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Re-Visioning the Semantic and Semiotic Registers in the Study of Culture and Religion

Abstract

The term 'God' may be understood as the desire for the complete epistemological condition of thought; language expresses this condition in statements of 'meaning.' 'Religion' expresses this desire in texts and ritual practice which may be examined by in academic study; however, because the 'third term' of *religio* is understood as the condition of being 'bounded to or by,' the study of religion is itself bounded to or by this desire for the completion of thought. This desire cannot be understood as an 'alterity' of thought but is rather the internal native or 'alter-native' condition of thought itself. Religions are the native residences of this desire, and claim to know the complete condition; however, *alter-natively*, because thought cannot completely restrict but rather remains itself an expression of the condition, human thought and its culture are open to an unrestricted examination of the expressions of the condition. Each religion expresses itself as a 'singularity' of this universal condition of thought; however, because of the native factors in the epistemological condition, specifically, that thought desires but cannot fully express or know the condition, no particular religion can claim hegemony to the expression of the condition: 'God' as such is the full expression of thought, yet by the definition of the terms of thought, its expression remains fully its alter-native exception of thought.

The thesis first considers the possibility of theory itself through a brief examination of etymological gaps and windows evident in its expression. Next, we examine a possible working theory for the study of religion and the epistemological implications arising from its expression. Thirdly, as a result of these two courses, we examine the semantic and semiotic conditions of what can be 'called' 'meaning.' The thesis concludes with proposed epistemological strategies for the study of culture and religion, including what are termed the eccentric semantic and semiotic loops, the potentiation of meaning in the instantiation and disinstantiation of language figurations, singularity in meaning expressions, and the unique singularity of religious meaning in what may be termed the "exceptional inception" of thought.

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Carl Raschke, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

Sandra Dixon

Third Advisor

Jere Surber

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RE-VISIONING THE SEMANTIC AND SEMIOTIC REGISTERS
IN THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND RELIGION

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Gary S. Bedford

August 2011

Advisor: Professor Carl Raschke

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Author: Gary S. Bedford

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ABSTRACT

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I. Introduction of the Thesis

Our thesis will consider the following propositions:

1. The term 'God' may be understood as the desire for the complete epistemological condition of thought; language expresses this condition in statements of 'meaning.'
2. 'Religion' expresses this desire in texts and ritual practice which may be considered in academic study; however, because the 'third term' of *religio* is understood as the condition of being 'bounded to or by,' the study of religion is itself bounded to this desire for the completion of thought.
3. This desire for the complete epistemological condition of thought cannot be understood as an 'alterity' of thought but is rather the internal native or '*alter-native*' condition of thought itself.
4. Religions are the native residences of this desire to know the complete condition; however, *alter-natively*, because thought cannot completely restrict this condition but remains itself an expression of the condition, human thought and its culture are open to an unrestricted examination of the expressions of the condition.
5. Each religion expresses itself as a 'singularity' of this universal condition of thought; however, because of the native factors in the epistemological condition, specifically, that thought desires but cannot fully express the condition, no particular religion can claim hegemony to the expression of the condition: 'God' as such is the full expression of thought, yet by the

definition of the terms of thought, its expression remains fully its *alter-native* excess of thought.

Our examination of the propositions will proceed along the following course:

1. First, because of the theoretical nature of the propositions, we will enter the study through a consideration of the problem of ‘theory’ itself, and specifically the problems that arise from the expression of what we mean by theory in the terms and statements of language. As such we will enter the epistemological problem of thought through the portal of language.
2. Secondly, we will examine a possible working theory for the study of religion itself and the epistemological implications and problems that arise from its consideration.
3. Thirdly, because of the discoveries from the first two courses, we will then more carefully examine the semantic and semiotic conditions of what we call ‘meaning.’
4. Finally, we will conclude with proposed epistemological strategies for the study of culture and religion. These strategies include what we term the eccentric semantic and semiotic loops, the potentiation of meaning in the instantiation and disinstantiation of language structures, singularity in meaning expressions, and the unique singularity of religious meaning in what we term the exceptional inception.

While we consider the thought of many theorists, Gilles Deleuze's transcendental empiricism appears to offer the strongest theoretical basis for the concepts we want to introduce to the discourse of religious studies. In our reading, Deleuze's thought appears to be capable of returning philosophical theory from its courings in the illusive expectation of historical progress *back* to theory itself. It appears to be particularly rooted in the careful empirical meta-analysis of thought as thought emerges to itself from the play of not only language but more importantly from what we will attempt to develop from his concept of the passive genesis as the *energetics* of meaning. Moreover, his development of *discordant harmony* in the epistemological analysis of the meaning register allows for the concept of the *singularity of meaning* which we attempt to develop for religious studies as the *exceptional inception* of the religious vision of the real. And exactly because of his discovery of the intrinsic discordance and disjunction of the figuration of thought, his theory offers the unique ability to decipher the contemporary crises of meaning which emanate from the collision of traditional cultures with the cultures of the so-called modern and post-modern.

II. A brief deconstruction of the approach to “theory”

How might we consider a *theory* of religion and ...religion(s)...the religious?”

Let us first briefly consider the possibility of theory in the following formula: ***“Theory asserts a highly self-critical working hypothesis which enables the consideration of the terms and conditions and possible heuristic modes or structures of intelligibility and meaning of a field of inquiry, a problem, or a problematic.”*** We may briefly consider the terms of the hypothesis:

“Theory asserts...”: “Theory” must first acknowledge that it begins with an implicit or explicit approach, that is it carries to the scene of the examination an intrinsic point of view and a system of values (including, and in particular, as in the case of phenomenology, where the approach asserts an ability to “*bracket*,” to use its native term) of the object of study. “Theory” moreover brings an assumed semantic meaning to the scene. On the one hand, “theory” appears to originate etymologically not as the construction of hypotheses but rather as the act of “viewing” or “seeing.”¹

However, more contemporary use of the term clearly indicates an operation that has moved well beyond the sensibility of “seeing” or “viewing” toward a more fully developed *ideational* presentation, or *re-presentation* of the object of study. “Theory” in its modern expression denotes a “set of statements or principles devised to explain a

¹ Late Latin *theoria*, from Greek *theoria*, from *theoros*, *spectator* : probably *thea*, a *viewing* + -oros, *seeing* (from *horan*, *to see*) The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved; thefreedictionary.com.

group of phenomena...explanatory statements...methods of analysis...a set of theorems...a belief or principle that guides action or assists comprehension...”² Our approach to the “study of...” carries with it both a “seeing” sensibility as well as what appears to be a much more highly developed *reasoned* set of attitudes and *principles*: both “sense” as seeing (but presumably the full range of the senses) *as well as* the statement or assertion of a more systematic set of rules or principles appears to engage theoretical study.

“*a highly self-critical...*”: Further, we are asserting that our theory must project a self-critical attitude. That is, theory, to jump to our next term, must also *work on itself*.

“*...working hypothesis...*”: Theory “works, it is a working through, both on itself and on its object of study Yet if we acknowledge that an *hypothesis* is already formulated as we discovered above, then we are already asserting that we can study religion and culture at all. The term “hypothesis” therefore denotes: “1. A tentative explanation for an observation, phenomenon, or scientific problem that can be tested by further investigation; 2. Something taken to be true for the purpose of argument or investigation; an assumption; 3. The antecedent of a conditional statement.”³ The etymology of the term is rooted in the Greek “hupotithenai,” derived from “hupothe”

² Ibid.

³ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company; thefreedictionary.com.

meaning “to suppose” and “tithenai” meaning “to place.”⁴ Theory or hypothesis is thus already supposing possible angles of approach, and it is already placing or situating such an approach in relation to the project of study: it is already “working.”

“...which enables the consideration...”: Working theory should enable or mobilize investigation. Theory is already carried by a momentum of curiosity. Also, the term “consideration” denotes “...to think carefully about...to esteem...to look at thoughtfully.”⁵ Here we note intrinsic *values of inquiry*, i.e., a value system which acknowledges “care.” However the etymology of the term “consider” derives from the Latin *consīderāre*, which means “to contemplate the stars.”⁶ “Consider” thus implies a curiosity to study or account for a more extreme horizon of inquiry.

“...the terms and conditions and possible heuristic modes or structures of intelligibility and meaning...”: Theory in the humanities thus acknowledges the uniquely semantic or linguistic and textual nature of its inquiry, as this brief interrogation suggests. The word “term” denotes both a word structure but also a temporal condition, as in a term or period of time, and thus indicates an inception and a “*term-inus*” of the study.⁷ As noted above, we are already “placed” in a space of hypothesis, and the “terms” of the inquiry also indicate the temporal condition of the inquiry. Theoretical inquiry originates from this conjugation of a *primary equation*, that is, from both the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: Perigee books, 1980, pp. 107-108.

⁷ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language.

temporality of the “seen” or “observed” but also from the *term*-inologies and statements. That is, in addition to its temporal meaning, the word “term” implicates language in the equation in two ways. First, term indicates “**a**. A word or group of words having a particular meaning....” and second, term indicates “**b**. ...language of a certain kind; chosen words...”⁸

In our consideration, item **b** will pertain to the *semantic condition*, that is the particular choice of language, the set of terms and then the consequent word-usage germane to the field of study. This *semantic condition* imparts from the term of the equation inquirer/inquired in that the primary temporal/spatial equation implies the *interaction* of the inquirer and the field of inquiry, and the semantic field which arises from this equation assumes a consequent interaction of the set of terms and terminology in the secondary language event that ensues from the “seeing”: a semantic texture holds in both the primary term (its term or time, and, presumably also the place or site of this interaction) *as well as* the secondary terms which express it. The text of the inquiry can, more or less, be a favorable or accurate expression or *re*-presentation of the act of seeing or observation. Item **a**, however, would appear to reach beyond either the initial semantic equation of observation or expression. That is, “meaning” implies yet another level of the inquiry which we will term the *semiotic condition*. Here we must observe that the “term” of the semiotic equation is not merely its interactive structure or “surface”, though this is implied – i.e., as we have observed the primary semantic observational interaction of the inquirer/inquired and the secondary semantic interactive structure of language are

⁸ Ibid.

required to approach this latent semiotic condition. What is implied and carried by this semantic condition *as well as what is implied and what in fact also carries the semantic condition itself*, however, is the more problematic assumption of the signs and symptoms of “meaning”, or, in the terms of our formula, the “...*possible heuristic modes or structures of intelligibility and meaning*”. “Intelligibility” implies the following: “1. Capable of being understood...; 2. Capable of being apprehended by the intellect alone.”⁹ “Capable of being understood...apprehended” already implies the capacity of understanding, and as further implied in its root, *intellegere* – *to perceive*, it implies the capacity to “perceive” the object of study, to interface with it, to observe it, but then to perceive it in a way that is “apprehended” or “understood.” Or, as its Latin root *legere* or *lectum* implies, “to choose, to pick.” As Joseph Shipley observes, “From the ability to choose the proper letters came the derived meaning of *legere*, to read: what is *legible* is what can be picked out.”¹⁰ Shipley goes on:

Few words have more ramifications in English than this Latin one. A group of men picked out for military service is a *legion*; then, any large number; men chosen may be a legation, or *legates*. That which is chosen tends to become imposed, hence, *legal*, lawful: and through Old French *leiel*, from Latin *legalis* comes its doublet, English *loyal*. ...To choose together is to make a *collection* (Latin *col*, from *com*, together). To choose among, to discriminate, is to show *intelligence* (Latin *intelligere*, *intellectum*, from *intellegere*, from *inter*, between + *legere*), or to be *intellectual*.
...Closely bound with this verb – for what you choose, you seek to hold, to bind – is Latin *ligare*, whence Italian *legare*, to bind...¹¹

⁹ Ibid, “Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *intelligibilis*, *intelligibilis*, from *intellegere*, *to perceive*”

¹⁰ Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins*, Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1979, 211.

¹¹ Ibid.

“Intelligibility” thus carries multiple usages: that is, it first implies understanding, i.e., to perceive or apprehend; next it implies a reading, from its root *legere*, to choose but also to “read”; and finally, from its etymological connection to *ligare*, it implies “to bind” or “be bounded to” which we note is also the root for the term “religion.” We will suggest that there is a subtle and obscure but crucial distinction rooted in the term intelligibility. On the one hand, intelligibility implies understanding which ensues from the literal semantic condition of word usage and reading; on the other hand, intelligibility implies what we will assert is a semiotic condition of “boundedness” to “symptoms” of meaning which exceed yet which are nonetheless expressed and bound to language.

While the term “intelligibility” and its root are complex, the terms “to mean” or “meaning” occupy over 6 pages of the OED and further expand the scope of the inquiry. Briefly, “to mean” carries the following three groups of reference: (1) “to have in mind, intend. [English and Middle English *menen*]¹² hence to express significance or intention, to “stand for, symbolize, typify, symbolise, represent”¹³; (2) “common”¹⁴ but also as in “geometric mean or arithmetic mean ...the average value of a set of numbers”¹⁵; (3) “intermediate”¹⁶ or “the middle point, state, or course between limits or extremes”¹⁷ also

¹² Ibid, 321.

¹³ Based on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2008 Princeton University, Farlex Inc.; freedictionary.com.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company; freedictionary.com.

¹⁶ Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins*, 321.

¹⁷ [Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged](http://freedictionary.com) © HarperCollins Publishers 2003; freedictionary.com.

used extensively in economics. “Meaning” then appears to encompass a broad set of potential usages. Initially we will assert that meaning pertains to *that expression of signification which stands “in” or “for” or emerges from the middle or medium ground of the interaction of the inquirer and the object of inquiry.* As we are discovering, the terms in our formula appear to both express this signification and interaction yet also to exceed it. This excess potential appears not to be a question of “what” meaning communicates or signifies. Rather, the more radical claim of our thesis points to “how” meaning is potentiated at all. Furthermore, we will claim that as such any semantic (textual) or semiotic (signs and symptoms) configuration of the registers of meaning will be seen to emerge from a potentiating “background” which exceeds yet contains its expressions. We will attempt to develop a concept of “meaning” which interfaces what we have termed its expressed semantic condition in conjugation with what we have termed its semiotic condition to account for the potential of its complete equation, and we will further assert that this equation offers a unique challenge to the study of culture and religion.

