

# Performatism in Architecture. On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensivity

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In my first article on performatism (Eshelman 2001(2)), I suggested that we have entered a new epoch in which subject, sign, and thing come together in ways that create an aesthetic experience of transcendency. Since the success of this endeavor entails a difficult, out-of-the-ordinary act, I called the techniques used in it “performances” and the epoch growing out of it “performatism.” I also suggested that two of the most important devices of performatism are framing and the reduction of subjectivity. Characters find themselves encased in a frame or rigid set of circumstances that they transcend by reverting to reduced states of consciousness and/or by focusing on simple, opaque things. “Transcendency” refers here to two things: the fictional representation of successful performances, on the one hand, and a phenomenology, an act of experiencing on the other. The performatist narrative doesn’t just depict acts of transcendence, it confronts us with an incredible, aesthetically mediated construct which we are challenged to accept as truth. In short, we are made to experience belief as an aesthetic fact. Whether we *really* believe is not something for a secular theory like performatism to decide or prescribe.

By far the most compelling way to describe performatism in semiotic terms I have found to be Eric Gans’s concept of the ostensive. This concept states that all semiotic acts must be traced to the setting of a primal, whole, at first meaningless, sign that defers mimetic violence and transcends the animal state to produce the human. Gans usually presents the ostensive as a linguistic or paleoanthropological universal. However, I believe that in its historical context, as a specific reaction to poststructuralism and postmodernism, the ostensive also provides a key to explaining the aesthetic dominant of the epoch now developing around us. In other words, I think we are entering an era in which the stylization of ostensivity *qua* performance is becoming *the* unavoidable mode of aesthetic expression. Eric Gans had the prescience (or perhaps also the misfortune) to anticipate this dominant a

good fifteen years before it had any direct equivalent in a work of art. I might also add that Gans has advanced a notion of his own, post-millennialism,[\(3\)](#) to describe the era after postmodernism, or what I call performatism. I have no real quarrel with Gans's concept, which is far more inclusive than my own. The purpose of performatism as a term is simply to focus in on the specifics of aesthetic experience and, ultimately, to help describe what I think is turning out to be a major shift in the epochal landscape.

In the following remarks, I would like to do two things. In a first step, I would like to link the concept of framing more closely with Gans's idea of the ostensive; in a second, I would like to apply the insights won thereby to the realm of architecture and spatial relations in general. Most of the examples of performatist architecture are from Berlin, where I have been teaching recently. The radical rebuilding of the city in the wake of German reunification has spawned a whole new set of architectural devices that are no longer reconcilable with the norms and conventions of postmodernism.

## **Framing and Ostensivity**

In the originary ostensive scene as postulated by Gans, two subjects without language vie for a thing.[\(4\)](#) Normally, they would be condemned to imitate one another's actions until a violent struggle breaks out. At some point, however, one of them sets forth a sign to designate the desired object. When this sign is accepted by the second subject, it forms the first, ostensive, sign, which by definition always refers to a thing at hand. The sign defers a violent struggle for the thing and enables the subjects to transcend their animal status and experience a common human bond that can be developed further. The horizontal, unchanging dimension of animal appetite is transcended by the creation of a vertical, semiotic, specifically human order out of which all later culture is then generated. One could also think of the ostensive sign as a kind of primal, paradoxical sign-frame encompassing a signifier and a thing and generating a larger frame delimiting a common field, the human.[\(5\)](#) This could be depicted in the following way (Diagram 1):



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The inner sign-frame contains the abstract signifier and the concrete thing without ever being reducible to the one or the other. The thing cannot be conceived of without the signifier; the signifier has no performative power without reference to the thing. The ostensive sign has no meaning in the usual sense of the word, standing rather solely for the truth of its own reconciliatory achievement. The originary sign is, in truth, a kind of fictional construct, but at the same time a

powerful and indispensable one. For once the reconciliatory power of the sign has been interiorized by the group, there is no returning to a precultural, presemiotic, or prehuman state. The originary sign-frame lays the groundwork for a larger, cultural frame that allows language-bearers to generate increasingly complex, predicative modes of communication no longer relying on the immediate presence of a thing. This ubiquitous, abstract mode of signification—what Gans calls the declarative—eventually comes to obscure the ostensive, “thingly” quality of the originary act of signification as well as the feel for its reconciliatory, transcendent achievement.[\(6\)](#)

Unlike ourselves, the early humans or hominids who have just created the ostensive sign still stand in awe of its power, even as they are unable to relate it directly to the origin of the human. Instead, they fetishize the powerful, mysteriously empty ostensive sign by designating it the “name-of-God” (cf. Gans 1997, 53) and by surrounding it with prohibitions and sacred rituals mediating what they believe is access to the Beyond (a still higher, incontrovertible frame outside the purview of the human). To the name-of-God then accrue semantic additions which allow the original ostensive act to become memorable and iterable. With time, the name-of-God becomes more and more laden with conventional meanings and binding, punitive directives. Eventually, ritual frames develop out of it which regulate social and religious behavior on a much broader scale. The ritual frame is by now largely opaque, consisting of semantic, secondary accretions that have been added onto the original, paradoxical, ostensive sign-frame. The things it frames are in themselves murky, speculative reenactments or representations of the primal scene. Because they are ascribed the power associated with the name-of-God, neither the frame nor its represented contents are open to critical question. Also, in this archaic stage, the ritualized frame has the same sacral status as the things being depicted or performed; indeed, the two are relatively undifferentiated. With the secularization and differentiation of society, however, this relationship shifts. The binding frame becomes increasingly secondary, an optional ornament; the unbound, represented actions or objects it encloses become the primary focus of interest. This is apparent from the way Kant, as a leading representative of the Enlightenment, deals with frames and ornamentation. As Derrida demonstrates in his well-known critique of the “parergon” in *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Kant tries to use the frame to mark off an intrinsic, primary area from an extrinsic, secondary one, both in the work of art and in religious belief. For Kant, frames have clearly become a form of supplementary ornamentation that he would like to exclude from his ordered pursuit of reason, beauty, and faith. The frame has, in other words, become a burden, a distraction from the “reasonable” things being represented in the work of art or being performed in philosophy and religious practice. As Derrida demonstrates with his usual acuity, this sort of exclusion is impossible, since the frame is both extrinsic and intrinsic to the work of art which it surrounds. The frame

is unavoidably that place where we have to begin deciding what is important and what is not important about a work of art. The frame is where we begin performing those very acts of aesthetic judgment that Kant would like to confine to an intrinsic, privileged area (which he needs the frame to mark off so that he can begin talking about that area in the first place). In a typical deconstructive move, Derrida temporarily restores the supplementary frame to a position of equality vis-à-vis the supposedly intrinsic area of representation, but doesn't consider the ontological implications of what he has done. Derrida isn't interested in the originary power of the frame; he's interested in liminal spaces which can be used to critique any sort of discourse trying to resist the uncontrollable pull exerted by outside contexts. Since all discourse is forced to do this at some point, Derrida never suffers from a lack of things to do; he simply moves on to deconstruct the next metaphysical conceit. From a performatist point of view, however, what Derrida does with the frame is a first step in the right direction; by taking the frame seriously again, Derrida inadvertently restores to it some of its originary, sacral valence.[\(7\)](#)

