new epoch. Accordingly, the job of a performatist aesthetics would be to describe the different manifestations of ostensivity in contemporary works of art and show how they make these works appeal to us in terms of monist, no longer postmodern mindsets. This book is devoted to realizing that project.

2. The aesthetic device specific to performatism is *double framing*. The double frame is based on a lock or fit between an outer frame (the work construct itself) and an inner one (an ostensive scene or scenes

of some kind). The work is constructed in such a way that its main argumentative premise shifts back and forth between these two venues; the logic of one augments the other in a circular, closed way. The result is a performative tautology that allows the endless circulation of cognitively dubious, but formally irrefutable metaphysical figures within its boundaries. These metaphysical figures are in turn valid only within the frame of a particular work; their patent constructedness reinforces the set-apartness or givenness of the work itself and coercively establishes its status as *aesthetic* – as a realm of objective, privileged, and positive experience. Because they are easy to identify and debunk, these metaphysical figures force readers or viewers to make a choice between the untrue beauty of the closed work or the open, banal truth of its endless contextualization. Performatist works of art attempt to make viewers or readers *believe* rather than convince them with cognitive arguments. This, in turn, may enable them to assume moral or ideological positions that they otherwise would not have. In terms of reader reception, a performance is successful when a reader's belief pattern is changed in some particular way, and when he or she begins to project that new belief pattern back onto reality.

3. The human locus of performatism is the *opaque* or *dense subject*. Because the simplest formal requirement of once more becoming a whole subject is tautological – to be a subject the subject must somehow set itself off from its context – performative characters consolidate their position by appearing opaque or dense to the world around them. This opacity is in itself not desirable per se, but rather forms the starting point for possible further development. This development is best measured in terms of whether (or to what degree) a subject transcends the double frame in which it happens to find itself. In narrative genres, this ability of a human subject to transcend a frame is the benchmark of an event or successful performance. In psychological narrative this transcendence is necessarily partial; in fantastic narrative it may be achieved totally. In architectonic and pictorial genres, which are by nature static, we encounter paradoxical states of saturation<sup>58</sup> or impendency<sup>59</sup> that impose the conditions for transcendence on us without actually demonstrating how that transcendence is eventually consummated.

4. The spatial and temporal coordinates of performatism are cast in a *theist* mode. This means that time and space are framed in such a way that subjects have a real chance to orient themselves within them and transcend them in some way. Because of its obvious constructedness and artificiality, this set-up or frame causes us to assume the existence of an implicit author forcing his or her will upon us as a kind of paradox or conundrum whose real meaning is beyond our ken. In terms of plot, we find a basic conflict between the spatial and temporal coerciveness of the theist frame and the human or figural subjects struggling to overcome it. In terms of spatial representation (in architecture), we find a basic tension between the architect's attempt to effect transcendence and the physical limitations imposed by the material he or she is using; the expansive theist gesture is always accompanied by a human, limited one.

7 Though based on Gans's notion of the ostensive, the concept of performatism was developed independently of Gans's own epochal notion of post-millennialism, which first appeared in his internet journal *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, No. 209, 3 June 2000 under the title "The Post-Millennial Age" ([www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw209.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw209.htm)).

### Notes to Chapter 1

1 See his *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), esp. 37-82.

2 In this sense performatism is the opposite of the phenomenological *epochh*. Phenomenology brackets things to *know* them better; performatism brackets things to *believe in* them better. For more on this see the discussion of Jean-Luc Marion's *Being Given*, Chapter Five in this book, ●-●●.

3 The most recent book-length formulation of this theory is Gans's *Signs of Paradox. Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); see also his *Originary Thinking. Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993) as well as the numerous glosses and additions in his internet journal *Chronicles of Love and Resentment* at

[www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/home.html](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/home.html)

4 See, for example, René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 7-9.

5 Gans suggests in his *Originary Thinking* that while the idea of God may be forgotten as society becomes more secular, "the process of this forgetting can never be concluded. Even if someday not one believer remains, the atheist will remain someone who rejects belief in God, not someone for whom the concept is empty" (42-43).

