Post 4

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Theory Smackdown: Performatism Tussles with Five Approaches to Literary Post-postmodernism

As I've noted in my [Annotated Bibliography](#) of works on post-postmodernism, there are an awful lot of books with "after postmodernism" or "beyond postmodernism" in their titles, but very few that swallow the notion that there really is an "after." Regarding literature, which is traditionally the place where academics begin writing cultural history, you can literally count the approaches to post-postmodernism on the fingers of one hand (if you don't include performatism or if you have six fingers). As of this writing, we have my *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (2000/2008), Nicoline Timmer's *Do You Feel It, Too?* (2010), Robin van den Akker and Tim Vermeulen's manifesto/website *Notes on Metamodernism* (2010), Christian Moraru's *Cosmodernism* (2011), Mary K. Holland's *Succeeding Postmodernism* (2013), and Irmtraud Huber's *Literature after Postmodernism* (2014). (Alan Kirby's *Digimodernism* [2009] is more about the effect of media on culture than about literature in the usual sense of the word and, in order to simplify things, won't be treated here).

In this post I'd like to compare these approaches directly. Obviously, I can't discuss all the points that the other authors make or go into too much detail, but I think I can give the reader a rough idea of where the main areas of agreement and disagreement lie. As a kind of litmus test I'll use the notion of **historicity** to show how the different approaches position themselves in regard to the "after" in after postmodernism. Although I obviously favor you-know-what, I'll try to present the other positions as fairly as possible (although I can't resist a jibe or two here and there).

Performatism is explicitly historical, in the sense that it treats the transition from postmodernism to post-postmodernism as an epochal change, as from Baroque to Classicism or from Romanticism to Realism. Although starting with clear-cut oppositions, the epochal approach recognizes that there is also a great deal of transitional overlap. Sometimes elements of both systems coexist uneasily in new works, and the new system usually begins by reworking elements of the old one.

For example, as in postmodernism, the performatist **double frame** assumes that experience is constructed and not authentic or direct. Unlike postmodernism, however, performatism uses that constructedness to achieve unified forms of experience that are absolutely alien to postmodernism (the most important involve experiences of love, belief, beauty, and transcendence). In other words, performatist works start off with a certain norm of postmodernism (that all experience is constructed) and use it for an entirely

different end and in a way that is taboo in postmodernism. You could say, I suppose, that performatism is still "dependent" on postmodernism or "filiated" with it, but this is formal hair-splitting: the values it conveys and the effects it produces are the opposite of the ones in postmodernism.

Also, performatism is not a return to or a repetition of modernism, which is fixated on unmediated experience, innovation, and authenticity. The driving cause behind the rise of performatism is boredom with postmodernism and not any particular political, economic, social, or media-driven source. Performatism starts, roughly speaking, in the mid 1990s.

Christian Moraru speaks of a "weak epochality" regarding his **cosmodernism** (p. 314). Cosmodernism still "rel[ies] copiously on postmodern techniques" and doesn't have its own stylistic paradigm (p. 316). In his view, cosmodernism starts in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Hence its cause is geopolitical rather than aesthetic. For this reason the beginning of cosmodernism overlaps with the end of postmodernism in the 1990s. In fact, Moraru tends to oppose cosmodernism more to modernism than to postmodernism (see p. 32), and some of his exemplary writers, like Dom Delillo and Raymond Federman, are usually regarded as classic representatives of postmodernism.

The key term in cosmodernism is "**relationality**," which is also central to postmodern ethics. Relationality is the "lynchpin" of cosmodernism (p. 3) and means

> "the worlds 'parts' such as people, nation-states, 'spheres' (and hemispheres), 'regions,' 'civilizations,' and racial-ethnic communities coming together and being by being with each other" (p. 3).

The main difference to postmodern relationality, which emphasizes the unbridgeable gap between the subject and others, is that Moraru places equal emphasis on "being-with" or "across" and "gap" (p. 23). Moraru, in other words, is hedging on difference and alterity. They are still there, but cosmodern American prose would

> "relate to those others and their otherness as such, to the different-as-different, along the cosmodern lines of concern and responsibility and so 'give back,' respond to the 'gift' ethically (p. 24).