Gans's concept of the ostensive then makes this valence explicit. For the ostensive allows us to think of the frame not just as a liminal space, as a convenient starting point for an endless epistemological critique, but rather also as the minimal set of conditions necessary for effecting a very real act of transcendence (the act of becoming human, the act of acquiring a linguistically mediated consciousness). The ostensive makes it possible to think of the frame as more than simply an ornament or a supplement; it allows us to reclaim thematically something of the frame's originary, performative force without fetishizing the ostensive, as does Girard, or getting lost in the endless ironies of the declarative, as does Derrida.[\(8\)](#) In the sense that Gans's generative anthropology (GA) mediates between the declarative and the ostensive, it can be also be seen as a kind of discourse of framing. However, this discourse is now focused on an ontologically founded, ostensive center and the human frame surrounding it.

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This mediated recovery of the ostensive is not, however, limited to the conceptually rigorous, explicit approach of GA. In recent works of literature, film, and architecture, artists are, without necessarily being aware of it, beginning to apprehend the originary qualities inherent in language and to produce works that represent and frame near equivalents of the primal ostensive scene. The reason for this unwitting convergence of art and theory is, I think, not difficult to explain. The most effective way of stopping postmodern modes of proliferation and deconstruction is to fall back on signs that are structurally similar to the ostensive sign, which consists of only a signifier and a referent and which has no meaning to deconstruct or contextualize. "Idiotic" grunts (as performed by the commune

members in Lars von Trier's Dogma film *The Idiots*) or a white plastic bag twirling in the wind (as filmed by Ricky Fitts in *American Beauty*) are examples of how the intentionally framed regress to "meaningless" signs helps revitalize the lives of these and other characters.<sup>(9)</sup> The very lack of meaning allows the characters—and ourselves—to once more experience redemption, truth, and beauty at the object or ostensive level. This new way of framing could be depicted schematically as follows (Diagram 2):



As in the archaic era of the ostensive, the ostensive sign (or any similar configuration with a radically reduced semantic content and a direct reference to a thing) occupies the center of attention. As in the archaic era, the frame is now once more being used as an instrument to enable transcendence. The difference, of course, is that this striving is now mediated through art, proceeds in retrograde fashion, and is acutely aware of its own paradoxality. Using frames, we can once more represent successful acts of transcendence in fictional worlds or experience transcendence vicariously by identifying with "meaningless," "idiotic," or otherwise reduced states of subjectivity and the things they focus on. In performatism, as in postmodern culture, the intermediate frame is correctly perceived as being important in pragmatic terms but no longer reliable in epistemological ones. As Derrida has shown, the frame is both extrinsic and intrinsic to what it surrounds (it surrounds and is itself always surrounded). It necessarily has breaks or contradictions, since it derives its authority from still higher frames or levels whose veracity is no less open to question than its own. Both performatism and postmodernism are aware of the ironies involved in recurring to the authority of higher, absent frames. The difference between the two is that performatism situates narrative and spatial equivalents of the ostensive at the core of all higher-level consciousness. Performatist thinking and art reorients itself to the latter-day equivalents of a "meaningless" but nonetheless deeply significant, irreducible inner frame. This frame can hardly be deconstructed because it has little or no semantic content and almost no context; it works simply through the truth of its own existence, as a reminder of the performative foundation of the human. It is also the place where beauty, love, belief, morality and all the other originary, performative situations that postmodernism dismisses as "metaphysical" were established—situations that are now being revitalized in aesthetic settings. Just how this is being done in architecture is the subject of the following remarks.

### **Spatializing Ostensivity: The Language of Performatist Architecture**

Performatism in architecture arises when minimal spatial relations are configured in

such a way as to suggest the possibility of achieving transcendence. Given the background of modernist architecture, in which there have been no lack of minimalist attempts to stylize or appropriate transcendence, and that of postmodernist architecture, which ironicizes its predecessor's program, this implies several restrictions. Like modernist architecture, performatist architecture stylizes functionality and tends to use simple forms suggesting a single, monistic end. However, unlike modernism, performatist architecture is aimed at evoking transcendency through devices that are perceived neither as being motivated by modernist notions of ideal functionality (whose most obvious token is the grid or square) nor as displaying an ornamental plurality in the postmodern sense (citing and mixing received, recognizable codes). Instead, performatist devices call attention to spatially mediated, minimal relations which seem to overcome certain intractable material or physical limitations. One might call this *transcendent functionalism*, as opposed to the rational or technical functionalism of modernism. Instead of expressing a geometrically founded principle in a consistent, foreseeable way, the performative device suggests the possibility of overcoming some spatial limitation with heretofore unrecognized functional means. Since this functional striving for transcendence is necessarily always incomplete, the result is a "useless" architectonic relation, or ornamentation—something that modernism of course rejects. At the same time, this type of ornamentation is not postmodern: it is the willed, paradoxical by-product of an architectonic act aimed at achieving transcendence and not the playful, ironically presented citation of previously existing, immanent styles.

In general, the incomplete architectonic performance functions in a way analogous to the ostensive sign, which founds the human through a quasi-transcendent, paradoxical act in which a thing is replaced by a sign-thing that partially overcomes the material conditions of its origin. Just as performatist narratives can be thought of as creating rough analogies to the originary scene using simple signs, retrograde characters, and fictional frames promising (and sometimes delivering) transcendence, performatist architecture can be thought of as highlighting certain types of spatial relationships that seem to overcome their own involvement in brute materiality. This turn towards the ostensive and the stylization of transcendence is not some sort of whim. Rather, it is a logical reaction to the legacy of modernism and postmodernism. Modernism sought to realize the aesthetic qualities of simplicity and unity in architecture but made the mistake of equating these with an essentialist relation, functionality. The result was a supposedly non-ornamental, rationally founded "ism" that with time revealed itself to be no less ornamental and no less metaphysical than any of its predecessor styles (modernist architects employed the square frame and the glass box universally, without regard to their actual consequences, such as leaky roofs or overheated office workers, and took the doctrine of functionalism to be an infallible blueprint for creating urban utopia).