“...of a field of inquiry, a problem, or a problematic.”: Finally, we acknowledge that our approach has a *design* which derives not only from its own theoretical angle of approach but also from the unique *designated* field or focus of inquiry: we are examining “some-thing,” either a field of inquiry, a particular concern or problem, or in this case a “revisioning of the registers of meaning in the study of culture and religion.” “Field of inquiry,” however, already assumes that a “field” is open for

interrogation, that is that it can be subject to such a theoretical approach or a method of examination. This seems acceptable for the study of the natural world, as in, for example, the categorical study and taxonomic classification of the species. We note, however, that our “field” is designated as “culture and religion.” While this field may indeed offer certain “empirical” indicators (for example, observable religious rituals or religious texts) the complete field or our ability to apprehend it should remain in question from the outset. Our assumption as to the accessibility to the “field of study” renders, again, at least two dimensions. On the one hand, what is assumed is the obvious objective “field of study”: i.e., we are assuming, as from the outset, that “theory” or “the hypothetical” can designate a specific territory of investigation, and that these territories might be isolated and then observed or interrogated, and that they can then be rendered into descriptive or interpretive discourse – we can designate this dimension of “field” as the “objective field.” Yet we further note that the assumption of intelligibility as well as the objective field of religion, rooted in *ligare*, imply a “boundedness to” a condition or set of data which would seem to be exceed direct empirical accessibility or purely descriptive expression. The unique background of culture and religion appears to be expressed in this “bounded to” condition.

Initial Summary of the Formula

Initial observations appear to figure a ‘surface’ and a ‘depth’ level of complexity to the terms of the formula:

Theory: surface text: "...set of hypothetical statements or possible angles of intelligibility;" alternative sub-text: "the act of seeing."

Self-criticality: surface text: "...assumes the availability of the study *as study...*" –e.g. academic pretense; alternative sub-text: observer's subjective self-awareness of the "subjectification" of the object of study.

Hypothetical: surface text: "...asserted explanation, set of explanatory "thesis or theses;" alternative sub-text: "already placed, sited."

Consider: surface text: "to regard, account for, form an opinion or angle of regard for;" alternative sub-text: "see the stars."

Terms & conditions of "meaning:" surface text: "emergent and intermediating expression;" alternative sub-depth text: "a potentiating and excessive background."

Field of inquiry: surface text: "actual field of study;" alternative sub-text: "the observer's angle of approach."

We have pursued this brief etymological exercise merely to attempt to introduce a "sense" of the rich but challenging complexity of any concept or theory of meaning. This sense carries and leaves a multiplicity of terms and textures of a landscape rather than clear and well defined maps or geographies. It appears that in each of the isolated terms "the theoretical" presents "fields" of counter-valences or heterogeneous levels of definition which then suggest working, interactive levels of complexity, both from within the isolated terms of the formula as well as in possible formulations of the hypothetical situation itself.

We step back and observe the terms “consider” and “terms/conditions” in the formula. Each present both a surface (e.g., consider: “...to regard...account for...”; terms/conditions: “...semantic arrangement...”) *as well as* what we might stipulate as an “alternativity” or a “depth” (e.g., consider: “...see the stars...”; terms/conditions: “...the meaning of...”). This sense of complexity would appear to hold in an arrangement of subtle and accepted overdetermination.

This brief deconstructive examination of a hypothetical approach to theory results in a complexity of meaning; we are pressured in its reading to accept a “sense” of each of its terms separately, and furthermore to accept a momentum of the composite statement which exceeds the immediate statement yet which is nonetheless expressed in the statement.

III. A Working Hypothesis: *Rite, Text, Boundedness ...*

“Religion” is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as “language” plays in linguistics or “culture” plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.¹⁸

Our thesis – or more specifically our *hypo-thesis* – is that postmodern religious thought and so-called “postmodern theology” in this age of the event has systematically and bizarrely failed to consider the singularity behind the event from which it claims to speak – the *religious* per se.¹⁹

We propose the following formula for our study:

“The academic study of culture and religion considers the texts and rituals and possible heuristic modes or structures of intelligibility of the individual’s or a culture’s account of the human condition and its confrontation with and boundedness to the “divine” or the “the religious.”

A conundrum of any proposed study confronts us: *Where to begin?* Even our somewhat careful introductory attempt to outline the nature of theory leaves us with the *sense* that we begin already “in” a study, a situation, a “middle” of “meaning,” hence an arrangement of signification – as observed, the “*site*” and “*sight*” and “*sign*” of the *hypothesis*. “Text,” “ritual,” and “boundedness” will be the initial terms of our inquiry and the middle expressions of the beginning of our discussion. We note from the outset that this middle appears somehow “looped.” That is, the presence of the third expression of the term “religious,” *boundedness*, appears to fold over or conjugate the first two terms. The third term will be left open by intention at this stage. That is, *boundedness*

¹⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, “*Religion, Religions, Religious*”, in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 281-282.

¹⁹ Carl Raschke, *Event Horizon Manuscript*, unpublished, 8.

will hold as a background in the observation of text and ritual which they would appear to claim to be “bound to...by...” or “witness to...” the “divine.”

Etymological Concerns: Encounter with the problem of language and signification

Jonathan Z. Smith, in “*Religion, Religions, Religious*” notes: “The term ‘religion’ has had a long history...its etymology is uncertain...one of three current possibilities, that it stems from the root **leig* meaning “to bind” rather than from roots meaning “to reread” or “to be careful...”²⁰ Three “sub-fields” within the field thus arise from this initial etymological spectrum:

(1) “care” attending to “ritual obligations or performance”;

(2) to read or re-read, [“used by Cicero, connected with *relegere*, to read over again”²¹];

(3) the act or state or condition of being connected or bound *by* or *to* (*ligare: to bind*).

1 and 2 suggest surface arrangements which would seem to lend themselves to “study.” First, “care” in the performance of the rituals, habits, and customs of religious practice would appear to be accessible *on the surface* to various angles of study: e.g., the descriptive study of a particular religious rite or the collective rites of a religion, as well as the possible comparative study of rites of various and varying religions. Second, to “read” or “re-read” presents both the act of what is meant by “reading/re-reading” as well

²⁰ Smith, “*Religion, Religions, Religious*,” 269.

²¹ OED, Compact Edition, 2481.

as the “content” of what is read. However, we note that “reading” might still imply oral discourse. For example, Homeric discourse but likely every ancient religion was mnemonically “transmitted.” The inscription of “texts” as such occurs already after the scene of oral discourse. Then secondarily, “reading/re-reading” suggests not merely the primary reading or presentation of a discourse but now, with the pre-fix “re-”, also genetic to *re-ligion/re-ligare*, “re-reading” implies a “reading of the reading...” or inference to the interpretation of the discourse. These two strains of *ligare* appear to have been the surface concern of “religious” studies, particularly in the attempt to originate maps of the myriad arrangements of religious practice and then to disseminate discussion of these arrangements in careful or disciplined descriptions, comparisons, or interpretations.

However, as we have noted, theme 3 of *ligare* or *ligio*, “to be bound to or by” presents a more complex problem. We suspect that it is likely *carefully hidden* in the first two strategies of *ligare/ligio*. That is, the “care-filled” rituals or oral/inscribed texts of a religious culture can be studied in a more empirical manner – there is “stuff” to observe, “rites” to describe, even people to interview, and discourse text to “read.” Moreover, reference to the *telos* or *horizon of orientation*, the goal of the rite or text, whether the Bodhisattva, Nirvana, God, Jesus of Nazareth, The Straight Path of Islam, redemption, etc., can be “read,” noted, and described *in the context* of the practiced ritual or discourse. Indeed, even the outlined third formula above, that is “*the act or state or condition of being connected or bound by or to (ligare: to bind),*” may imply that the

“act” or “condition” of “being connected to or by...” is in fact observable, describable, readable. “Study” of the third theme appears to remain in the domain of possible empirical “data,” at least from an anthropological angle.

Curiously, J.Z. Smith will claim that “...while there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experience and expression that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *there is no data for religion... .*”²² How is it that what appear to be observable and describable “data,” i.e., rite and text, are re-stated into the status of “...*there is no data...*”? Smith is at once (a) carefully mapping the methodological limits of the study and (b) stipulating that this empirical methodology, which he observes is “purely academic,” nonetheless appears to stipulate, in its own interior academic limitations, its own “third term.” The study of religion is thus “bounded by” text and ritual, but this interiority is itself also “bounded to” an ulteriority, that is a data set which exceeds rite and ritual. The formula loops back on itself. Therefore, Smith wants to expand the field of study to include what he terms the “theological,” although he will also attempt to restrict that field as such:

I have come to believe that a prime object of study for the historian of religion ought to be theological tradition, taking the term in its widest sense, in particular, those elements of the theological endeavor that are concerned with canon and its exegesis. ...The task of application as well as the judgment of the relative adequacy of particular applications to a community’s life situation remains the indigenous theologian’s task, but the study of the process, particularly the study of comparative systematic and exegesis, ought to become a major preoccupation of the historian of religion.²³

²² Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, xi.

²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

Smith's claims both address and raise a question for our study. On the one hand, we can agree on his assertion that a history of religion is incomplete without consideration of the "canon" (text) and its "persistent, and obsessive religious activity" (ritualized application of the text in culture), we would counter that it is more problematic to "bracket" the situation of revelation from the scholar's purview. He is forwarding the expansion of the possible field of study of the first two terms, while claiming a phenomenological ability to limit the possible consideration of the third term to the "the indigenous theologian's task..." We can agree: the study of a culture's literal text and ritual, of its expression and more formalized interpretation and the examination of the "character" and origin of its revelatory message will by definition remain within the existential field of the believer and the analytical field of that culture's theological speakers.

However, two interior issues arise. First, the study of "the religions" as cultural pluralities is called into question from the comparative aspect of the academic discipline. If we intend the scope of our study to address the field of all religions and their interaction then our theory will require a method and a conceptual framework which may account for not merely the *intra*-specific (indigenous) nature of religion but must include the *inter*-specific (comparative) encounters between religious cultures. Obviously, the encounter of the possibility of an indigenous and the comparative studies of religion occurs in their expressions in language. Secondly, we observe that the expansion of the study of the first two terms (text, ritual) to Smith's "theological" category has not

removed the insinuation of the third term as internally implied in the first two. We cannot implicate a term like the “theological tradition...in its widest sense” without a careful and thoughtful consideration of this very “sense.” The historian of religion’s focus notwithstanding, we suggest that it will be methodologically implausible to effectively bracket the term in the manner Smith intends *without severely constricting* the study of the first two terms themselves. Indeed, the activities of text and ritual “obsessively” pressure the third term *de facto*. “*Bounded to or by,*” from the expanded focus of a theory of “...religion...religions...the religious,” appears to explicitly implicate a working definitional third term, and moreover this third term appears to implicitly implicate at least part of the ulterior motive and aim of the first two terms. This *sense of ulteriority* is empirically observable in text and ritual and thereby cannot be bracketed from the theoretical angle of our approach.²⁴

Indeed, it is just this “self-critical” awareness of the academic limitations of the angle of approach to the study which “constitutes [the student’s] primary expertise, his foremost object of study.”²⁵ Smith stipulates a careful academic method: “First, that the exemplum has been well and fully understood...Second, that the exemplum be displayed in the service of some...theory, paradigm, some fundamental question...Third, that there be some method for explicitly relating the exemplum to the theory, paradigm, or question

²⁴ Smith’s choice of the sub-title, “*From Babylon to Jonestown,*” could not have been unintentional as it implicates not only the historical spectrum of religion but not unsubtly its spectrum of signification – for example, what do we think we can “mean” by religion after Jamestown?

²⁵ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xi.

and some method for evaluating each in terms of the other.”²⁶ So, we can affirm that Smith’s enterprise seeks its own internal principles of bracketing and focus in order to tightly define its approach, what Paul Ricoeur²⁷ might reference as a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Nonetheless, we are suggesting that such a study uncovers in the nature and excess of its own data a complementary “hermeneutics of expansion”²⁸ suggested by the theoretical field of the “*bounded to or by*” – and we could let Smith introduce the term “...*theological*...” – which appear necessary to complete the study of “...*religion...religions...religious*...” It is granted that these are already theoretical, scholarly, and what Smith calls “generic concepts” which are outside the indigenous field of historical study. Applying a generic examination, however, one not tied to a specific religious tradition but rather to “religion” itself as an academic field, constitutes what Smith himself terms “...a second-order generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology. *There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.*”²⁹

We appear to have briefly considered the formula for a method of study and its limits in approaching its data-set or field of study, yet our study remains empirically unsatisfied because we have not as yet addressed the third term, nor have we allowed the

²⁶ Ibid, xi-xii.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, Yale University Press, 1970.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Smith, “*Religion, Religions, Religious*”, pp. 281-282, my emphasis in italics.

third term to address our method. The equation proposed by the consideration of *ligare* or *ligio* or *re-ligio* has discovered but not sufficiently accounted for the full etymological referability of its horizon of interrogation, that is the implication of its “boundedness to or by.” And subjectively, we confess an unfulfilled “*desire for ...*” a fuller address and redress and accountability of this momentum and its “horizon.” Furthermore, we want to claim that this lack arises from the equation itself, that it has empirical roots, and that it is suggested in the etymology of the term “religion.” The focus of its scope retrenches Smith’s equation to include an ulterior sense to the study’s concern. This concern resides as a gap or lacunae, an aporia, in the equation of “...*religion...religion(s)...the religious.*”

We may have encountered what Raschke terms “...the portmanteau sense of the Roman word *religio*, which classical and even some current etymologies trace to the word *ligare*, to “bind” or to “bind tightly.”³⁰ We can note the intrinsic confusion which surrounds the etymological roots, and we can further note all three areas of focus appear plausible for our study. What can be implied by “portmanteaus sense?”