Moraru would also not "do away with otherness altogether" (p. 53), as, for example, Alain Badiou does. Instead, he occupies a position close to the conciliatory late poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy (pp. 53-54). This may sound like philosophical nit-picking, but it is an important difference. There *are* positions on otherness that are no longer poststructuralist/postmodernist, and Badiou's is definitely one of them—those

interested should take a look at his short and very blunt critique of poststructuralist, Levinas-based ethics in *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Chapter 2, pp. 18-29).

Performatism itself is also no longer oriented towards difference or alterity as the starting point of ethics. Difference can be bridged (at least temporarily and performatively) through mimesis and intuition, i.e. by spontaneously imitating something positive in someone else who may be very different from you in all possible regards. The focus is on these positive points of human interaction and not on how language always manages to sandbag them before and after the fact. The performatist take on globalization is also much narrower than Moraru's and is motivated by an aesthetic, rather than a geopolitical turn. (For more on this see my article "Archetypologies of the Human" that Moraru and Amy Elias kindly included in their 2015 essay collection *The Planetary Turn*; for the full source see the [Bibliography of Performatism](#)).

All in all, Moraru's assessment of **cosmodernism** as a "weak epochality" that is "not unlike" postmodernism (p. 316) also applies to this own theoretical position, which I would describe as a kind of a "soft" attitude towards cultural difference that is not unlike late poststructuralism. Difference for him is still a problem, but it can be dealt with ethically and responsibly in the "cultural imaginary" of cosmodernist prose. Also, cosmodernism "is not postmodernism's only successor" (p. 316) and postmodernism is not "'over'" (p. 316). The impression Moraru leaves is one of a **hedgy historicism**; cosmodernism is different than postmodernism but still overlaps with it and hasn't quite managed to displace it.

In her ***Succeeding Postmodernism*** (2013) **Mary K. Holland** seems pretty conflicted about whether or not to declare for post-postmodernism as a historical period. First, she states that 21-st century literature is no longer postmodern:

> "American fiction in the twenty-first century looks, reads, and feels profoundly different from twentieth-century postmodern literature [...]. It displays a new faith in language and a certainty about the novel's ability to engage in humanist pursuits that have not been seen since postmodernism shattered both in the middle of the last century" (pp. 1-2).

This sounds pretty up-front. However, if you read a little further you run into a whole bunch of caveats suggesting that the new trend is actually still postmodernism and that postmodernism is actually a big *success* because it has managed to take the its own deeply anti-humanistic understanding and use of language (which effectively subvert mediation, reconciliation, and empathy between human beings) and couple that with a humanist or Enlightenment

attitude that suddenly makes all that stuff possible that postmodernism was always against:

> "[...] novels of the first decade of the twenty-first-century move from struggle to success, retaining the conviction that we are born into a linguistically determined world, while constructing new avenues towards meaning and meaningful human connection through signification and mediation themselves" (p. 2).

Towards the end of the book, Holland positively twists herself into a pretzel to avoid saying that she's actually been talking about something genuinely new:

> "The primary goal of this book has not been to declare the end of postmodernism, or necessarily to refute that claim, or even to postulate the nature of the movement that will dethrone postmodernism, as inevitably something must, or to name that movement" (p. 199).

Instead, she wants to

> "[...] engage with these territories of inquiry without offering an eclipsable decisiveness that would only wrest attention from readers who know better than to put their faith in it: now is not the time to do hastily and with too little information what will surely be done with more evidence and staying power many years hence" (p. 199).

In short, she is kicking the can on down the road.

The main problem with Holland, as far as I can tell, is that she has super-glued herself to the poststructural concept of language that has been academic dogma for the last forty years and can't conceive of any type of signification that is not based on a split, problematical sign (i.e., a sign that can never, ever achieve unity of meaning, affect, or perception and in fact actively undercuts all three).

Holland's way out of postmodernism is, depending on how you look at it, either deeply paradoxical or doesn't make any sense. Postmodernism à la Hollandaise reintroduces humanism through the use of split, critical, anti-humanistic language; like Baron von Münchhausen, it grabs itself by its own shock of hair and pulls itself out of the swamp of irony and cynicism that its anti-humanistic language created in the first place. In all fairness to Holland, though, she shares this conflictedness with a lot of writers out there, the most notable being David Foster Wallace, who was undoubtedly trying to get away from postmodernism but whose language and narrative style were still steeped in it. This, however, is a topic for another blog entry.