Postmodernism, by contrast, uncoupled style from any essentialist claims, resulting in a profusion of wittily cited ornaments and an ironic, can't-nail-me-down-to-anything attitude. The result has been a highly context-sensitive, but also stylistically superficial architectural vernacular. Performatist architecture reacts against both by returning to an aesthetics of simplicity that is founded not in functionality or in stylistic citation but in the human—more specifically, in the semiotically mediated human capacity to believe. To put this in a slightly different way, postmodernism has shown us in an aesthetically and intellectually convincing way that *knowing* involves entering an endlessly complicated, uncontrollable regress with no origin, no goal, and no binding answers. The most effective way of escaping from that regress is to *believe*, or to focus in on simple, incredible object relations that seem to transcend the material conditions of their own existence and that challenge us to accept them whether we want to or not. It is this challenge that separates performatism from the postmodern and modern. We already *know*—just as the postmodernists and modernists do—that these relations are implausible, but that is now beside the point. For what these relations now do is to force us to focus our attention on a nascent act of transcendence and to *identify* with that act in a coherent, unified way. The sum of this implausible architectonic act and the involuntary identification with that act is a *performance*, a combined making and self-making that exists, if only for a time, in a state of vibrant, unstable unity. This unity comes about through an aesthetically mediated confluence of otherwise divergent desires or interests. It is only possible because artists have systematically begun to simulate the mechanisms of belief with aesthetic means and because a growing number of people are allowing themselves to be moved by this simulation. Whoever is content to *know* these incredible acts (to “unmask” their already obvious simulacrum character or appeal to belief) will miss the point. Such a viewer, though effortlessly maintaining his or her epistemological superiority vis-à-vis the aesthetically engaged performatist, will remain entrapped forever in the endless loops of postmodernist reflection.

Based on my observations in Berlin, I think it is safe to speak of nine basic devices of performatist architecture, arranged roughly in order of importance:

1. **Theistic creation (addition/subtraction of mass)**
2. **Transparency (dematerialization)**
3. **Triangulation**
4. **Kinesis**
5. **Impendency**
6. **Wholeness (closure)**
7. **Framing**
8. **Centering + ostensivity**
9. **Oneness (generativity)**

Here is a brief rundown of each category.

### **1. Theistic Creation (addition/subtraction of mass)**

A striking and very common architectonic device of performatism is to slice mass out of buildings on a grand scale or, less frequently, to add mass to them in peculiar places. The effect of this slicing or adding is *theistic* rather than ornamental or functional in the postmodernist or modernist sense. The user or viewer is meant to feel the powerful, preterhuman hand of the architect rather than to perceive some sort of ornamentally familiar form or compelling technical principle. The addition or subtraction of mass suggests a quasi-divine ability to give and take away; the architect presents himself (or herself) in the manner of a potent, but nonetheless limited manipulator of matter, as an anthropomorphic divinity who intervenes in the world below in a goal-directed, forward, but nonetheless ineffable way.<sup>(10)</sup> This may be contrasted with the demiurgical architect of modernism, whose striving for rationally guided technical perfection is not open to any sort of self-doubt, or with the gnostic architect of postmodernism, whose seemingly indifferent combining of unrelated, received styles creates an ironic metaposition lacking any fixed point of origin. In general, the performatist act of slicing/adding suggests a decisive, half-human, half-transcendent act of originary architectonic creation. This explains why in performatist structures we often see parts of roofs cut away to reveal the sky. The suggestion is that the architectural object is mediating some higher, celestial frame; the architectonic sign conveying the transcendent message ostentatiously reveals the transcendent through a gaping hole or lack in its own material makeup.<sup>(11)</sup>

### **2. Transparency (dematerialization)**

Transparency, which strongly implies the transcendent act of dematerialization, is another ubiquitous feature of performatist architecture. Performatist structures constantly evoke the possibility of transcending materiality by presenting it in the form of transparent, seemingly dematerialized planes. Postmodernism, by contrast, likes reflective surfaces because they refer back to a context and away from an origin, and bright colors, because they evoke secondary semantic associations not particular to the materials being used. Modernism, which also employs transparency a great deal, usually uses it to highlight internal formal or structural essences, as exemplified in Mies's notion that a building's glass skin should reveal its structural bones (*cf.* the discussion in Neumeyer 1986, 147-174). According to Rowe and Slutzky's well-known essay (Basel 1997, orig. 1955), in modernism there is in addition to this literal transparency also a phenomenal one that creates



overlapping, ambiguous planes, as in Le Corbusier's villa at Garches (cf. 1997, 33-41). Performatist transparency, by contrast, is demonstrative and tautological. It reifies, albeit imperfectly, the possibility of transcending materiality per se and doesn't really reveal anything particular about a structure's inner workings or essence. This has a certain analogy in the ostensive scene as described by Gans (1997, 39). The originary sign at first refers transparently to the thing. Upon seeing the thing in this mediated way, however, we discover that it isn't the thing itself we desire, but rather the "center of the scene of representation that the sign brought into existence." The thing vanishes, "to be restored through the renewed mediation of the sign" (1997, 40). Transparent planes or frames that don't reveal a particular essential content replay this semiotic disappearing act on a grand, sublime scale. In Gans's thought, I might add, this dematerialization also has crucial sacral implications, since it leads to the "discovery" of God, that is, the principle missing from the center.

### 3. Triangulation

A key spatial figure of performatist architectonics is triangulation. The triangle is a minimal figure embodying the transition from one- to two-dimensionality (from the horizontal to the vertical). Functionally, in the form of the lean-to, it no doubt represents the earliest form of man-made shelter. Visually it can be thought of as a figure valorizing the opposition divergence/convergence (Diagram 3):



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The apex of the triangle acts, on the one hand, as an index sign pointing to something particular, and on the other, as two lines extending out into infinity. Triangles also dissect and dynamicize space by creating slants and inclined planes. Modernism, although striving for geometrical purity and simplicity, traditionally disdains triangular figures, which it associates with folkloristic gables. These it replaces with squares or blocks connoting infinitely rational functionality (the block as the base for still another block, which is the base for still another block, etc.). The A-frame house, which is planted firmly on the ground, is only latently performatistic. From the postmodernist perspective it might be thought of as citing the primal, triangular lean-to; from the modernist perspective it carries a structural feature—the gable—to a logical, unifying conclusion. Performatism, by contrast, takes triangularity and makes it into a figure of belief: it tilts it and positions it in precarious, unexpected ways, suggesting that its normal function of providing shelter and stability has been overcome. A secondary device involved in performative triangulation is the use of acute angles. These "sharpen" the dynamic relationship between the concrete presence (convergence) and ineffable absence