6 See his discussion, for example, in *Originary Thinking*: "The pleasure of the esthetic results from the deferral or 'drowning' of the prior displeasure — the resentment — generated by unfulfillable desire. The esthetic experience engages the subject in a to-and-fro movement of imaginary possession and dispossession that blocks the formation of the stable imaginary structure of resentment, where the self on the periphery is definitively alienated from the desired object at the center" (118-119).

7 The deconstructionist argument about language origin only works if you assume the existence of binary categories *prior* to language. Compare Jonathan Culler's explanation of this in his *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

1982): “If a cave man is successfully to inaugurate language by making a special grunt signifying ‘food,’ we must suppose that the grunt is *already distinguished from other grunts* and that the world *has already been divided* into the categories ‘food’ and ‘non-food’” (96). [The italics are my own.] Culler’s explanation suggests two models of language origin. In the first, which is absurd, language would originate through a process of infinite regress. Originary language would be preceded by a still more originary language and so on and so forth. In the second, which is entirely plausible, the differentiation already exists in human cognition, where it so to speak sits around waiting for a linguistic correlate to express itself. Unfortunately, this argument is no longer deconstructive, since it assumes the existence of a signified already existing in human consciousness before the signifier. What is really undecidable here is not the origin of the sign itself (which cannot be *known*) but whether there is a pre-existing “set” in human consciousness towards treating signs and things as unities or dualities. The entire history of culture suggests that both, in fact, are possible, and that the competition between both possibilities is the basis of cultural history.

8 For paleoanthropological arguments see Gans, *Chronicle* No. 52, “Generative Paleoanthropology,” 27 July, 1996 ([www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/view52.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/view52.htm)). Gans’s hypothesis is also compatible with Mircea Eliade’s more general observation that religions must be founded in a sacred, holy place at the center of the world. See his *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987).

9 Alan Ball, *American Beauty* (New York: Newmarket Press), 60.

10 Ball, *American Beauty*, 60 and 100, respectively.

11 Ball, *American Beauty*, 60.

12 For more on the how the victimary mechanism operates in a religious context see Girard, *Things Hidden*, esp. Chapter 1, “The Victimimage Mechanism as the Basis of Religion” (3-47).

13 See also Chapter Three in this book, ••-••.

14 See his *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).

15 The classic example of “keying” is the set of signals that transforms fighting into playing for animals (see *Frame Analysis*, 40-82).

16 Randal Collins, “Theoretical Continuities in Goffman’s Work,” in *Erving Goffman. Exploring the Interaction Order*, ed. by Paul Drew and Anthony Wooton (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 51.

17 *Frame Analysis*, 21.

18 *Frame Analysis*, 28-30.



- 19 *Frame Analysis*, 31-37.
- 20 The surprisingly good fit between Gans's and Goffman's theories is undoubtedly a result of their common Durkheimian heritage. For more on Goffman's indebtedness to Durkheim see Collins, "Theoretical Continuities"; for more on Gans's own positive appraisal of Durkheim see his "The Sacred and the Social: Defining Durkheim's Anthropological Legacy," *Anthropoetics* 1 (2000) ([www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0601/durkheim.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0601/durkheim.htm)).
- 21 For more on this see Collins, "Theoretical Continuities," 59-60.
- 22 *Frame Analysis*, 1.
- 23 Cf. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Pantheon, 1967), esp. "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," 47-95.
- 24 *Interaction Ritual*, 95.
- 25 Based as it is on mutually held projections, the Durkheimian tradition is anathema to rigorous deconstructionists as well as other strains of poststructuralism drawing on the illusion-bashing philosophy of Nietzsche. Derrida's own send-up of the Durkheimian projection — his critique of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* — can be found in Chapter Two of his *Given Time. 1: Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also the discussion of how Jean-Luc Marion reverses this criticism in Chapter Five, •••• in this book.
- 26 According to Girard's scapegoating mechanism, a collective works off its mimetically generated tension by lynching an arbitrarily chosen victim, who is then deified after the fact as the group's saviour. In the case of *The Celebration* the scapegoating mechanism has a moral, rather than simply an energetic origin because the expulsion of the father is justified. Here as in many other cases in performatism, an archaic or originary scene returns outfitted with a constructed, modern-day rationale.
- 27 This occurs in the black comedy *Dogma*, in which two angels decide to return a God(dess) played by Alanis Morissette.
- 28 Ball, *American Beauty*, 57.
- 29 See the classic discussions in Jacques Lacan, "The Split between the Eye and the Gaze," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1981), 67-78 and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, Vintage Books, 1995), esp. "Panopticism," 195-230.
- 30 For more on this see Eric Gans's neoconservative critique of what he calls "victimary politics," e.g., in *Chronicle* Nr. 257, "Our Neo-Victimary Era," 2 March 2002 ([www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw257.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw257.htm))