Since the new (and at the same time old) trend assumes a "linguistically determined world" based on poststructural language, Holland also doesn't have much use for **performatism**:

> "Eshelman's commitment to a repaired sign-thing gap makes his vision of post-postmodernism least useful in my opinion, since it is central to my reading of twenty-first-century literature's recuperation of affect and meaning that such literature can only successfully overcome the problems of language by using a language that is inherently problematic, rather than casting back to an early idealization of organic meaning" (FN 34, p. 20).

Performatism, of course, doesn't have much use for Holland, because it assumes that language use is shifting towards monist forms of signification like ostensivity and mimesis that allow for unified or unmediated communication and shut out the endless regress of hypercritical, language-based navel-gazing that constitutes poststructuralism and postmodernism. And, unlike Holland, performatism does not suggest that we are returning to humanism. The notion of the **double frame** assumes that texts (and other people) impose themselves on us by force. This refers to a fairly brutal, originary, anthropological state or scene (a tip of the hat here to Eric Gans's **Generative Anthropology**) and is not a misty-eyed "idealization of organic meaning."

Somewhat weirdly, Holland winds up her monograph by naming the triumphant, basically-still-postmodern-period-that- she-doesn't-want-to-name "metamodernism." Unfortunately she does so without acknowledging the existence of Vermeulen and van den Akker's rather similar concept of metamodernism that had been floating around the internet for three years (something unprofessional enough that Vermeulen complained about it in his review article in the *American Book Review*, pp. 8-9; see the [Bibliography of Post-postmodernism](#)).

Holland's position is probably best described as **heavily conflicted posthistoricism**: she sees a lot of things that don't jibe with poststructuralism and postmodernism, but she still can't tear herself away from the poststructuralist theory of language. The result is a believe-it-or-not type narrative in which postmodernist language triumphantly saves itself by reintroducing the humanist set of values that it originally set out to subvert or destroy*.*

In her ***Do You Feel It Too?*** (2010) **Nicoline Timmer** doesn't reflect very much (if at all) on competing notions of post-postmodernism or on the more general problem of historicity. Perhaps because of this, her argumentation (unlike Holland's) is very straightforward and to the point. She uses the phrase "post-postmodernist syndrome" to characterize David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Mark

Danielewski's *House of Leaves,* and leaves it pretty much at that. For Timmer, postmodernism has been relegated to a "background" or "cultural setting" in the works of these and other writers of this generation (p. 13). The distinguishing feature of post-postmodernism is the "re-humanization" of the subject (p. 23), which she describes using a "narrative psychological approach" (p. 51 ff.).

To understand Timmer's arguments better, it's best to skip her lengthy justification of this approach in Chapter 2 and move on over to her *Appendix* (pp. 359-361), in which she provides a grab-bag list of 19 features of the post-postmodern novel that she has culled from her study. These features, which at first appear somewhat off the cuff, pack a hard historicizing punch: they all offer the clear distinctions between postmodern and post-postmodern that you need to re-start history. Here is a paraphrase of some of the most important points:

- post-postmodern novels have a different narrative structure than postmodern ones; this structure is needed to remedy the "existential crisis" of the self (p. 359); these novels also construct "shared frameworks of reality" (p. 361) rather than devolve into endless metacritiques of existing discourse;
- post-postmodern novels desire some form of community and have a "structural need for a we" (p. 359); this also takes place on the level of reader reception, i.e. these novels appeal to the reader to empathize, experience a feeling of community etc.;
- post-postmodern novels stress sameness instead of difference (p. 359);
- human figures in these novels "long for some form of containment" (p. 359);
- post-postmodern novels are characterized by a "willingness to belief," a "suspension of disbelief," and "taking a leap of faith" (p. 359);
- language use in post-postmodern novels is "a function of relationships between persons" (p. 360) and not deterministic, as in postmodernism; here Timmer cites DFW who is citing Wittgenstein;
- the "default state in the post-postmodern novel is the solipsistic experience world"; the main problem is to communicate inner feelings when one feels "empty inside" (p. 360);
- "postmodern techniques are still used in the post-postmodern novel, but they have a different function" (p. 360);
- post-postmodern novels still have irony, but it's not the "default mode" anymore (p. 360*).*

I won't go through these criteria point for point, but taken together they are more than enough to make a hard historical cut. From my own peculiar point of view, most of these statements are also compatible with **performatism**, though

I would phrase them somewhat differently and organize them more stringently. The one major difference is the approach to language (I prefer Gans's ostensive semiotics to Wittgenstein's play with language). All in all, however, Timmer's criteria offer a reliable guide to identifying post-postmodern narrative, and, taken together, they are definitely enough to get literary history rolling again.