(divergence) that is played out in the triangular scene. The acute angle, which constricts space within the building and wastes space without, suggests mathematically mediated precision and rigor without usually having any real functional value (the Flatiron building is the exception confirming the rule). Finally, triangulation suggests a paradoxical, performative way of overcoming the semantic opposition of verticality/horizontality that normally helps define all architectural epochs. Utopian modernist architecture, for example, foregrounds verticality according to the building-block principle noted above. Postmodern architecture, which is interested in the horizontal relations of context and conditionality, relativizes and sometimes even parodies the utopian rationality of modernism (when Philip Johnson, for example, tops the International Style of his famous A.T.&T. skyscraper with a piece of bric-a-brac, he effectively brings the high-flying utopian aspirations it cites back down to historical earth). Performatist architecture, by contrast, revitalizes the upward motion by casting it as a dynamic, oblique line or plane, which can, however, also be perceived just as well as a conduit of downward motion (see also the discussion of kinesis below). Such a line is neither ornamental nor functional, but demonstrative and performative: it draws attention to and revitalizes some symbolic relation located along the axis of the high and the low. As in the original ostensive scene, we are made to perceive architectonic space as a paradoxical unity existing prior to these two semantic opposites. It is also perhaps not entirely coincidental that the triangular constellation is reified in the originary ostensive scene itself, which cannot be reduced to anything less than a triadic relation.[\(12\)](#)

#### **4. Kinesis**

Kinesis is important to performatist architecture because it is uniquely suited to reifying transcendence by architectonic means, namely by suggesting that a static object, a building, is doing something that it cannot, that is, move. Usually, this takes place in the functional context of triangulation: the oblique side of the triangle suggests that a dynamic, “sliding” relationship between up and down is being mediated by the building. Modernist architecture, inasmuch as it follows the building-block principle, tends to promote stasis; postmodern architecture (such as the early Frank Gehry house) often suggests movement, but always in a non-directed way. An intermediate position seems to be occupied by Gehry’s recent work, as in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Nationale-Nederlanden Building in Prague, or the conference room in the DG Bank in Berlin. These structures, which seem to wriggle and squirm in all directions without really going anywhere, might still be thought of as examples of postmodern undecidability. At the same time, however, their undulating folds and bends may also be considered unique, amorphous forms evoking the very origin of form itself.[\(13\)](#) Deconstructivist architecture, such as Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin, is also very much

kinetic. Libeskind, though, emphasizes dysfunctionality and absence (the fractured, oddly arranged floor plan of the Jewish Museum is, for example, said to be reminiscent of a shattered Star of David, the empty inner spaces suggest the void left by the murder of the European Jews rather than sliced-away matter). In principle, at least, the kinetic architecture of performatism would always have to point out where it wants to move to—hence the importance of triangulation.

## 5. Impendency

A device related to kinesis and theistic creation is what I would call impendency (from *impendere*, to hang over, threaten). Buildings of this kind are architectonically so dynamic that they seem to be on the verge of collapse; they work, as it were, by putting fear of the Lord and awe of the architect into the viewer at the same time. This device, which I have found in several cases in Berlin, has certain equivalents in modernist architecture, as, for example, in Frank Lloyd Wright's elegantly cantilevered Fallingwater House [\(14\)](#) or Mies van der Rohe's National Gallery in Berlin, whose heavy black steel-and-concrete roof seems to float on air. The difference between modernism and performatism can be traced back to the difference between transcendence mediated by technical rationality and transcendence mediated by simple, wondrous configurations. In impendent modernist structures like the ones named, we are supposed to be aware that technical wizardry such as reinforced concrete or high-tension steel is keeping the precipitously hanging structures in place; in performatist ones, we are deliberately made to experience how a building seems to overcome imminent collapse. This sublime drama is human, and not technical: it is an expression of the architect's will or willfulness, rather than a demonstration of technical prowess. Postmodernist, particularly deconstructivist, buildings also thematize collapse and dysfunctionality. However, they do this without the metaphysical optimism of performatism, which plays out the non-rational, faith-based possibility of overcoming materiality, gravity, or functionality *per se*.

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## 6. Wholeness (closure)

Wholeness and closure are frequently thematized in performatist architecture, which stylizes them using novel, egg-shaped structures rather than the geometric, rational circles of modernism. Closure is of course anathema to postmodernism's tactics of boundary transgression and delimitation; modernism tends to favor open spaces and the utopian unlimitedness implied by them. The notion of closure is, incidentally, a crucial aspect of the originary scene according to Gans. In his scenario, the protagonists who have just created the first sign must stand back from

it to admire its wholeness and closedness: “the creation of a formal object in the sign requires that the criteria for formal closure be imposed by the subject” (Gans 1997, 29). This ability to impose closure through semiotic mediation is, in turn, the condition marking the “minimal structure of human will” (1997, 29). Performatism, one could say, revitalizes this originary moment in an architectonic act.

## **7. Framing (disassociation)**

Intermediate frames are an unreliable, but nonetheless essential part of the performatist scene: they provide the structure that enables dynamic acts of transcendence to occur at all, but are themselves necessarily fallible and dependent on an ostensive sign (the “inner frame”) or on other, extrinsic frames. As is the case in impendency, performatist architecture often employs frames as tokens of theistic self-revelation. Frames may bend dynamically at odd angles or have missing chunks suggesting a paradoxical confluence of architectonic might and impotence in the face of the Beyond; very often the frame seems to disassociate itself radically from its content (or vice versa). Postmodernist architecture sometimes thematizes frames, but, like Derrida, isn’t really interested in them as mediators of origin or transcendence. An example of this is the Frank Gehry house, which is an older building framed by a junky-looking new fence that establishes a liminal space between the two—readers interested in this may want to refer to Jameson’s well-known analysis (Jameson 1991, 97-129). The modernist frame, as exemplified by Mies van der Rohe’s Banking Pavilion in the Toronto-Dominion Center or the National Gallery in Berlin, creates an autonomous, transparent space for the individual to regard the world anew through a frame connoting technically mediated rationality.[\(15\)](#) The postmodernist frame is a liminal, schizoid one that creates a relationship of spatial undecidability between the solid frame and its voided content. Examples of this can be seen in many buildings of Oswald Mathias Ungers, who likes to cite and stylize the modernist, structural grid, in effect making what was once an essentialist principle into a superficial ornament.

## **8. Centering + Ostensivity**

Performatist structures like to point at things for reasons outlined above in the discussion of triangulation; sometimes they also like to center them *and* point at them. I have found a few odd examples of this, although it seems a minor, hard-to-implement device. Postmodernism, obviously, eschews all centrification; modernism centers things by way of symmetrical arrangement but doesn’t point at them.

## **9. Oneness (generativity)**

In at least one instance, I’ve found a building, Mathias Oswald Ungers’ Family Court in Berlin, that plays with a single form (a square) in a kinetic, three-dimensional

performance suggesting that other forms are being generated out of it in a dynamic, open-ended way. This mixture of rational, radical monism and ludic generativity suggests a synthesis of modernism and postmodernism. Modernism is rigidly monist but doesn't play; postmodern hates monism but likes to play. Representing generativity in architecture directly is in any case a very ambitious, aesthetically difficult move that will probably be limited to a small number of structures.