“Gilles Deleuze, in *Logic of Sense* considers Lewis Carol’s use of portmanteau words as such:

It seems then that the portmanteau word is grounded upon a strict disjunctive synthesis. ...we discover the law of the portmanteau word in general, provided that we disengage each time the disjunction which may have been hidden. ...in Carroll’s work, we must distinguish three sorts of esoteric words: *contracting words*, which perform a synthesis of succession over a single series and bear upon the syllabic elements of a proposition or a succession of propositions in order to extract from them their composite sense (“connection”); *circulating words*, which perform a synthesis of coexistence and coordination between two heterogeneous series and which directly and at once bear upon the

³⁰ Raschke, *Event Horizon Manuscript*, unpublished, 48.

respective senses of these series (“conjunction”); and *disjunctive* or portmanteau words, which perform an infinite ramification of coexisting series and bear at once upon words and senses, or syllabic and semiological elements (“disjunction”). The ramifying function or the disjunctive synthesis offers the real definition of the portmanteau word.³¹

Deleuze may be providing an initial hint at our problem, but our terms, “...*religion...religions...religious...*” are only indirectly implied as carrying the portmanteau sense: our terms are not Lewis Carroll portmanteau terms which combine *words* but rather our terms combine and carry as portmanteau baggage possible *meanings* of an indefinite data-set of terms. That is, we are noting on the one hand that *ligare* is connected with “text” and “rite” and on the other hand with “binding” or “re-binding...to...or by...”, and the focus or origination of this second term remains open and in question. The former terms offer available fields of inquiry, that is the notable (as in “text”) or observable (as in “ritual”), which correspond to Deleuze’s use of “*contracting words* which perform a synthesis of succession of propositions in order to extract from them their composite sense (“connection”) as well as to “*circulating words*, which perform a synthesis of coexistence and coordination between two heterogeneous series and which directly and at once bear upon the respective senses of these series (“conjunction”)...”: that is, we can stipulate, in the academic “sense”, that it is possible to contractually agree upon a field or fields of discourse which, though continually criticized, offer an academic and disciplined approach to a given field of study, and we can further stipulate that this same academy, by nature of its discursive interaction, may

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, New York: Columbia U. Press, 2003, pp. 46-47.

tend to agree upon, though still under the discipline's argumentative scrutiny, "connecting" or "synthetic" observations which serve to "perform a synthesis of coexistence and coordination..." We encountered these "contracting" and "circulating" conditions in our brief examination of theory, that is a 'sense' of theory appeared to emerge from the set of terms even though each of the terms carried both a surface definition as well as alternative sub-textual uses.

However, we must then observe – and it appears that this observation is, in Deleuze's terms, a "necessary" condition of the field of study in the contracted and synthetic data (the "read/re-read" and the "rite") the insinuation of the third term of *re-ligare/re-ligio*, that is the "bounded to...bounded by." That is, observing "rite" and "reading" in an empirical study cannot avoid including in these sub-fields the "reference to" ("boundedness to...") and the "referability by" ("bounded by...") the field of study *to* "what...horizon...what address or response...?" Embedded in the *contracted* and *connected* text there appears what Deleuze refers to above as "...an infinite ramification of coexisting series...[that] bear at once upon words and senses, or syllabic and semiological elements."

We can observe that his "portmanteau term" is itself "semantic," that is, text-bound in its initial explication. Yet the meaning exceeds its textual reference: the contracting and synthetic senses textualize sense, while the portmanteau references a *condition(s)* of meaning of a single term. The meaning is not purely contracted or synthetic but rather open to an unbounded horizon of reference. The literal *semantic*

meaning³², and we will use the term semantic to refer to the contracted and circulated use of language, also carries an internal alternative and *symptomatic* condition, a *semiotic* condition. The term “semiotics” itself appears to express a pivotal and seminal “sense” as it references the approach to a concept of “meaning.” That is, “semiotics” derives from the Greek “*semeiotikos, observant of signs, significant*, from *semeiosis, indication*, from *semeioun, to signal, to interpret as a sign*, from *semeion, sign*, from *sema*”³³ – in this first sense the semiotic condition may pertain to the condition of language as a system of signs. However, we note that partnered or *alternative* uses of “semiotic” pertain at once to the *interpretation of such signs* on the one hand, and on the other hand “...of or relating to sytmatology” or the symptomatological study of, in this case, language structures.³⁴ An epistemology of meaning appears to include both the semantic and semiotic conditions.

As such, we will attempt to further define and expand “semiotics” to regard not merely language or sign systems but rather to address a more comprehensive accounting of the entire “field” of meaning and meaning systems including and in particular what might be inferred by the symptoms of meaning, or a sytmatology of meaning. In particular, the use of “religion” to mean “...*bounded to or by...*” constitutes a “condition” or possibly an “event” of meaning rather than a specifiable reference. However, at this

³² We will use the term “semantic” in its linguistic sense, that is: “Of or relating to meaning, especially meaning in language.” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company; freedictionary.com)

³³ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. thefreedictionary.com.

³⁴ Ibid.

juncture we can note that this meaning condition carries and implies two alternative horizons: on the one hand, systems of language, what we are denoting as the “semantic” function, or the use of language to convey, more or less empirically, data, observable facts, and communication in general; and, on the other hand, the “semiotic” implies both the interpretation of what such meanings in fact *mean*, and more curiously how meaning itself can imply the appearance of symptoms of meaning – thus interpretation also implies symptomatology, or the study of the possible symptoms of meaning which hold *in excess of* or appear to be only *suggested by* their significations. For now we carry both senses forward, but as will be suggested further forward, both the semantic and the semiotic conditions find themselves predicated upon “strange loops” of contingency and dependence with one another within the visioning of our study.

For example, Deleuze, above, refers to this condition as the “...infinite ramification of coexisting series [which] bears at once upon words and senses or syllabic and semiological elements (“disjunction”).” The disjunctive, in “religious” studies or the study of “religion,” appears to be at once *expressed* and *hidden* in discourse. We can note this in the following:

*“It is not a question of knowing God when the veil be lifted but of knowing Him in the veil itself.”*³⁵
*“God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.”*³⁶

In both statements we can identify “contracting” and “circulating” functions of discourse.

All of the terms, that is, “question,” “God,” “knowing,” “veil,” or “God,” “nothing,”

³⁵ Shaikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawī, *Hikmatu-hu, Sagesse*, in Lings, Martin, *A Sufi Saint of the 20th Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawī*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2nd Edition, 1971, 211.

³⁶ St. Anselm.

“conceived,” etc., are stipulated to carry *contracted* or agreed upon “meanings,” and furthermore perform a more or less communally accepted or *circulating* function – the delivery of the statements is on their surface “intelligible.” As such, the signs are interpretable. Yet that which is intelligible is in fact the subversion of intelligibility itself in the ramifying pressure of the portmanteau function. The “veil” in the first statement, itself imaginable as an empirically observable object, now can carry and signify “God”; the contracted, circulated terms carry the disjunctive portmanteau “term” but this carriage is more of an implied “sense” than a specific or referable term or object; as such, the *excess sense* of the statement now holds meaning more as the “symptom” of this sense than a purely referable object. St. Anselm’s statement, already an abstraction, might be expressed even more abstractly: “‘God’ ‘signifies’ the ‘concept’ of that which exceeds conceptualization.” Pure contractual notation is disjoined *by the very “logical” contracted and synthetic concept of language*. Like a Zen koan, signification is disjoined *by signification*. What remains is a symptomatic “sense” of the excess yet this excess is immanently a figuration of discourse itself.

These statements, and their portmanteau interrogation, may reveal what has become latently hidden in religious studies theory and method. That is, the contracting and circulating discourse (e.g., the anthropological, sociological, description of rite and ritual, or in one scholar’s reading or re-reading of a second scholar’s secondary academic description of rite or text, etc.) has tended to override and to hide the third function which, in contracting and circulating discourse, is in fact only latently or indirectly

stipulated, i.e., “...God...*the religious*...” Furthermore, even when referenced, i.e., “God” or “Krishna,” these terms remain in their contracted and circulated status because the portmanteau function is an alternative *condition* of discourse rather than explicitly or semantically stated. “God” can be, and usually remains, particularly in a scientifically veiled academic culture, limited to a contracted and circulated *agreed upon* reference.

If surface discourse is bounded in the contracted and circulating function of discourse, then the interrogation of the portmanteau function is therefore not available to a semantic critical strategy alone. It will rather require a complementary but tightly defined *depth semiotic*. Such a depth semiotic is required to further interrogate the function of language as a veiling phenomenon. It would suggest that it is the conditionality of language itself which hides and obscures the portmanteau function, that “...seeing Him in the veil itself...” is tantamount to a semiotic rather than semantic critique of discourse, or alternatively the semantic dismantling of the veil of the semantic. Likewise, a depth semiotic will require a semantic discourse and will be carried on the back of the contracted and the circulating: the depth is spoken on the surface.

Excess of the Semantic Field

The excess of the semantic field, again here limited to the use of contracted and circulating words in propositions or statements of meaning, appears evident in our earlier examination of the proposition for a working theory. This excess constitutes the need for the contractual and then circulating functions themselves: the speakers must agree upon the use of language terms, and the success of language’s circulation will turn on the

degree of this contractual definition and clarity, and what we will later introduce as its “economic exchangeability.”

Contractual/Consensus: Consensus insinuates both a linguistic and a non-linguistic condition to the semantic condition of meaning in language. First, the linguistic function indicates there is agreement as to “what” a term may or may not mean: hypothetically, the literal meaning of a term is given, considered in context, negotiated between speakers, and then applied (circulated). But secondly, we must observe the non-linguistic or energetic function to this semantic agreement in the form of a “will to accept” or a “momentum/force of agreement” – contract implies a firm agreement but contract arrived at by consensus implies a non-linguistic “will” or “force of agreement” in order to agree upon definitional terms between speakers in discourse.

Deleuze’s employs a concept of “singularity” to pressure a structuralist assumption of possible meaning. This critique works from within the structuralist assumption that meaning structures may be configured or expressed as the “signifier” which expresses a “signified.” For Deleuze,

Structures are fields composed of at least two series or sets of conjoined but differential singular points, for example the signifiers and signifieds of structural linguistics; these series can only connect to produce meaning if they are traversed by a paradoxical element, which is not something common to both series but different from them. Difference relates to difference not through some similarity but through difference, through a kind of resonance that Deleuze calls “intensity.”³⁷

³⁷ Timothy Murphy, Syracuse University, *Singularity*, *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 370-371.

For example, terms used above such as “God” and “veil” or “God” and “conceived,” while implying a conjunction, are conjoined rather as “differential singular points” which on the surface appear not to carry immediate reference. “Veil” is a garment to hide one’s face or the surface of an object, and “conceived” is an abstract term of thought. Neither express “God” until the expression is potentiated by their conjunction. Yet meaning is either implied or carried by their singular expression in what Deleuze will note is not the semantic likeness or commonality but rather the conjunction of their difference by the force of “intensity.” Here we can note that intensity cannot be a semantic “structure” as such but rather intensity deploys an energetic of force to the equation of meaning. Discussing the relation of philosophy to differential mathematics and specifically Hoëne Wronski’s *Philosophie de l’infini*, Deleuze subtly introduces three radically transformative concepts to the epistemological equation of meaning: force, potential, and value:

...the differential is indeed pure power, just as the differential relation is a pure element of potentiality.

A principle of complete determination corresponds to this element of potentiality. Complete determination must not be confused with reciprocal determination. The latter concerned the differential relations and their degrees or varieties in the Idea which correspond to diverse forms. The former concerns the values of a relation...³⁸

Each concept expresses the problematic of an energetics of meaning which forces meaning structures past a threshold of clear or cleanly definable reference. However, Deleuze appears not be excluding structure as such, rather “reciprocal determinations” of the signifier and signified are subsumed in the “complete determination.” The semantic

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 175.

condition, comprised on its surface of linguistic structures which contract and circulate surface signification and reference, nonetheless expresses these differentiating “structures” in an *energetics of meaning*. Structures are subject to a consensual will, are only potentiated at the moment of their expression, and the meaning of any expression is always subject to pre-existent valuation. Any abstraction to a universal basis or value for discourse is itself possible as a potential reciprocal reference, yet such a reference is itself subject to the energetics of the complete determination which pre-potentiates and pre-values its expression. Rather, the expression of the universal is potentiated in the singularity of the event of meaning, but this event is always differentiating, is always already expressed in its value assumptions, and the event is always energized by a will that must be in excess of the semantic event itself.

The non-linguistic “will” to accept is driven by the undecidability and multiplicities of the linguistic condition itself: the semantic meaning frequently if not always speaks *from* a multiple set of possible meanings of a term (as we observed in our etymological analysis of the terms of general theory) as well as *to* multiple sets of possible speakers. DiCenso, observing Freud’s primary and then Derrida’s and Ricoeur’s secondary analyses, notes both the problem of an *overdetermination* of semantic meaning as well as the *overinterpretation* of possible symptoms of meaning, both of which derive from the multiplicity or pluralization of semantic meaning and the lack of a pre-consensual foundation to the semantic:

...in *The Interpretation of Dreams* notions of *overdetermination* and *overinterpretation* anticipate the rejection of paradigms of univocity by contemporary theories. Overdetermination applies to formative influences in the

genesis of dreams, symptoms, and texts. Overinterpretation indicates the consequent multiplicity of modes and levels of meaning that emerge in analyzing these phenomena. Meaning is, in principle, uncontrollable and open-ended. This open-endedness is the product both of an inherent pluralization within language and symbols (as expressed in Paul Ricoeur's emphasis on *polysemy*), and of the proliferation of meaning in relation to contexts and viewpoints (as in Jacques Derrida's *dissemination*). Derrida summarizes the latter thus: "dissemination...can be led back neither to a present of simple origin nor of an eschatological presence....It marks an irreducible and *generative* multiplicity."³⁹

The use of a term which originates from a "generative multiplicity" yet which achieves consensus and circulation implies a semantic energetics, that is a momentum of "will to negotiate-compromise-accept-concede" to a usable meaning from a polysemic set of possible meanings.