As of this writing, *Literature after Postmodernism* (2014) by **Irmtraud Huber** is the newest addition to the "after" genre. Apart from treating four major novelists (Mark Danielewski, Jonathan Safran Foer, Michael Chabon, and David Mitchell), Huber provides a very even-handed survey of theories of post-postmodernism in Chapter 1 (pp. 21-50), so that if you don't trust my version of things here you can always double-check with her.

Huber has only one serious misunderstanding of my own position. This is where she suggests that my **gender politics**are "dubious" because I identify postmodernism with "deistic feminine formlessness" and want to reinstate a kind of theism based on the authority of the father (p. 258 FN 7). In fact, my performatist theism is an equal-opportunity enterprise allowing for both male and female deification (a good example being the movie *Dogma* featuring Alanis Morissette as God, which I cite on p. 232 of my book). Also, one of my former pupils, **Yuan Xue**, has written an entire (German-language) book using performatism to show how post-postmodern narratives construct semi-divine transgender hero-heroines (see the [Performatism Bibliography](#)), so performatism can't be all that male chauvinistic to begin with.

Huber is very cautious regarding the question of **historicity**. She notes that "a move beyond postmodernist paradigms can be discerned" but that the change "does not seem to fit comfortably into the logic of succession" described by Pierre Bourdieu (p. 223), i.e. that the new epoch actively and dramatically negates the old one or breaks with it. Here she quite correctly speaks of a "pervasive lack of antagonistic attitudes" (p. 224), and suggests that "[post-postmodern] reconstruction is post-Oedipal" (p. 224) and that it entails "absence, yearning and construction, instead of struggle and succession" (p. 228).

This is all true, but it doesn't mean that there's no epochal change where there is no dramatic rupture. Postmodernism doesn't have to be negated because it has gone flat; it's like drinking stale beer (you liked it when it was all bubbly, but you just don't want it anymore when all the spark has gone out of it). Negating postmodernism would be like beating a dead horse (or a dead shark, if you happen to think of Damien Hirst). Huber's own solution to this is to describe the development of post-postmodernism as a kind of coming-of-age story or *Bildungsroman*; interested readers can find her full account of this on pp. 241-254.

Be that as it may, **Huber** doesn't seem to have any practical problem with the existence of post-postmodern literature. She proposes a **four-point**

program of her own that contains the following features, which I'll summarize briefly:

1) A "return to the real, though not [...] to realism" (p. 216). By this Huber means that post-postmodern literature is based on "**construction**" and a **turn towards the fictive** (p. 218); post-postmodern narratives "focus on the constructive role of fictions and ask for their contribution to and responsibility towards the world we live in" (p. 218).

2) "**Stylistic continuity with postmodernism**." Postmodern aesthetic strategies are used, but in a different way than in postmodernism (p. 219). This refunctionalization of postmodern metafictional style is pragmatic and not ontological and epistemological (i.e. not concerned with showing that all discourse is a lie or doomed to failure from the start):

> "Metafiction no longer seeks to expose and deconstruct fiction's underlying premises. Instead it reconstructs fiction as precarious communication and focuses on the ways in which we draw on fictions to make sense of ourselves, our past, our present and our future" (p. 221).

3) "A focus on **communication as an intersubjective connection**" (p. 216) and a "pragmatic focus on **communicative bonding**" (p. 221). Huber also says that post-postmodernism rejects the "arbitrary rupture at the core of the sign" (p. 221) that is crucial to postmodernism. Huber's own theoretical orientation is toward Wolfgang Iser's anthropological notion of the fictive; because Iser himself was pretty well outside the pale of poststructuralism she has no problems with alternatives to poststructural language. In any case, Huber's literary examples

> "[...] exploit the paradigmatic fictionality of the fantastic mode to explore the fictive as a communication which is successful not necessarily in the sense that it conveys a single intended meaning, but in the sense that it triggers meaning construction, that it gives rise to processes of interpretation in a creative intersubjective connection between sender and recipient" (p. 221).

Note here that post-postmodern fiction doesn't so much create positive meaning as "processes of interpretation" based on what are essentially fictive or constructed premises.