## **Performatist Architecture in Berlin**

Before I start my virtual stroll through Berlin, the reader should be aware that I will be treating these buildings in terms of their place in the performatist code rather than in regard to their urban context, the oeuvre of their planners, and their success or failure as functional and aesthetic objects—that is, the usual subjects of architectural criticism. Those familiar with German and curious about these and other topics might want to consult Falk Jaeger's well-informed and richly illustrated *Architektur für das neue Jahrtausend*, which provides the most up-to-date critical overview of the architectural scene in Berlin of the 1990's. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my research assistant, Franziska Havemann, who was instrumental in having the pictures taken and digitally "developed."

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## **The Estrel Hotel (triangulation, framing, impendency, theist creation)**

The Estrel Hotel ([fig. 1](#), [fig. 2](#)) is performatism at its most exuberant. The hotel's main structure is a gigantic wedge whose apex points down toward a specific spot on earth (you, the observer) while its open angles stretch upwards and outwards toward the infinite bounds of the sky. The upwardly directed push from solid, gleaming mass to nothingness is accentuated by an empty frame above extending the wedge structure below. The sky itself then fills out the emptied earthly construct—a common performatist device suggesting a transcendent goal. The most striking feature of the building is the enormous wopperjawed wedge resting on the inclined plane of the building's forefront. You could think of it as an impendent threat (the proverbial ton of bricks about to slam down on your head) or as a load on a ramp miraculously defying the laws of gravity. The theist implications are here, I think, self-evident: as Jaeger writes, "you can almost imagine how the architects took a knife and carved the form out of a block of clay" (2001, 179). Viewed from the side (not visible in these pictures), the Estrel also suggests the intent of a theistically inspired creator to overcome materiality. A large chunk has been carved out of the fore and aft parts of the building, which are linked only by a catwalk; the jaggedly running juxtaposition of glass (above) and stone (below) along the building

suggests a willful, if uneven, transition from solid earth to immaterial sky.

### **The Kant Triangle (kinesis, triangulation, impendency)**

The Kant Triangle ([fig. 3](#)), located prominently next to the Bahnhof Zoo train station, is not especially performative in terms of its basic ornamentation. Indeed, the reflective glass surface on the side, the juxtaposition of quadratic and circular figures as well as the ornamental struts are all typical features of postmodernism. What makes the building extravagantly performative is the fact that it really and truly *moves*: the triangular gizmo on top is a kind of gigantic weather vane or sail that actually shifts when the wind builds up enough (initially unaware of this fact, I made a mental note to stay clear when the first big gust of wind came along). The oversized weather vane does have a function of sorts—it can be used to clean the building—but there are probably easier and less ostentatious ways to go about doing this. With this kind of building, the context is secondary. Your attention involuntarily focuses on the giant triangle, which, depending on the way the wind is blowing, decenters itself again by pointing outward towards something in the scene around it. This is a good working example of transcendent functionalism. The “function” of the vane is to attract attention to itself so that it can refocus that attention elsewhere once again; the agency guiding that function (the wind) is part of a bigger, natural, ineffable frame that transcends us all while at the same time leaving a spatial, terrestrial marker incontrovertibly demonstrating its existence.

### **Neues Kranzler Eck Shopping Mall, Kurfürstendamm (triangulation, transparency, framing, kinesis, theistic creation)**

Also centrally located near, and visible from, Bahnhof Zoo. The extreme acute angle of the transparent, triangulated facade “wastes” space in an extravagant, visible way incompatible with any quotidian function ([fig. 4](#)). Paradoxically, this grand display of ornamental excess is derived from the Euclidian axiom that two non-parallel planes in space must converge. The true function of this rationally motivated ornamentation would indeed appear to be to direct the observer’s gaze upwards in the most radical possible way ([fig. 5](#)). As in many other structures, the half-built transparent roofing and the incomplete frames ([fig. 6](#), [fig. 7](#)) suggest that the heavens above are the real, ultimate roof of the work of art (designed either by a theist, personal God interested in building a shopping mall, or a theist, incompletely omnipotent architect, in this case Helmut Jahn). A nice ornamental touch is provided by the two aviaries ([fig. 8](#)), which house tropical birds. They repeat the triangular structure of the building as a frame while also displaying living, squawking symbols of transcendence.

### **Peek and Cloppenburg Department Store, Kurfürstendamm (framing,**

### **kinesis, transparency, triangulation)**

The transparent mass of this department store on the Kudamm ([fig. 9](#)) appears to be flowing out from under its massive, upwardly directed frame. This dramatic disassociation of frame and content thematizes the possibility of overcoming an originary relation, which here takes on the semantic attributes of solid vs. liquid (in functional terms, the transparent shield keeps water off passers-by and prospective customers while at the same time mimicking the attributes of what it is protecting them from). In terms of gender, the transparent, flowing skirt might be thought of as a graceful female counterpoint to the masculine, muscular frame: Peek & Cloppenburg, after all, clothes both men and women.

### **The Baden-Württemberg Office, Tiergartenstraße (theistic creation, triangulation)**

A willful, theist architect has gutted the building, but in a goal-directed, elegant way made clear by triangulation ([fig. 10](#)) The horizon lines leading into the building serve to draw us involuntarily into its space, even as we are taken aback by the drastic, non-functional removal of so much matter from a rectilinear volume. Further rectangular incisions in the main triangular slice heighten this effect even more.

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### **The British Embassy, Wilhelmstraße (theist creation, triangulation)**

Because of its bright, arbitrarily selected colors and playful shapes the British Embassy ([fig. 11](#), [fig. 12](#)) near the Pariser Platz might superficially seem postmodern. Once more, however, I believe a theistic gesture of “I take away and I give” informs the building’s character more than anything else. In general, it looks as if the architect first eviscerated the building and then placed an enormous triangular form in it pointing back directly out to YOU. The odd feeling of being drawn into the building and at the same time repulsed by it is strengthened by the absence of window frames allowing you to find your bearings—the horizon lines recede in such an acute way that you have the impression of no connection between the facade and what is behind it (once more a case of a frame disassociated from its content). The total effect is more than a bit unsettling. The building is massive and yet vulnerable, attractive and yet repelling. This paradox is originary and performative rather than cited or semantic. There is no set of previous codes I am aware of that could help us figure out what the building is doing to us.

### **Indian Embassy, Tiergartenstraße (theist creation)**



One of a spate of new foreign embassies in Berlin trying to outdo one another in architectural brilliance ([fig. 13](#)). It was designed, it would seem, by a theistically inspired architect with a large round cookie cutter.