To summarize the excess of linguistic consensus or contract, the "inherent pluralization within language" refers to our assertion of the linguistic and energetic excess of the semantic condition. As noted in our introductory etymological survey, linguistic terms have multiple possible definitions and uses in language, the term's definition is itself dependent upon other terms with their own multiple possible definitions, and most vitally as Deleuze instructs, the conjunction of terms requires and already assumes will, differentiating potentiation, and value. Moreover, in the culture of discourse, speakers carry to the term their own unique linguistic bias and background, the multiplicity of which constitutes a linguistic yet overdetermined consensus. Multiple possible definitions and uses of terms and multiple possible speakers who approach the term with their own version of the nativity of the language mark the observable

³⁹ James DiCenso, *The Other Freud – religion, culture and psychoanalysis*, London & New York: Routledge, 1999, 8; DiCenso is quoting Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1981, 45.

plurivocal nature of the linguistic excess. Speaking, communicating in text, are contractualized functions, but it is entirely unclear how this contract is “written.” That is, this plurivocal condition itself implies the insinuation of an extra-linguistic will working in the contractual process: intrinsic and extrinsic negotiation and compromise of the definition of terms inheres in the contractual process of language and constitutes the energetic condition of its excess, an excess economic.

Circulating: Likewise, the “circulating” condition of the semantic excess implies both a linguistic excess and an extra-linguistic momentum. That is, once agreed upon in contract, words become circulated, moving in repetition between speakers. The hypothetical contractual negotiation, whether explicitly and scholastically labored or informally and implicitly agreed upon, tends to become more implicitly defined in the repetition of the terms of language: in the habituated use of a term that term tends to achieve a non- or less-than-negotiated status, that is it tends toward a “literal” or literalized usage.

Likewise, this linguistic achievement is not attained without a non-linguistic or extra-linguistic momentum, that is the simple repetition of the term constitutes an energetic momentum which tends to pressure the non- or less-than-fully reflective (hence habitual) literality of the term’s use in language. Freud’s re-discovery of the “speaking cure” insighted that the determination and overdetermination of the possible terms of language are never absent psychic force.

Summary of the Semantic Excess: The semantic or “literal” use of language speaks from a set of possible multiplicities of definition of terms; the indefinite referability of the definition of terms *by other terms* of language infers further complication of any pure semantic meaning; all implicate the condition of undecidability of the semantic and as such constitute a linguistic semantic excess. Moreover, the contractual and circulated condition of semantic language terms, as willful agreement and repetitive usage between speakers, appears to be not fully accountable without a non-linguistic⁴⁰ or extra-linguistic momentum, that is an implied psychic-energetic status of the semantic. The semantic persists in a condition of excess, both linguistic and extra-linguistic.⁴¹ We can note a native *heteroglossia*⁴² to the semantic field.

⁴⁰ Even Kant alludes to this extra-linguistic status of language when, in the *Prolegomena* he admits (my emphasis in italics):

“To search in our common knowledge for the concepts which do not rest upon particular experience and yet occur in all knowledge from experience, of which they as it were constitute the mere form of connection, presupposes neither greater reflection nor deeper insight than to detect in a language the rules of the actual use of words generally and thus to collect elements for a grammar (in fact both researches are very nearly related), *even though we are not able to give a reason why each language has just this and no other formal constitution, and still less why any precise number of such formal determinations in general, neither more nor less, can be found in it.*” (Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena*, 4: 323, (Kant, Immanuel, *Explanatory section of the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic, Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, *Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902, 323); quoted by Surber, Jere Paul, *Metacritique*, ed. & trans. Jere Paul Surber, New York: Humanity Books, 2001, 16)

Surber goes on to keenly observe that Kant “implicitly assumed that the categorical structure of experience is independent both of the various empirical ways in which this structure is articulated within experience and of the linguistic resources utilized by the transcendental philosopher in analyzing experience.” Kant’s general avoidance of the problem of language is problematic for the full expression of his critical philosophy.

⁴¹ We will develop this “extra-linguistic” concept as a linguistic *economic* further forward; Derrida refers to it as “economic condensation” in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, 40; see Gasché, Rodolphe, *The Tain of the Mirror*, Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 184-185.

⁴² “It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naïve absence of conflict.” (Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 368; quoted by Charles Winquist, *The Surface of the Deep*, Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group Publishers, 2001, 130)

Excess of the Semiotic Field

We call any specific formalization of expression a regime of signs, at least when the expression is linguistic. A regime of signs constitutes a semiotic system. But it appears difficult to analyze semiotic systems in themselves: there is always a form of content that is simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression, and the two forms pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic.⁴³

A concept of the “semiotic field” is much more difficult for us to gain hold of for it tends to inhere in the semantic field as both a “regime of signs” but also, by its definition, as *symptom*, as Derrida’s *trace* – that is, if linguistic syntax courses in the metered foot of speech, then the semiotic traces its footprint in the shifting sands and flows or momentums of meaning registers. A linguistic naiveté is ruptured by indecisiveness in the core of the linguistic and extra-linguistic exchanges of meaning.

Our analysis of this complexity will proceed on two tracks. First, from a more or less conventional angle of the contracted/circulated definition of the term semiotic (similar to the Deleuze/Guattari first usage above, as a “regime of signs”). Next, because we claim that the contracted/circulated definition may in fact be inadequate in tracking a more or less complete map of this regime or register of the semiotic, we will therefore consider a *meta-analysis* of the semantic and semiotic fields which addresses that which appears “inseparable from and independent of the form of expression [which] pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic.”

Our first track works from the “conventional” definition of semiotic. The OED notes two lines of reference, while the Collins English Dictionary expands to three:

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, New York: Continuum, 2004, 123.

semiotic, semeiotic *adj.*

1. Relating to symptoms.
2. Symbolic, serving to convey meaning.⁴⁴

1. (Linguistics) relating to signs and symbols, esp. spoken or written signs
2. (Linguistics) relating to semiotics
3. (Medicine) of, relating to, or resembling the symptoms of disease; symptomatic
[from Greek *sēmeiōtikos* taking note of signs, from *sēmeion* a sign]⁴⁵

Semiotics references two broad areas of study similar to the Deleuze-Guattari

formula:

1. (Linguistics) the study of signs and symbols, esp. the relations between written or spoken signs and their referents in the physical world or the world of ideas.)
2. (Medicine) the scientific study of the symptoms of disease; symptomatology; also called semiology semeiology.⁴⁶

For our purposes, the first semiotic register relates to the study of linguistic meaning, that is, the use of signs to originate, contract, and then circulate conventional systems of communication such as: “*The cat chases the mouse,*” “*Herd the mammoths into the blind canyon and then we hunt them from the cliff by the large boulder...*” These examples of course involves the technical examination of codes and how they can isolate, convene, and then convey specific meaning in communication systems. Umberto Eco renders a specific and perhaps useful set of definitions:

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it.

...semiotics studies all cultural process as *processes of communication*.

⁴⁴ OED.

⁴⁵ freedictionary.com: Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

...This process is made possible by the existence of a code.

A code is a system of signification. ...When – on the basis of an underlying rule – something actually presented to the perception of the addressee *stands for* something else, there is *signification*.

...A signification system is an autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible. On the contrary (except for stimulation processes) *every act of communication to or between human beings* – or any other intelligent biological or mechanical apparatus – *presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition*.⁴⁷

Eco appears to articulate the first set of definitions which pertain to “...the semiotic...semiotics” as the study of signs, and specifically the study of code systems which facilitate human communication. Eco’s principles thus follow:

- a. “Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be *taken* as a sign” and “a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else...” [my emphasis] asserts that the semiotic register pertains to the representation and/or substitution of subjective objects of reference to code systems: for example, a “tall organic structure” within my view or touch can be coded to its sign reference “tree.”
- b. The “substitution” of the object for the sign appears to be a virtual process. The code process holds independently in addition to or separate from the actual object/sign structure, i.e., “...This something else does not necessarily have to exist... A signification system is an autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible.” The representation or

⁴⁷ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976 (1979 Midland Book edition), pp. 7-9.

substitution holds independently, and hypothetically can thus be used in this virtual condition to construct a valid, usable, or accepted representation *or* contra-wise to construct a “lie” or misrepresentation or mis-substitution.

- c. Eco will reference further on the necessary validation of a “correct” “semiotic convention,” i.e., “...when this association is culturally recognized and systematically coded...There is a sign every time a human group decides to use and to recognize something as the vehicle of something else.”⁴⁸ This principle coincides with Deleuze-Guattari’s reference to *contracted* and then *circulated* words as signs.
- d. Eco also stipulates that “...semiotics...the semiotic” as sign or code systems are “necessary conditions.” This principle is less empirically obvious, and appears to open the semiotic register to the question “...what or who...” claims this “necessary condition.”

This very brief consideration of Eco’s *Theory* does not claim to be complete or comprehensive but rather merely heuristic for our purposes of clarifying the semantic and semiotic registers. As such, we may observe that the first three principles coincide with what we have stipulated as the semantic register, that is systems of linguistic signs with more or less literal (contracted-consensual) and common usage (circulated/circulating) meaning and furthermore which may be subject to true or false verification. For a

⁴⁸ Ibid, 17.

consideration of the semiotic register their coincidence refers to “...relating to signs...esp. spoken or written signs.” However, what remains in excess are both “symbols” (as distinct from signs) and “symptomatology” as the study of the “symptoms” of meaning. We would claim that this initial isolation of a semiotic excess, as a further elaboration of the semantic excess which must express the semiotic, is not coincidental and that symbol and symptomatology share a common ground which relates to Eco’s fourth principle, the “necessary condition” of the semiotic.

A symbol denotes a more complex meaning function than sign: a sign can express a symbol but in so doing surpasses the code system in at least two ways. First, a symbol, such as the “Tomb of Jesus” in Christianity or the Sacred Ka’ba of Islam can be expressed as semantically signified empirical objects in an accepted or consensual historical context – Jesus was crucified on the cross and his body entombed by witnesses, and the Ka’ba is an accepted holy site with empirical reference. However, each can signify “something” which exceeds any empirical reference – for the Christian believer the tomb may signify the site where Jesus manifests as both fully mortal but with the resurrection also fully “divine,” while the Ka’ba “holds” and resounds as the most sacred site of Allah. As such, the symbol functions as both a sign but also as a symptom of an extra-semantic or extra-linguistic reference, “like” Anselm’s extra-conceptual concept of God or Shaikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawī’s reference to “God in the veil itself.” In this sense, a symbol exceeds its semantic sense “...by virtue of the unequal parts which it subsumes

and draws together, but draws together as unequal parts...”⁴⁹ The semantic “carries” the “sense” of the symbolic but the “sense of the symbolic” exceeds its semantic register. Secondly, while both the semantic and the semiotic require “interpretation,” semantic interpretation seeks what Paul Ricoeur might call a hermeneutics of suspicion (or minimal, specifying field), while the possible semiotic register requires Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of expansion. That is, semantic interpretation involves the clarification of the meaning of a word or proposition which may eventuate contractual agreement (or not) as to the “correct” or “applicable” (or not) *usage* or possible circulation: if I state that “the cat chases the mouse” I am not referring to an elephant pursuing a semi-truck & trailer; and in the command to “herd the mammoths into the blind canyon” I’m not issuing a command to meet by the fire and drink beer. The minimal process of semantic interpretation serves to determine the expressed intentional meaning of a statement. On the other hand, a hermeneutics of expansion involves statements which are expressed in the semantic register, and therefore carry contracted/circulated meaning, yet are at the same time not immediately or comprehensively reducible to a simplified semantic register: “God in the veil” or “that than which nothing great may be conceived” or the “Ka’ba as the sacred site of Allah” are statements which the Christian or the Muslim “understand” yet the statements exceed the immediate semantic register because the

⁴⁹ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 89.

statement contain terms which are now functioning differently and in contrast to their immediate semantic expression.⁵⁰

In summary, we can observe self-critically *but also empirically* that our attempt to clarify the semantic versus the semiotic is itself *symptomatic* of the excesses of the semantic and semiotic conditions. Therefore, in a second analysis we will pursue the suspicion that the excesses of the semantic and semiotic registers themselves express at least two additional fundamental aporias or gaps which haunt thought. Let us initially designate these as *symptom* and *background*. Symptom pertains to the second set of definitions of “...semiotics...the semiotic” while background addresses an operative ontological problem in the meaning condition. Each are intrinsic and yet independent of the thought of the meaning condition, or to re-quote Deleuze and Guattari, each are “...simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression.”

Symptomatology and symptom, we recall, are alternative and secondary definitions of “...semiotics...the semiotic.” However, the study of symptoms, as medical signs, complicates any “semiology” by implicating the “body” of the image in a non- or extra-semantic and extra-semiotic observation. Symptom derives from the Greek prefix

⁵⁰ “As I see it the problem of the unity of language cannot validly be posed until a fixed status has been assigned to a group of expressions that share the peculiarity of designating an indirect meaning in and through a direct meaning and thus call for something like deciphering, i.e., an interpretation, in the precise sense of the word. To mean something other than what is said – this is the symbolic function.

...It is neither the duality of sensory sign and signification nor that of signification and thing, the latter duality moreover being inseparable from the former. In a symbol the duality is added to and superimposed upon the duality of sensory sign and signification as a relation of meaning to meaning; it presupposes signs that already have a primary, literal, manifest meaning.” (Ricoeur, *Freud & Philosophy – An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denis Savage, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970, 12-13.)

syn- (“together”) and *ptoma* (“mischance”)⁵¹ but also denotes “an indication of disease...a casualty...that befalls one.”⁵² The study of semiotics is thus akin to the study of mischance (as a ventured but somehow failed “bet,” and perhaps also as a mischance of fortune) but as well the study of casualty, wound, or injury. The study of language pertains to the wound or mischance of meaning or the meaning condition. Žizek approaches this conundrum via Lacan’s insight that “...the Real can be inscribed [*peut s’inscrire*] only through a deadlock of formalization”⁵³ which is to suggest that the act of signification always fails the complete an exhaustive description of that which it would inscribe – the act of inscription formalizes by limitation in the symbolic order the comprehension of the totality of the so-called “real” order, and this formalization is by definition an always faltering attempt.⁵⁴ As such, while still able to contract and circulate meaning, the symbolic order may also thus denote itself as a *casualty of meaning*: “In other words, the Real cannot be inscribed, but we can inscribe this impossibility itself, we can locate its place: a traumatic place which causes a series of failures⁵⁵.... The symbolic structure must include an element which embodies its ‘stain,’ its own point of impossibility around which it is articulated: in a way it is the structuring of its own

⁵¹ Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Definitions*, 347.