4) Post-postmodern texts are marked by "**doubtful optimism**" (p. 222); the "optimism underlying such constructions is tentative" or "remains precarious" (p. 222). Huber also suggests that such texts "posit the need for representation in order to develop meaningful relations" (p. 223), which is to say that they break with the postmodern ethics based on Levinas which assumes that human subjects are intrinsically alien and unrepresentable to one another.

All these positions are basically compatible with performatism. Conversely, Huber also seems quite comfortable with the performatist double frame (see her remarks on pp. 38-39). With her "coming-of-age" story of post-postmodernism Huber proposes a **gradualist version of literary history**, which remains a history nonetheless.

The last approach, **metamodernism**, was suggested by two young Dutch cultural theorists, Tim Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, in 2010. Metamodernism is a little different in substance from the other theories listed here because up to now, it has been confined pretty much to the web. It started originally as a programmatic statement (Notes on Metamodernism) in a blog that caught on so much that it became a regular internet journal (also called Notes on Metamodernism). Tim Vermeulen tells me that a book is going to be published shortly, but since I haven't seen it, I'm basing my account on the original manifesto and the website.

Part of metamodernism's popularity is that it is based on a fairly simple formula that goes like this:

"[...] metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (pp. 5-6 of the manifesto, which says that its page numbers are "not for citation purposes." Since I'm not sure what page numbers are there for if not for citing, I'm using them anyway).

And:

"The metamodern is constituted by the tension, no, the double-bind, of a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all" (p. 6).

This oscillation is "not a balance" (p. 6); rather

> "it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm" (p. 6).

Essentially, you can plug whatever contrary feelings or effects are generated by a text or work of art into this formula and analyze them according to these pendulum swings or the "double bind." For example, if you take the film *Birdman* that I discuss in Post 3, you could say that Riggan Thomson's wildly dysfunctional stage production of a Raymond Carver story leads into postmodern apathy, whereas the transcendent ending where he turns into Birdman swings back towards metamodern enthusiasm. Because there are "innumerable poles" this kind of analysis can be made more complex, and its back-and-forth movement allows for a lot of free play between what might be called late or "soft" postmodernism and post-postmodernism. (Metamodernism is incidentally programmatically historical: "History, it seems, is moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end" {p. 2}).

Metamodernism also has an epistemological dimension. This means, essentially, that it can be thought of "as-if thinking" (p. 5) or as a construct:

> "Metamodernism moves for the sake of moving, attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever a truth that it never expects to find" (p. 5)

This epistemology sounds suspiciously like postmodernism, which from the get-go is set towards dysfunctionality and failure and searches vainly for a constantly receding truth.

On the other hand, metamodernism is also said to have a historical horizon that reaches beyond postmodernism. Vermeulen and van den Akker use the term *metaxis* to describe this (p. 12), which they define as "impossibly, at once a place that is not a place, a territory without boundaries, a position without parameters" and as being "here, there, and nowhere" (p. 12). If this sounds confusing, it is, but I interpret it to mean that metamodernism also opens a horizon of transcendence ("a future presence that is futureless" p. 12) that exceeds the merely epistemological focus of postmodernism on truth-seeking.

Vermeulen and van den Akker also ascribe metamodernism a neoromantic character (pp. 8-12) because of its oscillation between "enthusiasm and failure" (a quote from the early German romantic Friedrich Schlegel, p. 8) and its interest in turning the "finite into the infinite" (p. 8). I won't go into this line of argumentation any more in further detail, but a great deal depends here on how ordered you think the new epoch or "structure of feeling" is. **Performatism** opts for order and hierarchy (and hence gives the new epoch a neoclassical spin), whereas **metamodernism** "oscillates" freely like a

Romanticism (for more on the neoclassical interpretation of post-postmodernism see my German-language article "Ordnungsästhetik nach der Postmoderne" listed in the [Performatism Bibliography](#)).

Summary: The Consensus on Post-postmodernism

The above discussion has led me to two conclusions.

1. **Cogent theories of post-postmodernism are based directly on a clean break with poststructuralist theory**. Of the six approaches discussed, Mary K. Holland's metamodernism is the most tightly bonded to poststructuralist language theory and hence also the one least willing to acknowledge the end of postmodernism. Because of this, she winds up in the paradoxical (or, more properly, implausible) position of arguing that postmodernism magically renews itself by doing the opposite of what it was always all about. Christian Moraru's cosmodernism, which is oriented towards a conciliatory interpretation of Levinas and the "softened-up" late poststructuralism of Derrida and Nancy, is also correspondingly fuzzy when it comes to making sharp distinctions between postmodernism and its aftermath. Also, his focus on globalization and a geopolitical "cause" of cosmodernism blurs specific differences in literary strategy that the other, specifically literary theories key in on.