### **The DG Bank, Pariser Platz (framing, transparency, triangulation, theist creation)**

The usual line on the DG Bank ([fig. 14](#)) is that the overly restrictive building code for the Pariser Platz caused Frank Gehry to design a run-of-the-mill facade, while the real focal point of the building is the bizarre “Horse’s Head” conference room tucked away inside. In performatist terms, however, I find that the facade, in its own way, is no less remarkable or complex than the Bilbao museum or any of Gehry’s other crumply, amorphous metallic structures. The massive, cut-off columns, which simultaneously frame oversize, movable windows, suggest a powerful upward surge which is paradoxically intensified by being chopped off at the top (that’s the theist architect at work again) and by the triangular incline of the transparent window-become-balcony (which suggests overcoming the need for a horizontal frame: [fig. 15](#)). The building as a whole is dramatic juxtaposition of upwardly bound, self-transcending transparency and crude, earthbound materiality: on the one hand, Gehry creates a massive, uncompromising frame; on the other, he tries to get rid of it in a series of incompletely realized, irregular, staggered steps (note how the balconies on the second floor create a slightly protruding step or plane setting up the massive, dramatic removal of volume further above).

### **The Paul Löbe Government Office Building, Regierungsviertel (transparency, impendency, theist creation, framing)**

Placed between the Federal Chancellery and the Reichstag, the Paul Löbe Building ([fig. 16](#)) has the thankless task of linking the massive, brooding Reichstag and the swirling, effervescent Federal Chancellery. Be that as it may, it is still a textbook example of performatist technique. The large chunks cut out of the roof make a transcendent, ineffable frame-the sky-an intrinsic part of the entire architectural statement ([fig. 17](#)). This is a common, but very effective performatist device. The spindly pillars of the roof ([fig. 18](#)) look as if they could be knocked over with one swift kick (in the aftermath of September 11th, one wonders if the architect has had any second thoughts about this impendent feature). The large cuts made in the side of the building are huge theist incisions supposed to make it possible for passersby to observe, at least superficially, just what their elected representatives are up to. After decades of postmodern distrust of visual evidence, performatism-as exemplified in Gans’s notion of the ostensive-suggests that truth can be made present and visible in terms of a specifically framed, artificial scene, even as this scene is always open to resentment over what it cannot depict (in this case the



abstract or cognitive aspects of lawmaking). You don't have to be a hard-boiled cynic to "see through" this particular device, but I think it should be understood together with the total theist message, which implies that the Federal Representatives are also beholden to a higher context of undisclosed origin (German cabinet members, for example, have the option of taking the oath of office either with reference to God or without).

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### **The Sony Center, Potsdamer Platz (kinesis, transparency, centering, theistic creation, triangulation)**

Designed by Helmut Jahn, the megalomaniac German-American architect critics love to hate, and owned by a multinational entertainment moloch, the Sony Center ([fig. 19](#)) is neither *gemütlich* (exuding emotional warmth) nor *volkstümlich* (of the people). It seems to attract visitors not because of any innate charm, but because several large cinemas were cleverly located in or near it. Nonetheless, the Sony Center and the surrounding buildings (also designed by Jahn) are all impressive examples of performatist spatialization. The roof, for example ([fig. 20](#)), suggests a giant whirligig about to take off on its own in defiance of all notions of functionality or common sense; the odd structure in the middle, by contrast, points dramatically downwards to a center point. As a matter of fact, it looks as if a giant dart has just plunged in the Center's roof, dramatically exemplifying the Sony Playstation motto "It's not a game." The typical incompleteness of the roof makes the firmament—and even the megalomaniac architect's ultimate inadequacy before it—a part of the total aesthetic statement. Another oddity is the enigmatic, trestle-like frame planted on the building's roof ([fig. 21](#)). As in many other performatist structures, it seems to transcend both ornamentation and functionality by combining both in a paradoxical way that resists any earthly explanation. Normally, the trestle is found in that epitome of functional ugliness, the train bridge. Planted on the top of a building like this, the trestle becomes an ornament connoting an out-of-place, as yet unachieved functionality that would presumably require us to transcend everything we have known up to now about buildings and train bridges. Unlike postmodernist ornamentation and citation, which is clever and smoothly ironic, this suggests the work of a powerful, yet not perfectly omnipotent hand (that of a theist God or of the architect mimicking Him).

The notion of theist creation also applies to the neighboring Deutsche Bahn Building, which looks as if Jahn took a very large hatchet and chopped it in half ([fig. 22](#)). Depending on your perspective, it could be either a sign of tremendous power or a bow to something higher, a sublime subtraction of mass demonstrating that less can also be infinitely more.

## **Price Waterhouse Coopers Building, Potsdamer Platz (triangulation, transparency)**

This striking Renzo Piano building ([fig. 23](#)) realizes triangulation and transparency in the extreme. Note that the transparent facade of this skyscraper doesn't really reveal any skeletal frame à la Mies ([fig. 24](#)); instead, it accentuates the non-functional, but logically realized acuteness of the triangular frame. This is a typical performatist paradox with a transcendence-seeking resolution. The acute, geometrically rigorous frame thrusting itself out of the building's functional body embodies both ornamentation and functionalism while transcending them both: it is a geometrically defined, rationally conceived, useless ornament whose function is to point upwards and outwards towards an unidentifiable, higher source. If you reverse this function—if you think of yourself being sucked into the space cut out by the building—you are drawn into a newly built, very popular shopping district.

## **The Treptow Crematorium, Baumgartenstraße (all nine performatist devices)**

If you ever have the misfortune to die and be cremated in Berlin, your friends and family will have the good fortune to mourn your passing in this building. Many people think that this is one of the most important and beautiful structures erected in Berlin in the last ten years; indeed, the interest in the Crematorium as an aesthetic object is so great that the cemetery's administrators have had to hire a private company to conduct tours during cemetery off-hours.

Of all the buildings treated here, the Crematorium is the only one that actually fulfils a sacral function, albeit one on the fringe of Church dogma (cremation is a pagan rather than a Christian rite and seems to have become popular in recent years because it's cheaper than a regular full burial). This sacral context, which makes the set to transcendency visible to even the most hidebound cynic, is not, however, a necessary condition of performatism. Indeed, the architects, Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank, used almost identical devices in two completely secular buildings (the Federal Chancellery in Berlin—see [fig. 33](#) below—and the Art Museum in Bonn). This more or less self-contained sacral aesthetic (or aesthetic sacrality) is more important than the context-sensitivity typical of postmodernism. Ideally, the performatist leap to the transcendent can take place anywhere, under any conditions.