⁵² Skeat, *A Concise Etymological dictionary of the English Language*, 537.

⁵³ Jacques Lacan, *le Séminaire XX-Encore*, Paris, 1975, 85, quoted by Slavoj Žizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, New York: Verso, 1999, 172.

⁵⁴ This principle was expressed by Kant in that the subject’s experience of the pure object, or the object “in-itself,” can never be fully or exhaustively perceived but rather the object is rendered to experience as the object “for-itself.”

⁵⁵ Žizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp. 172-173.

impossibility.”⁵⁶ “That” which terms express in the meaning order is both inseparable (as “that” specified, de-limited “object” which is described/inscribed) from the expression itself and yet, paradoxically, it remains independent of the inscription by virtue of the very order of expression which by definition delimits and inscribes as an only partially and wounded inscription, and the form of expression of this paradoxical assemblage is the form of the symptom: “...the paradox is that this symbolic pact, this structural network of relations, can establish itself only in so far as it is embodied in a totally contingent material element, a little-bit-of-Real which, by its sudden irruption, disrupts the homeostatic indifference of relations between subjects. In other words, the imaginary balance changes into a symbolically structured network through a shock of the Real. ...Why? Because the big Other, the symbolic order, is always *barré*, failed, crossed-out, mutilated, and the contingent material element embodies this internal blockage, limit, of the symbolic structure.”⁵⁷ We can note that the meaning condition appears to be expressed using contracted and circulated signs and symbols, and now also “symptoms” of meaning either expressed but also latent “as” or “in” meaning. We may also discern that “that” which is expressed, while rendered in an apparently increasingly problematic mode, can use language to reference the world in a signed and/or symbolic and/or symptomatic order of “meaning.”

Zizek insinuates the next semiotic category of concern in the image of “...the big Other.” That is, the meaning condition can be seen to attempt to at least minimally

⁵⁶ Ibid, 183.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

reference the “complete” register of meaning even if that register’s reference system is wounded, incomplete, and only expressed symptomatically both because of the intrinsic limits of its mode of apprehension but also because the field of complete reference is itself never comprehensively commensurable. Even if physics might theoretically extrapolate a “Big Bang” at the “inception” of the “universe,” these terms themselves radically resist definition and in fact assign Žižek’s pathology of meaning: to assign the word “universe” as a reference to the complete, exhaustive data set of possible physical reference is already to introduce a finite *de*-fined designation to the apparently indefinite data set of possible universe(s) – yet from both the minimal empirical study even a @14 billion year old “universe” is a finite assumption (and may not in fact “be” very old at all). From another angle, a maximal theoretical study is confounded by the non-empirical conundrum “Why or how is there or was there ever something rather than nothing, ever, at all...?” Such a register must reference the complete set of signified objects and their possible (or impossible) complete expression. But it is just this effort to signify the incommensurable which shadows thought and the hope or expectation of expressing its background complete set, abstractly stated as Lonergan’s “...complete set of answers to the complete set of questions.” To “complete” such a wounded, incomplete reference to the dream of a complete meaning register, we can observe, if only abstractly, that the semantic and semiotic foregrounds of expression are apparently always held or contrasted in abeyance against an implied complete background. This background is active and effective in both the semantic and the semiotic dimensions of the register. When the sign

or symbol “▲” for “delta” or difference is inscribed on the blackboard what we perceive is (a) the data-set of “▲” and (b) the complete data-set of “▲” against its indefinite and comprehensive background, that is the complete set of “▲” and “not-▲.” The shift from (a) to (b) abstractly inscribes the wound of the symptom because the form of expression of the equation has already scarred and mutilated the possibility of the complete and true image: the image itself is already, in its inscription, a “new” foreground with its own “new” background. Pure difference “▲” is inscribed inseparably but only in an already “next” repetition which thus renders its sign as symptom in repetition and its “essence” independent of this symptomatic image. Winqvist describes Lonergan’s equation as revealing the necessary condition of the “prescision of knowing”:

Lonergan’s notion of being as the complete set of answers to the complete set of questions is an unrestricted notion which cannot be realized under any set of conditioned heuristic structures belonging to our transcendental imagination.⁵⁸ What this means is that if we decide to work toward an understanding of the being which manifests itself as the content of the known, then we have prescinded from the question of the nature of reality itself. The notion of being which is available to ordinary discourse is a notion of proportionate being. The proportion is determined by a structural isomorphism with the formal heuristic character of the transcendental imagination since these structures provide the formal principles for the unity of any given concrete situation.⁵⁹

Deleuze will express this insight as such: “We cannot think of the condition in the image of the conditioned...”⁶⁰ However, we must ask if this insight is functionally occluded in the contracting and then circulating function of terms in their forms of expressions: the

⁵⁸ Charles Winqvist, *The Transcendental Imagination*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972, 26-27; Winqvist is referencing Bernhard Lonergan, *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, 350.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 123.

condition of the semiotic is always conditioned and this condition presupposes, “prescinds” from the assumption of meaning as such. Or to extrapolate from Winquist’s description of Lonergan’s abstract image, to imagine the possibility of “the full set of answers” is already to condition “an unrestricted” into “a conditioned heuristic structure,” that is, a restricted structure – this constitutes a penultimate but nonetheless asserted naming of an unnamable concept, as in Anselm’s “...*that than which nothing greater can be conceived...*”

More critically, however, we note the semantic and semiotic psychology which surreptitiously emerges from this penult: Winquist’s observation that “*The proportion (the conditioned) is determined by a structural isomorphism with...formal heuristic character...*” (my parenthetical insert) marks the subtle but intractable Rubicon where the apparently incommensurable statement assumes heuristic meaning and thought may take flight (and power) and even an undeserved dominion over “...the Big Real...the Big other..., etc.” This is not an ontological observation but rather an empirical observation of the internal “logic” and/or “a-logic” of sense and speech which nonetheless expresses an assumed ontology in the structure of knowing. Derrida appears to express this problem of knowing from within the code system itself, that is as intrinsic to the “structure” of expression itself: “This supplement of a code which traverses its own field, endlessly displaces its closure, breaks its line, opens its circle, and no ontology will have been able to reduce it.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 271

The perpetual displacement of the code and its supplement notwithstanding, the momentum of expression appears to desire its full address or accounting of the potential meaning condition as observed in the energetic assertion of such statements themselves, as we find in both Lonergan's or Anselm's formulas. Winqvist observes Lonergan further: "Lonergan notes that our notion of being, which is itself a heuristic notion, must have its foundation in the dynamic orientation of the pure desire to know."⁶² We observe both an indefinite "desire to know" but this desire perpetually encounters, and encounters by definition of this penultimate status rather than simply its direct failure, the indefinite semiotic register itself, "...*the full set...*" or "...*that than which...*" These perpetually penultimate references to the extreme excess of the register are functionally intrinsic to the register itself: its native status cannot avoid its equation which by definition already is formulated as "▲" and "all that is not ▲." The semiotic penult indefinitely expresses (semantically) its definite (conditioned, proportioned, contracted, circulated) formulation of the indefinite register of signification. Moreover, Lonergan's stipulation of the "desire to know" itself expresses the indefinite register, or rather, the internal energetic momentum which must be *or desire to be* commensurate to the possible indefinite register. Signification thus can be expressed as the register upon which the indefinite desire to know definitely encounters and natively signifies the field of possible reference of "▲" and "all that is not ▲."

⁶² Winqvist, *The Transcendental Imagination*, 26, paraphrasing Lonergan, *Insight*, 348.

Such analysis constitutes a semiotic *anamnesis* because we are forced to exfoliate the internal formula of signification itself. Semiotic analysis is an internal “recall to memory” of the operative components and hypothetical structure of not only how signification expresses but must also account for the full “equationability” of the possible field of reference. The occlusion of the full potential of both the energy and the field by its expression is a native fact of signification which prescinds from the sign. We cannot purge this limiting fact from the equation because it constitutes the equation.

Summary of the Excess of the Semiotic Field: The excess of the semiotic condition prescinds from any formulation of the condition itself but is nonetheless natively stipulated in the (energetic) desire to express this internal excess both conditionally and unconditionally in semantic registers. Expressions of “religion: or “the religious” appear to at once affirm and defy Deleuze’s observation that “We cannot think of the condition in the image of the conditioned...”⁶³ because they claim to be expressing concerns of unconditional meaning yet within the semantic register. We are suggesting that this claim is legitimated by the very assemblage of the composite semantic and semiotic conditions, that is “ ‘▲’ and all that is not ‘▲’ .”

Freud appears to address this issue indirectly as a precept to dream interpretation in the principle of secondary revisioning. That is, the dream-image functionally prescinds from (and hence resists) any attempt to analyze or interpret its significance which, however, *does not prevent such secondary analysis* – on the contrary, the

⁶³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 123.

fascination with an unconditional (more and less) dream-image captivates thought in a psychological momentum which is precipitated in an irresistible desire for its thought. As the secondary “thought” of the dream itself emerges and *transverses* into “heuristic structures” it transforms the dream-image indelibly to a signified meaning, the by-product of which is the functional (unavoidable) forgetfulness of the pure *force* of the dream-image itself: *force* is surreptitiously transversed to *meaning*. Deleuze thus thrusts the apparent intolerability of the abstract thought-image into a concept of *compossibility* in which a recognition of the full field of thought is accepted to theory as ‘▲’ *folded into* “... *and* all that is not ‘▲’ ”:

“...the very condition of “compossibility,” in a manner of reconstituting over and again one and the same, infinitely infinite, converging series, the World, made of all series, its curvature having a unique variable. The differential relation thus acquires a new meaning, since it expresses the analytical extension of one series into another, and no more the unity of converging series that would not diverge in the least from each other. Now then, infinity also changes meaning. It acquires a fourth and still current dimension: it is no longer defined either by itself or by the “limit” of a series, but by a law of order or continuity that classifies limits or transforms series into a “totality” (the presently infinite totality of the world, or the transfinite).”⁶⁴

What remains is to impute the consideration of the energetic, that is the semiotic and now psychic energy of this compossibility as it transverses meaning and emerges onto the cultural field.

Initial Observations

Observation and analysis of the semantic and semiotic registers (the “meaning” register) must be, or rather, already are situated as the operational starting point of any

⁶⁴ Deleuze, *The Fold*, trans. Tom Conley, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 50.

theory of “...religion...religions...the religious” because the configuration of the semantic and semiotic registers prescind from their expression in signs and symptoms. First, more careful consideration of how “signs” and “symptoms” express appears to insinuate an indefinite or polysemic multiplicity to expression; second, more careful consideration of “expression” appears to insinuate an energetics of indefinite momentum or measure to the equation; and finally, any boundary “between” the semantic and semiotic conditions appears to stipulate a “boundary condition” itself of both liminal expressibility and efficient yet non-quantifiable energy. In each of the semantic and semiotic conditions we observe conditional statements expressed from a register which appears to be both conditional and unconditional. The composite condition appears able to express both conditional, contracted and circulated terms, yet also to be able to express unconditional portmanteau terms. This conditionalized and extra-conditionalized nativity of the registers of meaning appear to render sign and symptom as compositions of an anterior figuration which challenges normative Western philosophical discourse and particularly any definable epistemological structuration of knowing or expression. As Derrida poignantly suggests:

We must let ourselves be referred to an order that no longer refers to sensibility. But we are not referred to intelligibility either, to an ideality not fortuitously associated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding. We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy’s founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Jaques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D. B. Allison, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 133.

However, we challenge Derrida's own structuration of thought in his use of the concept of the "infrastructure," expressed by Gasché that: "...The infrastructure, consequently, must be thought of as preceding, in a nontemporal way, the alternative of being and nothingness, of presence and absence, and of the ontico-ontological difference as well, as Derrida shows in 'Difference.' If an infrastructure is to assume the explicatory status of a ground, it must be a radical alterity in excess of that which it accounts for. ...the infrastructure acquires its interpretive efficiency with regard to the specific problems it clarifies through being in excess of the opposition of sense and non-sense, meaning and the absence of meaning. ...it is in a position of anteriority to the epoch of meaning and the loss of meaning."⁶⁶ On the contrary, we diverge from Derrida in that we will assert that no claim can be made that the infrastructure prescind from a "ground" or an "alterity" to thought. Rather, we claim that we can only observe thought as an *infra*-symptom of its own "structure-as-symptom" which we have abstracted to the equation "'▲' and all that is not '▲'"; nor do we require such a "ground" to observe that thought is a symptom of this equation. On the other hand, what we *can* claim is that discursive thought which derives from this equation "'▲' and all that is not '▲'" bears an energetic which exceeds thought not as structural alterity but rather as the *infra*-economic of meaning. The semantic and semiotic registers of meaning should always appear inefficient in its semantic expression because its energetic flow should always exceed such expression, but this difference makes all the difference as we examine the excessive

⁶⁶ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 148.

expressions of culture and particularly religious culture. Whether the study of culture, and in particular religious studies, is fully cognizant of this difference at this stage of its unfolding remains in question. As such, what is termed “alterity” is rather a perpetual alternativity of the register of meaning.

Etymological Concern: Contracted and Circulated Terms

Analysis thereby encounters its *meta*-analysis in the first, second and third terms of “*religio*,” that is as the third term “...*bounded by or to*...” invades the terms “rite” and “ritual” and appears then to levy a complex force upon the etymological figuration of our hypothetical equation: any linguistic analysis occurs in the context of language and hence must be, self-critically, a *meta*-method.⁶⁷ On the one hand, we can connect “*bounded*” to “text” and “rite”: the religious participant is “*bound to...or by*...” a “text” or a “rite” in careful and ritualized practice. Yet on the other hand, the equation is incomplete without a reference to “what” the text or rite is bound.