- 31 New York: Penguin, 2001.
- 32 His reading material towards the end of the movie includes *Frankenstein*, suggesting that he is aware of his own monstrosity.
- 33 Here as elsewhere I've adopted the narratological terminology developed by Franz Stanzel in *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Stanzel's opposition of authorial/figural is best suited to describing the homologous relationship between a theist (authorial) creator/creatix and his or her human (figural) creations. Stanzel himself excludes first-person authorial narration from his well-known tripartite classification scheme.
- 34 Ball, *American Beauty*, 1.
- 35 I have treated *Atonement* briefly in "Originary Aesthetics and the End of Postmodernism," *The Originary Hypothesis: a Minimal Proposal for Humanistic Inquiry*, ed. by Adam Katz (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 2007), 59-82.
- 36 "Buben nizhnego mira" in Viktor Pelevin, *Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh. Tom I. Buben Nizhnego Mira* (Moscow: Terra, 1996), 362-366.
- 37 "Buben," 366.
- 38 In his collection *A Werewolf Problem in Central Russian and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1998).
- 39 In his collection *The Blue Lantern and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1997), 21-62.
- 40 For more on these terms as used by Jean-Luc Marion, see Chapter 5, ●●●.
- 41 Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin. Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite* (New York: Random House, 1980), XIII.
- 42 See the discussion in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23-24.
- 43 In postmodern literature, this principle is exemplified best in Sasha Sokolov's hilarious novel *Palisandriia* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), in which the hero, after a life of wild sexual and social transgressions, discovers at the end of the book that he was really a hermaphrodite all along.
- 44 New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002.
- 45 Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003 [Polish orig. 1998].
- 46 New York: Knopf, 2000.
- 47 See his *Topologie der Kunst* (Munich: Hanser, 2003), where he ducks the issue completely.
- 48 Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier* (Princeton: Princeton University

Press, 2004), 182. For a further discussion of Michaels' anti-theory see Chapter Five, ••-••.

49 *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 20.

50 See in particular Derrida's "Some Statements and Truism about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seisms," in *The States of 'Theory': History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 63-94; here 65.

51 See his "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," *Diacritics* 2 (1984), 20-31.

52 See his *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

53 First introduced in *Chronicle* Nr. 209, 3 June 2000, "The Post-Millennial Age" ([www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw209.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw209.htm)). Gans develops a systematic epochal concept of history prior to post-millennialism in Part Two of his *Originary Thinking*, 117-219.

54 The flip side of the coin is that deist time can also end apocalyptically — see Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now" or Leibniz's assertion in *Monadology* § 6, that the monads can only be created or be destroyed in one fell swoop ("tout d'un coup").

55 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989), 40.

56 *Cinema* 2, 40.

57 *Cinema* 2, 41.

58 For more on this concept, which has been suggested by Jean-Luc Marion, see Chapter Five, ••-••.

59 For more on this architectonic concept see Chapter Four, ••-••.

### Notes to Chapter 2

1 London: Penguin, 2001.

2 *Hotel World*, 181.

3 *Hotel World*, 30 and 237.

4 *Granta* 72 (2000), 35-54; Polish original "Numery" [Numbers] (1989), cited according to Tokarczuk's story collection *Szafa* (Wałbrzych: Ruta 1998), 10-39. Page numbers refer respectively to the English and Polish editions.

5 "Hotel Capital," 35/10.

6 "Hotel Capital," 35/10-11.

7 "Hotel Capital," 36/11.