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The Crematorium is a veritable encyclopedia of performatist devices. By all appearances, the theist creator seems to have carved it out of a single block (in reality the building is made of plain old poured concrete: [fig. 25](#)). Slices in the roof

([fig. 26](#)) suggest a rationally planned passage to heaven as well as the ease with which even the most solid-seeming material can be made to evanesce. Dematerialization is also suggested by the transparent walls; you can literally see through the entire building. Very effective is also the kinetic manipulation of the facade ([fig. 27](#)); the louvers make matter appear and disappear upon command. The ornamental, absolutely superfluous triangulation defining the three ominous smokestacks ([fig. 28](#), [fig. 29](#)) suggests upward, transcendent expansiveness while pointing downward, as it were, at thee. Not quite visible in the picture is the incision made in the earth, into which the theist creator has, as it were, laid the Crematorium (the actual cremating, which is done by a computer-guided mechanism, takes place underground). Inside, the twenty-nine light-tipped columns arouse universal wonder ([fig. 30](#)). It is hardly necessary to comment on how they simultaneously transcend functionality, materiality and “mere” ornamentation. An at first curious, but on second thought absolutely characteristic feature is the egg suspended from a barely visible wire hung from the ceiling above a round pool ([fig. 31](#), [fig. 32](#)). Here, Schultes and Gill are evidently citing pagan symbols of originary unity (cf. Käplinger 1998). I invite the reader to decide what is more important: the performative, magical representation of that unity, or the derivative fact of its citation. Also striking are the curiously tiered walls of the Crematorium with their regular rows of holes and casket-like incisions with sandpiles at their base. The holes contain lights which, when lit, performatively suggest the dispersion of matter from within; the sandpiles represent the dissolution of matter into dust. These and other devices used in the Crematorium are suggestive of non-Christian sacral structures (the Temple of Karnak, the Great Mosque in Cordoba, Stonehenge, etc.) without, as far as I can tell, really citing them directly. The point is not to quote but to create what Schultes calls “suggestive spatiality” (Schultes 2001, 202) or, as he also once put it, “a new, primeval convention, an architectonic imperative” (Rauterberg 2000).

### **The Federal Chancellery, Regierungsviertel (transparency, kinesis)**

Dubbed the “Chancellor’s Washing Machine” by the general public, this swirling, grandiose structure ([fig. 33](#)), which is the seat of executive power in Germany as well as the Chancellor’s home, has been accused of being gargantuan and excessively garish.<sup>(16)</sup> Like the Reichstag, the Presidential Chancellery, and the Paul Löbe Building, it makes an important positive statement about political culture in today’s Germany. In each case, the decision-making bodies involved could have opted for staid, emotionless structures suggesting stability, bureaucratic efficiency, and consensual continuity—the reassuring hallmarks of postwar German politics. Instead, the vacuum that resulted after German reunification was taken as a chance to fit out Germany with an architectonic face beholden to no particular previous historical style and conveying open, uplifting qualities. This is most certainly one

case where the fall of communism has had a direct aesthetic expression: the building definitely makes a post-millennial statement in Gans's sense.[\(17\)](#)

The Chancellery itself is a great deal larger than my picture suggests. It is flanked by two massive office blocks, and from the distance its boxy exterior does indeed resemble a giant, outlandish household appliance (the popular idea of the building as a kind of gargantuan washing machine fits in well with my notion of transcendent functionalism). The facade, which is the most striking and widely photographed feature, works by radically disassociating frame and content in both vertical and horizontal space. As in the Treptower Crematorium, it is possible to see through the vast building entirely; the structure seeks in this way to disavow its own materiality. Wings have been sliced into the roof suggesting both flight and the overcoming of matter; the flight theme is echoed further below by the pterodactyl-like roof stretched out over the entrance. The profusion of chopped-off pillars suggests theist willfulness mitigated by natural growth (the trees on top). On the horizontal level, the first floor appears to be disassociated entirely from the ground floor; similarly, the louvers in back of the pillars dissect and "move" space on a horizontal axis. On the ground, the oddly configured grass strips repeat the wing patterns above and point us toward the entrance. In general, the building "opens" out towards us and tries to draw us into its space, which is then made to dematerialize as much as possible. This effect of openness, transparency, and upwardly bound movement is entirely conscious and political. Schultes wanted to make this German equivalent of the American White House as open to the public view as possible, and was bitterly disappointed that a Citizen's Information Center he designed was not built in front of the Chancellery (cf. Schultes 2001).

### **The Presidential Chancellery, Tiergarten (wholeness)**

A shiny anthracite egg ([fig. 34](#)), which connotes wholeness while at the same time managing to integrate its natural surroundings into itself visually. The building reflects, but in a humane, inclusive way, and not in the cool, metallic-sunglass-style typical of postmodernism: black and white, nature and culture merge amicably on its receding, self-effacing surface.

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### **The Lemon Office Building (closure + triangulation, impendency, transparency, theist creation)**

Figuratively speaking, this is performatism's way of squaring the circle ([fig. 35](#), [fig. 36](#)). Triangulation, which normally involves stylizing convergence and divergence, is combined here in a paradoxical way with circularity and wholeness. Seen from the road, the Lemon Building seems to float over its base, which is marked by crisp

incisions that seemingly undermine its wholeness and stability—all the work of an architect not quite of this world. In this structure, the occupants of the building unwittingly participate in the performatist plan: undrawn, the window shades realize transparency; drawn, materialization. This spontaneous individual activity of the building's users—something modernist architects disdained as a gross disruption of their rigorous symmetries—is now integrated into the total aesthetic scheme.

### **GSW Office Building, Kochstraße (transparency, kinesis, framing)**

The sail-like structure on top of this building ([fig. 37](#)) as well as the peculiar transparent facade ([fig. 38](#)) work together to create a chimney-like draft that cools the building. This demonstrates that performatist devices need not be non-functional in reality—they just have to look that way. In this case there is also still a certain overlap between postmodern and performatist language. The sail on top can be said to cite 1950's-style buildings (Jaeger 2001, 68) and the red-pink-orange color of the awnings is no doubt still a frivolous, postmodern touch. No longer postmodern, however, is the way the they interact with the transparent frame to suggest dematerialization. The awnings, whose number and arrangement is constantly changing as their users pull them up and down, put on a striking, spontaneous performance while suggesting that material things are being suspended in thin air. The frame itself appears entirely disassociated from its content, which is yet another frame.