Nonetheless, in their etymological survey, as we referenced earlier, both Smith and Raschke are noting the originating problematic of our study in the initial definition of the named field of study itself. And, from our introductory summary, we noted what we termed the “counter-valenced” or “heterogeneous” levels of the inquiry’s own terms in the formula.

We also noted that, absent a more complete accounting of the semantic and semiotic meaning registers, we are challenged to discover Deleuze’s *disjunctive* condition in the term “religion...religious...” as rooted in *ligare*. From Deleuze’s angle, it would

⁶⁷ *Meta* here is used to point to the internal complexity of the problem of language whenever an attempt occurs to critique language. For example, Surber, in *Metacritique*, observes of the *metakrikker* that “...we can say that *Metakritik* begins by asserting a “linguistic *a priori*” as more fundamental than and the ultimate condition for any subsequent assertion of a “conceptual” or “categorical *a priori*” of the sort advocated by Kantian transcendentalism.”(Jere Surber, *Metacritique*, 13) The trajectory of our thesis is rather to assert that the *meta*-conditionality of the problem of language is a function of the internal semantic and semiotic condition which, following Deleuze’s critique, does not posit a new *a priori* but rather works from the empirical observation of the multiple and complex situation intrinsic to language’s “states of affairs” but more precisely to the states of affairs which arise when the terms of language critique and analyze their own condition.

appear that our analysis is still hunting within the *contracting* or *circulating* conditions of the term: “religion,” as a *contracting word*, may appear to “perform a synthesis of succession over a single series” in that “rite” and “text” can “bind” the religious participant to a set of careful practices and as such “...extract from them their composite sense (“connection”); in a similar vein, “religion” as a *circulating word* can “...perform a synthesis of coexistence and coordination between two heterogeneous series...” and as such function to form a “conjunction” of terms. As a “contracted” term, “religion” can be assigned a heuristic value which sites it in relation to the valences of the semantic arrangement. Here too, as a “circulated” term, “religion” can be assigned a heuristic value which *by definition* allows it to perform a synthetic function of coordination between heterogeneous series – in both cases, the complexity appears to be contained “semantically” in pre-given arrangements and pre-determined circulated structures of signification.

The contracted and circulated characteristics of language usage notwithstanding, there appears to be another, or rather, an *alter-native* character to these same contracted/circulated terms which exceed the register. This excess is not merely an etymological complex which may or may not achieve contract or circulation (usable validity) but rather this excess appears to “stem” internally from terms and propositions such as “...*that than which...*” or “...*seeing in the veil itself...*” or “...*the full set of answers...*” or even “...*why is there something...*” using contractible and circulatable

terminologies. Or less abstractly, within our equation of *religio*, how can (if it can) our discipline contract and circulate the third term *religio* or *ligare* in an academic register?

Can we anticipate that Deleuze's "contracted" and "circulating" fields pertain to the discourse which has tended to evolve into the "academic" study of religion or "religious studies" in recent decades since the American academy's early formulation (if it was *ever* formally formulated) of its "vision" or version of the discipline in the 1960's-1970's? Further inquiry should question whether these fields of discourse have dominated at the expense of the "disjunctive" or "portmanteau" voices of the "religious" or, what Raschke will, in less or more measured rebellion, stipulate as the "dialogical turn."⁶⁸ This turn, as we are observing in our examination, cannot be stipulated in the first two terms of the formula – our examination's thesis asserts therefore that "it" exceeds as the "third term" *by contracted/circulated definition from within as an internal alter-native of the register itself*. Etymological confusion or complexity of the contracted or circulated use of language cannot account for its own repetitive internal excess but this ironically and paradoxically does not allow our extrication from the contracted and circulated contextability of thinking by projecting semi-contracted or semi-circulated "externalized alterities" – the problem of language is rather domiciled in the alter-native

⁶⁸ "...the "end of theology" implies a Copernican revolution in a provisional sense of the word with regard to language. "Overcoming metaphysics" involves more than "thinking the unthought" (Heidegger), or outgrowing representationalism (Derrida), or rediscovering immanence (Deleuze). At its very core postmodernism is a *theory of language*, and these particular philosophical theories serve mainly as critiques of the covert Aristotelianism that has crept into philosophy in almost every generation. In that respect the "post-" in postmodernism marks little more than the disruption of, or transition beyond, what has gone before. ...If the last stage of philosophical modernism was the "linguistic turn that spanned a sizable portion of the twentieth century, then we are on the verge of something unprecedented, and perhaps unwarranted, in the legacy of philosophico-theological thinking. We are witnessing the markings of what we shall call the dialogical turn." (Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2004, 211-212.)

turn within language itself and everything we can hope to have or use as reference hides or evanesces in the veil itself. Nietzsche's or Western culture's eternal return speaks rather as an internal turning.

Smith pressures this point from within the discourse itself in a manner which is helpful for our critique. He observes that American religious studies scholars have resisted a self-awareness and a cognizance the "religion(s)...the religious" and he notes:

"Religion" is not a native category...it is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of the native culture..."

"...there is an implicit universality. "Religion" is thought to be a ubiquitous human phenomenon."

"In constructing the second-order, generic category "religion," its characteristics are those that appear natural to the other. In these quotations this familiarity is signaled by the phrases "knowledge of god" and "religion...as we understand it." "Religion" is an anthropological not a theological category."⁶⁹

Indeed, in an earlier work, *Imagining Religion*, Smith further asserts that "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy. For this reason, the student of religion, and most particularly the historian of religion, must be relentlessly self-conscious. Indeed, this self-consciousness constitutes his primary expertise, his foremost object of study."⁷⁰

Smith is thus addressing the crux of the problematic: "religious" studies has first contracted and then circulated a discipline which both explicitly and implicitly imposes

⁶⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 269.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, xi.

these first conditions of discourse, the contracted and the circulated, to frame (if not circumvent) the third term, the disjunctive, which, ironically, remains the surreptitious background condition of the “religion...the religious...” This strategy would appear to be an academic strategy on its surface aided, perhaps not fully intentionally, by a semantic and semiotic strategy in its depth. Can we suggest that the study of “*religion...the religious...*” has tended to marginalize its own unique capacity to express a disjunctive third term of its register?

Religious studies remains a viable discipline *as such*, that is, to continue with Smith’s approach, an *academic* discipline. Our discovery simply reminds the academy that such a discipline engenders its own incompleteness without the third term. In Smith’s own observation: “I have come to believe that a prime object for the historian of religion ought to be the theological tradition, taking the term in the widest sense.”⁷¹

Non-Etymological Concern: The energetic disjunctive background

The internal remainder, Deleuze’s portmanteau term, addresses the symptomatic condition of meaning veiled within and upon the semantic surface condition of discourse: meaning is only *expressed* in discourse.

The register of “...religion(s)...the religious...” may be both a contentious objective of empirical research and explication, and therefore a discussion possible within Kant’s categories or his self-limiting paradigm of reason, yet ironically and paradoxically this empirical method is not complete without referability to that which is the exception

⁷¹ Ibid, 43.

to reason, the portmanteau expression, “...bound...bounded...boundedness...”, that is, to *empirical inclusion* in the discipline’s progression to statements of indefinite reference such as Anselm’s “...that than which nothing greater can be conceived...” We will stipulate, however, that this internal exception is not merely the status of an *extra-curricular theology* or an attempted but limited discipline of internally externalized so-called “alterity,” but is rather the insinuated condition of reason itself, reason “fully” (“full” as indefinitely iterated and extended) accounted, reason whose momentum desires a full accountability of itself. Therefore, the Kantian *grenzbegriff* cannot be a “borderline concept” external to the reach of reason, but is rather the internalizing exception to reason itself, it is the alter-native condition of the equation of reason upon which the empirical study of religion in particular, and reason in general, is predicated.⁷² This turn points to the internal return and completion of the Kantian project to its alter-native expression: it will insinuate faith or desire as requisite for reason rather than merely Kant’s own alter-native, i.e., reason critiqued in order to “make room for faith.” The modern/post-modern shift is revisionable as an internal turn of the semantic and semiotic registers.

Religious studies remains incomplete and unviable without the third term which speaks as its ghost “background,” its veiled boundedness. If discourse constitutes a

⁷² “The “state of exception” is more than a political concept, or perhaps even a “politico-theological one,” as Schmidt envisioned it. Schmidt himself referred to it as a “borderline concept” (*Grenzbegriff*). Schmidt, to be sure, was employing the German term in a quite different sense from Kant, who in the *Critique of Pure Reason* characterized the *Grenzbegriff* as an idea that marks the limit of our understanding and of our rational faculties. “God” and “immortality” are well-known Kantian examples of *Grenzbegriffe*. For Kant in his political philosophy as well as his ethics all the various iterations of “borderline,” “limiting”, or what he elsewhere terms “heuristic” notions function exclusively to provide some logical justification for the use of terms and categories that cannot be captured within the net of empirical induction.” (Raschke, *Schmidt’s State of Exception*, unpublished manuscript, 4.)

primary *via regias* of the discipline, then the semantic and semiotic registers are *empirically* (as the semantic evidence reveals) and *emphatically* (as the psychic force of expression evidences) a theological discipline whether it self-critically achieves this recognition or not: “...*Called or not called God will be there... .*” However, in calling and naming “religion...the religious...” have we not already addressed this internal conundrum, but more obviously have we not *already been addressed*? It is a curious footnote that the emerging discipline of what might be termed “philosophical psychology” in the works of James Hillman and others stipulates a psychological maxim to philosophical discourse in the term “...*stick to the image...*”⁷³ whether analysis focuses on the image of the dream or, in this case, the complete image of thought. As such, the examination remains only provisional, i.e., “pivoting” or turning at this juncture/disjuncture, and we therefore require additional conceptual strategies with which to discuss the register of “...*religion...religions...the religious...*”

Finally, our treatment of the semantic register as distinct from the semiotic register has, we believe, discovered an internalizing complexity and disjunction. These terms, while useful in themselves in the contractual and circulating senses, cannot however be mapped to separate topographies but rather find themselves domiciled in an internal, overlapping complexity in the homeland of the meaning condition itself. The attempt to clearly and lucidly distinguish them appears to be a symptom of the categorical

⁷³ Hillman of course describes his work as “archetypal psychology” but indeed he himself is a very careful and lucid philosopher in the sense that our study here would describe the field. See James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology* and other works.

imperative itself which, again, while useful, remains a sub-set of the full equation of reason on the one hand and yet a not merely potentially dangerous instigator of intellectual hegemony on the other. Such hegemony, ironically, reveals discourse as symptomatic and the momentum of the semantic and semiotic registers as *energetic* or, to recall Nietzsche's expression, as the *will to power*. The terms semantic and semiotic refer to and cross-reference the register of meaning as a complexity.

IV. Conceptual Strategies

“The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of an object, and consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of *unlimitedness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.”⁷⁴

Our discipline demands a revised and unique conceptual complexity in the arts and sciences because both this domain and our ability to account for the capacity of our study remain incomplete and penultimate without strategies which approximate the empirical topography of our observable data-sets. Just as the disjunctive portmanteau statement is expressed in contracted, circulated terms and hence achieves an internal empirical reference in discourse, the “...*bounded to...by...*” stakes claim to its empirical position in the complexity of what we think we can mean by “...*religion...religions...the religious...*” as an academic pursuit.

The “Precision” from Sense and Difference

We suspect an arrangement to the thought of sense which already “prescinds” from both thought and what we have nominated as “sense.” Indeed, we might speculate that sense itself appears to be a function of precision itself. That is, the verb transitive “prescind” refers to the act “to separate or divide in thought; consider individually,” and the verb intransitive “to withdraw one's attention.”⁷⁵ Sense is always “sense of...” “this” or “that” or “this in contrast to this other this or that...”, and so on.

⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Part 1, 90.

⁷⁵ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Before its nomination in the term “sense,” sense is already itself prescinding “from,” that is it is transitively “separating, dividing...” the surface of the field in the subject of sense to the object of sense. “Subject” and “object” are already linguistic “terms” used to nominate the sub-sets of sense. Or intransitively, this passive sense can also be seen to “draw” focus to the object as it “withdraws” attention to all that is not the object, or the implied complete background of the object. It appears we must assume that precision is not an operation of thought before it is an operation of sense, even if nominated as an operation of sense by a term of thought. Sense both *pre*-forms and also *per*-forms its operation as the differentiating function of the encounter of a nominated “subject” with the nominated “object.” Precision thus stipulates at least two characteristics for our theory: first, what we term “sense” is already pre- or “ante”-posed in advance by sense prescinding from the “world”; secondly, this ante-position imputes a momentum to the flow and folding of sense. In the first instance, Deleuze will characterize this quality as the “paradox of regress, or indefinite proliferation”:

When I designate something, I always suppose that the sense is understood, that it is already there. As Bergson said, one does not proceed from sounds to images and from images to sense; rather one is established “from the outset” within sense. Sense is like the sphere in which I am already established in order to enact possible denotations, and even to think their conditions. Sense is always presupposed as soon as I begin to speak; I would not be able to begin without this presupposition. In other words, I never state the sense of what I am saying. But on the other hand, I can always take the sense of what I say as the object of another proposition whose sense, in turn, I cannot state. I thus enter into the infinite regress of that which is presupposed. ...This infinite proliferation of verbal entities is known as Frege’s paradox.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 28-29.

The second precept is hinted at here as well when the “order” of sense’s procession “...*from* sounds to images...” suggests the flow or momentum of sense. The American semiotician Charles Peirce appears to be very precise about this “momentum,” (which we also claim suggests an *energetics* of sense) when he refers to the “separation” or “division” of sense in the condition of its precision:

§5. The terms “precision” and “abstraction,” which were formerly applied to every kind of separation, are now limited, not merely to mental separation, but to that which arises from *attention to* one element and *neglect of* the other. Exclusive attention consists in a definite conception or *supposition* of one part of an object, without any supposition of the other. Abstraction or precision ought to be carefully distinguished from two other modes of mental separation, which may be termed *discrimination* and *dissociation*. Discrimination has to do merely with the essences of terms, and only draws a distinction in meaning. Dissociation is that separation which, in the absence of a constant association, is permitted by the law of association of images.