   Of the other approaches, all have basically stopped using post-structuralist theory (although they're still acutely aware of it). Performatism uses Gans's concepts of the ostensive and recurs to philosophers like Alain Badiou and Jean-Luc Marion; Irmtraud Huber uses Wolfgang Iser's anthropological concept of the fictive; Nicoline Timmer draws on narrative psychology, and Tim Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker use their own metalanguage that is demonstrably not poststructuralist (they are careful to distinguish their notion of "oscillation" from the way the word is sometimes used in poststructuralism). None of these theories agonize any more at length about whether postmodernism is "really" over with, and all of them actively restart the historical narrative regarding literature (although some more cautiously than others).

2. **There is a basic consensus on post-postmodernism**. The four approaches that break cleanly with poststructuralism—my performat-ism, Timmer's "post-postmodern syndrome," Huber's post-post-modernism and Vermeulen and van den Akker's metamodernism—all share certain common features that taken together will almost certainly form the basis for future discussions of post-postmodernism. These features are as follows:

- Post-postmodern literature is **constructed**, but in a way that is functionally different from postmodern literature. I refer to the device of the double frame, which I believe is specific to post-postmodernism, Timmer speaks of "shared frameworks of reality," Huber literally says "construction" and a "turn towards the fictive," and Vermeulen and van den Akker have their Kantian mode of the "as-if," which means "construct" in philosophical parlance. Post-postmodern constructs are functionally different because they are aimed at achieving the goals listed in the following points:

- Post-postmodern literature no longer focuses on an endless critique of language, discourse and ideology, but instead seeks to **create positive dyadic relations between human subjects**. I speak of the positive imitation of others (mimesis), Timmer of a "structural need for a we," and Huber of "communicative bonding." Vermeulen and van den Akker don't have a specific notion of intersubjectivity, but their neoromantic mode presume-ably allows for it. Moraru hesitates between a "being-with" and a "gap" between humans, but I think that his concept of cosmo-dernism is slightly weighted towards the possibility of positive intercultural constructs.

- Post-postmodern literature has a **basically optimistic "set" or dynamic** to it, even if the end results are not always blissfully happy. This means that it focuses on sameness rather than difference (Timmer), on successful rather than unsuccessful communication (Eshelman), or has a "precarious" or "doubtful" optimism to it (Huber); I also speak of "metaphysical optimism," which is similar. Vermeulen and van den Akker see post-postmodernism as part of an oscillation between (negative) postmodern aspects and (postive) metamodern ones, whereby the metamodern ones tend to hold sway. This basic optimism chokes off, mutes, or suppresses postmodern irony, which is relegated to a secondary, kibitzing role.

- Post-postmodern literature opens up a **horizon of potential transcendence**. I speak of a distinct tendency towards theism (belief in a Higher Force of some kind) and, in narrative terms, of overcoming the double frame (creating distinct events). Timmer stresses that post-postmodernism is characterized by a "willingness to belief" and "leaps of faith," and van den Akker and Vermeulen speak of metamodern metataxis as an impossible "place without a place" (such a place is not conceivable without an experience of transcendence). Huber focuses more on the fictive and the

fantastic, but I think she means essentially the same thing in a more secular guise: both fantastic fiction and theism encourage us to believe in things that are implausible. Theist stories always have a strong fantastic strain to them, and we may continue, even as believers, to entertain strong doubts about them*.*

Let me state my final point as bluntly as possible. Post-postmodernism can be described in **specifically historical terms** that no longer depend on poststructuralist discourse. Post-postmodernism is neither a total break with postmodernism or its miraculous extension, but rather refunctionalizes the postmodern strategy of constructing reality by aiming it at (at least) three specific goals which are unthinkable in postmodernism: 1) **creating positive dyadic relations between humans**, 2) **suppressing endless postmodern irony through a skeptical, but basically optimistic mindset**, and 3) **opening up a window of transcendence that holds forth some form of hope** (or, if we want to be theologically more cautious, of creating fictive, imaginary horizons that renew us ethically and psychologically). We now have four—count 'em—*four* separate approaches that have reached the same or similar conclusions, and I have no doubt that the future discourse on post-postmodernism will follow the paths they have set down