### **The Family Court, Kreuzberg (framing, generativity)**

This building by the square-loving German architect Mathias Oswald Ungers still has ties to the postmodern aesthetic. It cites a presumably functional unit, the square or grid, and treats it as a superficial ornament rather than as the external expression of an inner functional principle ([fig. 39](#)). Here, though, it seems to me that Ungers transcends postmodernism by using the square as a generative unit that unfolds in a dynamic second dimension (on the building's facade) and in a third dimension (the empty frame beside it: [fig. 40](#)). In both instances, the square is more than a mere ornament or a simple bearer of functionality. On the two-dimensional plane the kinetically ever expanding squares demonstrate generativity (if observed from top right to bottom left) or, in a way more natural to the eye, reduction to originary unity (if observed from bottom left to top right). The disassociation of frame and content that we have observed elsewhere is realized in an especially radical way off to the left. The frame's contents seem to have taken off for parts unknown, leaving the functional structure behind as a useless ornament reminding us of a just transpired transcendent incident. Ungers, whose manifesto "Towards a New Architecture" (1960) was a harbinger of postmodernism, has more recently expressed himself in ways suggestive of performatism. In remarks about his

Landesbibliothek in Karlsruhe (Ungers 1992) he notes that the building he designed is supposed to “look as if it had already always been there” (his “schon immer” being normal German usage and not a Hegel or Derrida quotation). In emphasizing the “uniqueness” (Einmaligkeit) of the building, Ungers rejects the notion of following an “eclecticistic principle.” Rather, he “decomposes” aspects of other structures to form timeless architectonic invariants striving for perfection. His technique consists of “a play of formal elements which remain the same independently of historical development and which are employed in varied form and in the most varied epochs in different works of architecture.” This “iconographic principle,” as Ungers calls it, resembles the sacral practice of icon painting: “Just as the icon is the original image [Urbild] and in the course of time is perfected ever more, so too does the the process of assimilation consist not just in banal imitation, but also in ever new interpretations of what are essentially the same architectonic elements.” His plan for the Library is thus “not just the extension of an already existing architectonic concept, but also its continuation in the sense of a search for perfection.”

### **The Jewish Museum, Berlin Mitte (kinesis, theist neglect, incomplete triangulation)**

Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum ([fig. 41](#)) is a deconstructivist, late-postmodern structure that, however, shares numerous devices with performatism (just as deconstruction itself shares certain theoretical positions with Gans’s GA and performatism). One of the most striking differences between deconstructive and performatist architecture is the former’s metaphysical pessimism. Although manifestly theist—it stylizes an act of originary creation/destruction rather than citing previous styles—the Jewish Museum suggests the willful neglect of a theist God: the cuts in the building look as though an evil Other has slashed the building with a giant razor ([fig. 42](#)). Generally speaking, triangulation is either lacking (forms are simply oblique) or is incomplete, as in the cuts on the facade ([fig. 41](#)). The slanting, squat steles topped by greenery are more suggestive of gravestones than of structural devices; together with the rest of the building they suggest a world gone awry but slowly trying to set itself right again.

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*Times*, September 2, 2001.

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## Notes

1. The second half of this paper was presented as a talk at the John-F.-Kennedy-Institut in Berlin on 15 November 2001. [\(back\)](#)
2. The German original has in the meantime appeared in *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach* 46 (2000), 149-173. [\(back\)](#)
3. See *Chronicle* 209, June 3, 2000. [\(back\)](#)
4. I am following here the argumentation outlined in *Signs of Paradox* (Gans 1997). [\(back\)](#)
5. In his internet "Introduction to GA" ([anthropoetics.ucla.edu/gaintro.htm](http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/gaintro.htm)) Gans writes: "The spectator's separation from the esthetic representation is experienced as a *formal barrier* or frame that surrounds it, independently of the reality of the inaccessible central figure that is necessary to the sacred." [\(back\)](#)
6. For an extensive discussion of how ostensive generates first the imperative and then the declarative see Gans 1981. [\(back\)](#)
7. As Girard (1987, 64) writes, "if you examine the pivotal terms in the finest analyses of Derrida, you will see that beyond the deconstruction of philosophical concepts, it is always a question of the paradoxes of the sacred [...]." [\(back\)](#)
8. As Gans says in this regard, "Girard's key limitation is a mirror image of that of Derrida: where the latter can only comprehend declarative truth, the former sees only the ostensive" (Gans 1997, 58). [\(back\)](#)
9. See my analyses of these works in Eshelman 2001. [\(back\)](#)
10. Analogous to the theist God, who places humankind into an imperfect framework in which He then intervenes in unpredictable, unknowable ways. Like acts of God in general, theist devices may appear to be pointless or unmotivated. [\(back\)](#)
11. Readers familiar with deconstructive discourse will recognize this as the exact theological opposite of what is done by deconstruction. For deconstruction, such defects or lacunae mark the fatal nothingness lurking beyond signification. The whole point of occidental metaphysics, from its perspective, is to cover up, defer or



deny these markers through the application of ever more discursive twists and turns. The melancholy, metaphysically pessimistic goal of deconstruction is to critique this cover-up or repression through the application of its *own* discourse, which it turn helps realize precisely that deferral which it itself is unmasking. [\(back\)](#)

12. One could oppose this to Heidegger's notion of the *Geviert* or fourfold as the point of architectonic origin (see Heidegger 1997, 106). For example, one could think of the threefold relation as being quasi-semantic and ostensive, the fourfold relation between "earth and air, men and gods" as being always already semantic or, as Gans and Derrida would say, "metaphysical." In his own writings on architecture, Derrida (1997) suggests two by now familiar patterns derived from his text analyses. Architecture may either be labyrinthine, a mark of the failure of the Tower of Babel to impose a universal language/architecture on humankind (322), or "an experience of the Supreme which is not higher but in a sense more ancient than space and therefore is a spatialization of time" (323)—an architectural incarnation of *différance*. In this last instance, Derrida is a hair's breadth away from generative anthropology's notions of the human and the sacred. What is missing, as always, is the causal nexus that would explain why this leap from time to space came about in the first place. Derrida's originary moment remains a brilliant, self-engendering act without any anchoring in the scene of the human. [\(back\)](#)

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13. Gehry himself considers these structures to be no longer postmodern. However, the Nationale-Nederlanden Building in Prague (popularly called "Ginger and Fred" or "The Dancing House") as well as the so-called "Horse's Head" conference room in the DG Bank contain anthropomorphic elements reminiscent of the postmodern habit of semanticizing architectonic relations. In addition, the "Horse's Head" contains what look to me like large buckyballs, thus suggesting—by way of quotation—a double origin of undular organicity and angular crystallicity. [\(back\)](#)

14. Whose sagging balcony now has to be held up by an elaborate set of trusses, as recently reported by the *New York Times* (Wald 2001, 1). [\(back\)](#)

15. For more on this technique see Neumeyer 1994, 78. [\(back\)](#)

16. The mainstream press's reaction to the Chancellery has been mixed. A positive view can be found in Rauterberg 2000. Readers interested in some of the standard criticism directed at the building should consult the interview conducted by *Der Spiegel* with Schultes (Schultes 2001). [\(back\)](#)

17. In Gans's reckoning, post-millennialism starts with the reunification of Central Europe and the victory of capitalism, rather than with the year 2000. [\(back\)](#)