...Precision is not a reciprocal process.⁷⁷

Thus we impute this precept of precision from the regress of the symptoms of a sense of thought which *has already begun*. As Peirce theorizes, the order is not reciprocal because we can never achieve pure sense but only an *after*-sense. Yet it appears that we can discern that its *after*-sense symptomatic expression is ironically reciprocating in that we achieve this “sense” of the precision of sensed thought from the ante-position of textual references to describe these symptoms. And the precept of precision appears to subtly suggest the “flow” of energy “from” and “to,” and though we cannot obtain a semantic or semiotic measure of such energy we note that it must register a certain efficiency of *exchange*, and this energetic must also be included in the total equation which we will call the “sense-to-sign” register.

⁷⁷ Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, Peirce, Charles Sanders, *The Essential Peirce Volume I*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 2-3

Sense to Sign: The Requisite for a Theory of Semantic and Semiotic Economic

Exchange

All the sciences have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task understood as the solution of the *problem of value*, the determination of the *order of rank among values*.⁷⁸

We are never referred to the real forces that *form* thought, thought itself is never related to the real forces that it presupposes *as thought*. Truth is never related to what it presupposes. But there is no truth that, before being a truth, is not the bringing into effect of a sense or the realization of a value. Truth, as a concept, is entirely undetermined.⁷⁹

...From denotation to manifestation, then to signification, but also from signification to manifestation and to denotation, we are carried along a circle, which is the circle of the proposition. Whether we ought to be content with these three dimensions of the proposition, or whether we should add a *fourth* – *which would be sense* – is an economic or strategic question.⁸⁰

Culture rests precariously in the liminal boundary of the energetic momentum between these semantic and the semiotic registers. This borderland renders the register as desiring intelligibility but only more or less stable. Meaning has already occurred to itself as it would seek to analyze, and it is already carried on the momentum of the desire to know. From this reverse angle, Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason* may be read as much as a warning as analysis – it speaks like the gorgons at the gates of castle. We can discern desire, faith, and pathos as primary requisites *for* reason.

Of course the gate is now a prescinded aporia – an impassable yet implied portal – which closes as its opens and opens as it closes in the dynamic plays and leaps from “desire’s” “sensibility” to its elusive and elliptical signatures in the signs of proposed “intelligibilities.” What *ante* do we hold and then put up as we stand at the portal?

⁷⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: The Modern Library, 2000, 492.

⁷⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, (original *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, pp. 103-104.

⁸⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 17.

This portal of the meaning register can also be assigned as “gap” or “gaping” – i.e., the subtle and immeasurable implied extent “between” *sensibility* (the imagined “pre-verbal” or, in our terms, *ante-verbal*) and *intelligibility*. Each term is already achieved through the assignment of signification – the inscription of the sign to *de-sign-ate* the references of experience in a signed “time” and a “space.” That is, by assigning the time/space mark of the *sense-to-object* event to a “sign,” so-assigned “intelligible thought” “captures” the event in the signature of a language system:

Signs represent the present in its absence; they take the place of the present. When we cannot take hold of or show the thing, let us say the present, the being-present, when the present does not present itself, then we signify, we go through the detour of signs. We take up or give signs; we make signs.⁸¹

Derrida, deconstructing classical semiology from within, thus asserted that because the sign is a “secondary” or “provisional” substitution of the time/space “presence” or now deferred presence of the sense-to-object event, the sign could no longer be assumed to merely represent this presence or deferred presence.⁸² More critically, for a semantic and semiotic economic theory, he asserted that the “simple symmetrical” relationship of sign to presence was in question,⁸³ thus raising the ante for any expectation that we could measure or estimate the energetic or economic force of an

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, “*Differance*,” in *Speech and Phenomena*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 138

⁸² Ibid, “1. Differance can no longer be understood according to the concept of “sign,” which has always been taken to mean the representation of a presence and has been constituted in a system (of thought or language) determined on the basis of an in view of presence.”

⁸³ Ibid, “2. In this way we question the authority of presence or its simple symmetrical contrary, absence or lack. We thus interrogate the limit that has always constrained us, that always constrains us – we who inhabit a language and a system of thought –to form the sense of being in general as presence or absence, in the categories of being or beingness (*ousia*).”

originary sensibility to its signature in the sign. Derrida assigned this immeasurable and unnamable gap or aporia “*différance*”:

Derrida sought to radicalize the Heideggerian project by tracing the metaphysical privileging of presence back to the tradition’s most basic assumptions regarding language, signification, and textuality. ...Derrida introduced the signifier *différance*. Identical in sound with the French *difference*, of which it at first appears in misspelling, it indicates the underlying process of opening or spacing that makes any concrete system of differences possible. Neither active nor passive, substantial nor insubstantial, determinate nor indeterminate, *différance* is...a sort of intersection of temporality becoming spatialized. *Différance* is neither signs nor the differences between them but a sort of open field of play out of which both arise. It is covered over or suppressed by every concrete act of signification, but it is also their ultimate source and precondition, a spacing...but not a space, a temporalizing but not any particular temporal event, a continually receding or deferred trace of past and future significations in the present.⁸⁴

We suspect a “gap within the gap” in Surber’s observation that “*Difference* is neither signs nor the differences between them but a sort of open field of play of which both arise.” This open field is indeed, we assert, the energetic economic field which is “covered over or suppressed” by the process itself – it constitutes what we stipulate as the leap of faith or desire between sensibility and intelligibility. It suggests the *ante* of the bet, the energy of sense which is anteed on the betting table and then rendered and *exchanged* in the play of signification.

Sense to Sign “Instantiation” as the Ante of Thought

It is rather a question of a throw of the dice, of the whole sky as open space and of throwing as the only rule. The singular points are on the die; the questions are the dice themselves; the imperative is to throw. Ideas are the problematic combinations which result from throws.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Jere Paul Surber, *Culture and Critique*, Denver, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 198.

We require an additional, indeed, an *excessive* propaedeutic to the meaning equation of sensibility and intelligibility itself, and we term this a propaedeutic of the “ante.”

Hegel appears to stipulate the mechanics of the semantic register as follows:

“In **Intuition** we have single objects before us. Thinking brings them into *relation* with each other or *compares* them. In **Comparison** it singles out what they have in common with each other and omits that by which they differ and thus it retains only universal ideas.”⁸⁶

So here we may empirically observe thought’s own sly ante to the betting table: Hegel *assumes*, or must “ante,” the semantic register (“intuition...thinking...relation...comparison...universal ideas”) in order to describe or account for the process of thought. But at Hegel’s juncture thought has already leapt (or lapsed), it is already in flight, but from what space or time, what throw, what bet?

To account for the meaning register, we must therefore *ante*-pose this leap “from” “sense” “to” “sign” – from Hegel’s “single objects” “to” “thinking...intuition...etc.” - we punctuate using quotation-marks to intentionally point to each term in the *order of the ante*. That is, each sign of the ante-signature of the equation is already a bet, a “put”⁸⁷ of any “thesis” which would assume and insinuate itself into the meaning register. The ante constitutes both the sign reference and the energetic momentum which must be “put” or “placed” in order to begin and *pre*-sume the play of meaning. To “presume” is to “take

⁸⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 9, section 1: “The Science of Laws, Morals and Religion, Elucidation,” #6; quoted by Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U. Press, 1990, 41.

⁸⁷ One definition of “ante” means “to put in beside, to place”, OED.

possession of without any right”⁸⁸ and indeed, we and/or thought possess no “right” to its presumption – it must simply ante the right or privilege. No “right,” that is, other than the *post facto* consensus and contract of a now post-assigned semantic and semiotic figuration and energetic. Moreover, Hegel’s “thinking” already *possesses* an *ante*-positing of itself in order to posit itself as such – and, we might also observe, both “thought” and the “subject that would think” are furthermore *possessed by* this put – the anteed put already stipulates both the order and the economics (the “cost” of the bet) of the play of meaning. The light of consensual meaning is always an afterglow of a previous positing that has already been purchased by the economics of the bet.

This ante applies to the “thought of difference.” For example, if I draw “▲” on the blackboard the faculty of vision may see and then visually distinguish the image “▲” as “differentiated” against the background of the blackboard (or it may not) but what-is-called “thought” rescinds the term “difference” until I verbally insinuate the question, “*What do you see?*” The “what” and the “see” have already leapt from the pure event of seeing but this leap itself constitutes an event, the event of the energetic shift from sight *to* sound *to* term – the event of sight is termed in the terms of the question, and as such *term*-inates the pure vision as it is now sounded and inscribed in “its” verbal signing but the “it” is itself no longer the pure vision but rather a “new” event, a new *instance* of figuration. The economics of this shift must be at least efficient, that is, the event cannot destroy the energy of the original sensory input but rather must shift and conserve it to a new state or status: the state or status of the term is itself energetic, sensory, even

⁸⁸ OED.

sensual. Or, more likely, the event achieves an expanded economics as the mere visual sensory input of “▲” expands into a vastly “new” sensory topography, that of the indefinite field of the full language-set.⁸⁹ It is “one thing” to “see” the “▲” as a pure visual reference/difference, but it is quite another “thing” to write the text *Difference & Repetition*.

However, the “shift” from “sense” to “sign” stipulates a *qualitative* as well as an *energetic* or quantitative change, and this difference constitutes an immeasurable part of the difference of the sense-to-sign *ex-change*, a difference which escapes “quantification” because it metamorphoses the arch of the event-shift to a new qualitative state. Deleuze notes in his description of Leibniz’s “fold”:

The simplest way of stating the point is by saying that to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, “to withdraw into the recesses of a world.” [Leibniz, *Letter to Arnauld*, April 1687 (Gph, II, 99) [Mason, 125]] ...That is why metamorphosis or “metaschematism” pertains to more than mere change of dimension: every animal is double – but as a heterogeneous or heteromorphic creature, just as the butterfly is folded into the caterpillar that will soon unfold.⁹⁰

We are employing Deleuze’s illustration of the Leibnizian “fold” to suggest that the instantiating shift from sense to sign, the intrinsic generative “unit” of the semantic and semiotic registers, constitutes *both* a (1) quantitative and “economic” “-crease” (both potentiated as *in-crease* but also as *de-crease* of energy) as sense shifts or “unfolds” to sign, and (2) that this quantitative shift further implies (and may hide) a qualitative shift,

⁸⁹ Or, alter-natively, we can assert this full-set to the visual arts, or the sound-set to the musical arts, etc. Art and music therefore comprise the radically expanded *erotic* or *sensual* subliminal topographies of the “full” or “fuller” set of vision and sound, as such.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, *The Fold*, 9.

a metamorphosis, which “generates” the sign as a “meta-schema” of sense in a process which Deleuze stipulates elsewhere as the “passive genesis.”⁹¹ This liminal boundary of the semantic and semiotic registers cannot be fully accounted but rather subsists as an energetic and metaschematic symptom of any language event.

We stipulate this anteed move prior to the assignation of the meaning structure the *instantiation* of the shift from “sense” “to” “sign” – and the “here,” in this space and time, our “sense” and “sign” are of course themselves already anteed bets of the meaning play. Kant’s *a priori* principles of space and time hold as both the “instance” or time reference as well as the “stance” or “standing-in” or space reference of the anteed event of meaning. But “now” the instance of the sign constitutes the event of the instance of signification rather than pure space or time – the “play” from sense to sign instantiates its own singular event. Instantiation is thus the insinuation of “sense” now stipulated as its “sign” “of” “meaning” – “meaning” as a “sign” “of” “a” “sense” but now captured in the parenthetical (etymologically, *parenthesis* as the “put” of the “thesis”⁹²) complexity of the register. Instantiation constitutes the flashpoint which precedes any semantic or semiotic originating event, a flashpoint which, however, has by definition already lapsed from the signature – like a flashbulb in a dark *ante-room* which has already flashed to reveal the signature of the room’s image – the glow of the image is already an after-glow. And while we might desire to dream Plato’s dream in the cave – the dream of the “Idea”

⁹¹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 116-117.

⁹² Late Latin, *insertion of a letter or syllable in a word*, from Greek, from *parentithenai*, *to insert*; freedictionary.com: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009.

expressed in the ‘idea’ – the entire Platonic image of the “Idea/idea” remains itself already an ante-posed instantiation.

This insight is consistent with our earlier observation that “theory” must first acknowledge that it begins with a self-declared approach, that it carries to the scene of the examination an intrinsic point of view, an already held system of values. The approach and value system are expressed in their discourse and are thereby available to our observation, critique, and analysis – the so-called semantic or deconstructive critique. Yet our examination is forcing the discursive analysis beyond this semantic economic register to include the implication of its own ante-positioned *economic* register which we think prescinds from the formal structure.

For example, we can speculate that the method resident to phenomenology, so-called “bracketing,” may itself be “read” as the attempt to gain access to this ante-position of thought by attempting to use the “[...]” as a descriptive means of isolating the mind’s acquisition of the object. Indeed, as with any philosophical approach, we can trace an elaborate method yet such methods are suspended in the discursive register already anteed and then expressed by means of this register. In fact, we might apply the test of veracity to a philosophy or philosophical method by carefully examining its ability to accurately adhere to its original definition of itself – does it coherently describe and thus account for experience within the given register of its elected discourse? Does it bet work? However, our conceptualization of the ante-regimes (the semantic +/- the semiotic) anticipates (in arrears) the failed attempt by phenomenology to bracket and

thereby isolate thought or elements of thought. That is, because the semantic and semiotic ante-conditions of meaning are themselves only secondarily legible as a parenthetical structure, phenomenological bracketing is better situated as only symptomatically reflecting (rather than axiomatically accessing) the already constellated event horizon of meaning.

A philosophical economic could thus be imagined as the energetic efficiency of the method's expression and application of its ante-position – this would imply its semantic economic efficient, expressed below in point #1. Yet in point #2 we will *up the ante* to include a semiotic economic:

1. The ante of discourse: The discourse is always the expression of its semantic economic – the “ante” as its expression in language, “a” language, that is its intrinsic boundedness in a discursive system as, for example, critiqued by Derrida's deconstructive analysis; the language event, on the discursive register, is read as the instantiation of the sign in the “space” and “time” of the text; this instantiation constitutes, moreover, an economic investment, an ante of energy; we will explore both aspects of the equation but here indicate that “investment” will bear on the “sense” side of the equation – what Freud stipulated as “cathectic energy,” while “instantiation” will bear on the sign-side of the equation. A complete critique of the semantic register will reveal, however, that its economy cannot be fully accounted nor completed unless we allow for an energetic

momentum to the register: this situation we will describe as the *eccentric restrained loop of the semantic*.

2. The ante of semiosis: The full accounting of the event horizon of meaning, what we might term the full register of the field of sensibility (can we “call” it “desire,” or “faith,” etc. ...), cannot not implicate the entire sensual horizon of possible thought of which the discursive ante is merely an expression, minimally a sign, and maximally the sign and its energetic symptom; this register is subject to a radically differentiated semiotic economics which cannot not bear upon the discursive register nor itself be expressed except through the discursive register – what we will describe as the *eccentric un-restrained loop of the semiotic*.

The Eccentric, Negotiated, Restrained, Valued “Semantic” Loop

Semiotics is dealing with sign-function, but a sign-function represents the correlation of two functives which (outside that correlation) are not by nature semiotic.

What remains undisputed is that *pour cause* a code is continuously confused with the s-codes: whether the code has determined the format of the s-codes or vice versa, a code exists because s-codes exist, and the s-codes exist because a code exists, has existed or has to exist. Signification encompasses the whole of cultural life, even at the lower threshold of semiotics.

A theory of codes should rather be concerned to state to what degree the super-elevation of connotation can be made possible; how much its overlapping of sense may produce a maze-like network of intertwined sign-functions; and either this maze-like situation can constitute the object of a semiotic structural description, or it produces a sort of topological knot that a theory of codes can define but cannot structurally reproduce by means of a finite model.

“Semiosis explains itself by itself; this continual circularity is the normal condition of signification and even allows communication to use signs in order to mention things.”

The real problem is that *every semantic unit used in order to analyze a sememe is in its turn a sememe to be analyzed.*⁹³

In these remarkable statements from *A Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco appears to acknowledge the limits of a semantic and semiotic theory absent “sense,” though he appears to be more modestly weighting its import; rather, we would assert that the entire chain of signification begins (and “ends” to begin next) with “sense” / “sign-sense” / “sense signed” / etc., in what can only be characterized as *itself* a sign-sensed “eccentric” loop. In our proposed configuration, the conceptualization of the composite semantic and semiotic register figures as Eco’s concept of semiotics “or” semiosis because we are claiming, as an extension or amendment of his formulas, that the semantic and semiotic remain inseparably and eccentrically co-implicated in discourse and that a hidden but fierce energetic carries their composite momentum.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, what figures in these statements remain Eco’s sharply focused and recurring observations of the semantic complex which may only achieve accountability as secondary or tertiary *meta*-critiques, or a critique accounting for its own figuration with the tools provided by that figuration itself. Furthermore, this emerging meta-critique cannot stipulate a new or separate register of “alterity” outside of the textability of the semantic or semiotic registers but rather can only pressure the “turn” of the equation back upon itself: the dialogical turn of the semantic register exfoliates as a recurring internal *alter-nativity* that remains native to itself in discourse.

⁹³ Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 20, 46, 57, 71, 121 respectively.

⁹⁴ Goux, *Symbolic Economics*, 20-21, expresses this as the “conjunction of the formal and the energetic at the root of symbolic *investment* and its laws of structuration.”

The shift from “sense” (homologous to Kant’s “sensibility”) to “sign” (homologous to Kant’s “intelligibility”) alludes to the problematic question of the origin or origin-ability of thought.

Contractual signs or words constitute the consensual contract of semantic meaning (“con” – *with* and “sensus”, as agreed upon “sense” and now referred, *signed sense*). As such, we identify two aspects of contractual words: (1) their *consensus* (see “circulating” further forward) anticipates the imperative for the sense-to-sign leap of “desire/faith” or more neutrally, of “psychic energy”; (2) counter-wise, the consensus or agreement of meaning exfoliates Kant’s *transcendental function* as an already insinuated faculty of thought, i.e., we cannot imagine a sense-sign “consensus” without a transcendental function. Yet, we must also observe that we cannot stipulate the transcendental function without a consensual semantic: a *semantic eccentric loop* is required to account for the empirical structure of discourse. That is, we discover in the careful exfoliation of the semantic the “already given *and taken*” consensus of value in the assignment of meaning figurations: this discovery reveals the problem of valuation already indemnified and embedded in our assumption of meaning values. The semantic has already been ante-posed by, indeed, predicated upon a “givenness” of meaning-value and moreover this semantic register implies a given if not purely measurable “economic.”

Our arrival, indeed, our revival, at this status has occurred prior to our investigation and therefore the explication of a semantic of meaning will require a conceptualization of the meaning function which both anticipates and exceeds that

function itself. An economics of the semantic is required, what Jean-Joseph Goux terms “...a genealogy of values...[or] the genesis of the value form.”⁹⁵ Goux traces the four stages of his conceptualization of this genealogy, first in Marx’s theory of economic value and then, alternatively, in Freud’s four stages of child development:

<u>Marx</u>	<u>Freud</u>
Phase I: Elementary or accidental form of value:	Oral Stage
Phase II: Total or extended form of value	Anal Stage
Phase III: Generalized form of value	Phallic Stage
Phase IV: Money for of value	Genital Stage

Goux’s analysis proposes a plausible theory for the genealogy of valuation for the semantic register, yet curiously, it also exfoliates the suggestion of what we are stipulating is the requirement for a more complete economics of signification, that is as well a genealogy of symptomatically implied semiotic value. In somewhat homologous references as Deleuze’s “contracted” and “circulated” words, Goux stipulates:

Now these processes of replacement and trade are neither disconnected nor disorganized. Repeated and systematic substitution acts to structure the world of exchangeable elements *with reference to certain distinctive poles*. In the play of symptoms, equivalents, and metaphors, certain privileged elements take over and, in a standardized (social, universal) fashion, govern the process of circulation. ...In certain points of condensation, values seem to gather, capitalize, centralize itself, investing certain elements with a privileged representativeness and even with a monopoly on representativeness within the diverse set of which they are members. The mysterious genesis of this privilege

⁹⁵ Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 11.

is effaced, leaving their monopoly absolute, *absolved*, exempted in their transcendent role as standard and measure of values.⁹⁶

“Processes of replacement and trade...in a standardized social-universal fashion” appear to be homologous to “contracted” semantic processes; “...repeated and systematic substitution...structure...exchangeable elements...” appears homologous to “circulated” words. But then Goux curiously alludes to the *play*, “this drift of value objects, of interchangeable parts from which a *hierarchy* (of values) develops, a principle of order and subordination...”⁹⁷ – as such Goux is alluding to the energetic economic shift which forces the event of instantiation. He proceeds to then stipulate that this event constitutes a new *and more energetic* regime “... which places the great (manifold and polymorphous) majority of “signs” (products, actions and gestures, subjects, objects) under the sacred command of a select few among them.” The analysis observes the expansion of signed regimes to more powerful and energetic hierarchies of signification which precipitate two insights: First, Goux is inserting into the equation the *force* of sense upon the sign; Second, he is asserting that the now signed-sense of “...products, actions and gestures, subjects, objects...” can achieve “command” and even “monopoly” over the now instantiated hierarchies of the sign regime. Goux appears to be stipulating that this is a function of meaning which underlies the formation of, e.g., Marx’s monopoly capital, and which is attributable not as a new *a priori* structure but rather as the internal sense-to-sign event which precipitates first the possibility of initial

⁹⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

intelligibility but then the inevitability of empowered intelligibility, that is as Goux's *meta*-sense, as intelligibility accounting for its own economic. The four-stage process (either Marx's economic or Freud's psychodynamic) thus traces "the mysterious genesis of this privilege" of value which would account for the shift from "commodity- or use-value" to "exchange-value" to "universal equivalent" (for the Freudian register the shift from "oral-identification" to "anal-generalized" to "phallic-singular equivalent" and finally to the "genital-elision of the phallus via castration to general or complete psychic organization").⁹⁸

Regarding gold as an "overestimated" economic universal equivalent, Goux via Marx raises the eccentric loop question which reveals "the reversal, the "false semblance" intrinsic to gold's "fetishistic character": that is, to paraphrase, "...is the commodity valued by a gold standard because all commodities have consensually been valued by gold, *or conversely*, have commodities come to be valued by gold simply because *it is gold* ...?"⁹⁹ To unpack the implication of this paradox, has gold, gold that is now *transvalued as money*, now assumed a *virtual-actualized status* which bears its own economic momentum?

⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 22-23.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 33, "Hence the reversal, the "false-semblance," the "magic of money." Out of every *oblivion* of the genesis of the general equivalent form arises an overestimation of its role. This is the "*fetishistic* character" or "fetishistic illusion" that is imprinted upon precious metals by the money form. Likewise, in the sexual domain, according to Lacan, the organ that is invested with a privileged signifying function "acquires a fetishistic value." "What happens is, not that a commodity assumes the aspect of money because all other commodities universally express their values in it; but the converse of this, that they universally appear to express their values in it because it is money." [Marx, *Capital: A Critique of the Political Economy*, trans. from the 4th German edition by Eden Paul and Cedar Paul, 2 vols., New York: E.P. Dutton, 1930, 69 (Goux's emphasis added), 68, 69, 57; Lacan, *Ecrits*, 694; Marx, *Capital*, 68.]

We note for future reference for the study of religion Goux's observation that "In the commercial register, we can affirm that commodities used as currency have included shells, salt blocks, furs, wheat, rice, livestock, mean, silver and gold in powder or ingots, and finally *gold pieces of officially guaranteed weight and worth* – a list that hardly differs from an inventory of *perverse fixations*, up to the advent of normalcy..."¹⁰⁰ and in particular we want to remind ourselves of the homologous claim by Mircea Eliade that "It is unlikely that there is any animal or any important species of plant in the world that has *never* had a place in religion. In the same way too, every trade, art, industry and technical skill either began as something holy, or has, over the years, been invested with religious value."¹⁰¹

This description, however, while accounting for the expression and genesis of value on the semantic register, nonetheless tends to exceed itself, or to require a further explication of the value function when Goux observes and quotes Marx's apparent capitulation to the difficulty of defining a final value to the capital register: "But, adds Marx, "the whole mystery of the form of values lies hidden" even in the most "elementary form, and its analysis is our fundamental difficulty."¹⁰² Is Marx desiring a phantom *a priori* value, or in his eloquent semantic abstraction of *das capital* is he obscuring the eccentric semiotic loop's alternative but omnipresent economic? We note

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 32.

¹⁰¹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York: Meridian Books, 1965, 1.

¹⁰² Ibid, 32, Goux is quoting Marx, *Capital*, p. 29, (Goux's emphasis added), *Capital*, 18.

this for future reference, but use it to introduce the imperative for an *alter-native semiotic economic*.

That is, because the eccentric semantic loop occurs as a restrained consensus¹⁰³ its value or economic force appears not to be equatable to the semantic register itself but is rather its consensus is only observable as emergently catalyzed. We can merely ante-
pose in our observation that "...it is as if..." the indefinite energy and momentum of "sense" is "condensed" or "displaced," to use Freud's terms, and whose now only energetic "trace" is carried in the equation in the "con" of "consensus." Consensus infers an agreement of multiple and possibly differing views, opinions, stances, but also, from the economic side of the equation, differing weighting or energetic emphasis of the terms of definition. The restrained consensus of meaning values in the semantic register implies the attempted "synthesis" (from a Kantian perspective, which may tend to over-weight the instantiation of the sign) or "erasure" (from a Derridian perspective, which may tend to over-weight the potential erasure of difference of the sense-to-sign function) of difference in the resultant signatures, though Deleuze and Guattari's concept of

¹⁰³ We note simply that consensus requires psychological output in order to arrive at agreement, whether explicit agreement or graduated (via circulation) consensus achieved in the *use* of language terms; Freud develops the concept of "cathexis" and "counter-cathexis" to account for the expenditure of psychic energy required to first "cathect" or connect to the object of attention but then a countering, complementary cathectic energy required to be able to either distinguish or disconnect and thus differentiate psychic activity to other objects: "Restraint of motor discharge (of action) had now become necessary, and was provided by means of the process of *thought*, which was developed from ideation. Thought was endowed with qualities which made it possible for the mental apparatus to support increased tension during a delay in the process of discharge. It is essentially an experimental way of acting, accompanied by displacement of smaller quantities of cathexis together with less expenditure (discharge) of them. For this purpose conversion of free cathexis into "bound" cathexes was imperative, and this was brought about by means of raising the level of the whole cathectic process. It is probably that thinking was originally unconscious, in so far as it rose above mere ideation and turned to the relations between the object-impressions, and that it became endowed with further qualities which were perceptible to consciousness only through its connection with the memory-traces of words." (Freud, "*Two Principles of Mental Functioning (1911)*," in *General Psychological Theory Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. and intro. Philip Rieff, New York: Collier Books, 1963, 24.)

“disjunctive synthesis”¹⁰⁴ is likely more accurate to the equation – the “synthesis” offers a surface condition of agreement, while the still disjunctive sub-surface economic is more or less successfully suppressed (and we would suggest it is also heightened by a psychic energy of semantic and semiotic empowerment). We can recall Ibrahim’s question from Global Theology Fall 2009: “How can it be that five Islamic scholars, born into the same language, can read the same Koran and disagree so radically on its meaning?,” or Jonathan Z. Smith’s observation of James H. Leuba’s text *Psychological Study of Religion* regarding the internal confusion and multiplicity of the definitions of “religion” which Leuba notes results in “...more than fifty definitions of religion...”¹⁰⁵ The surface restrained synthesis appears to be able to retain a radical (and residually psychic and energetic) and latent disjunctiveness.

Yet the force of consensus of the “meaning” of a term must itself be intrinsic to the question of the functionality of this ante-posed “register of sense” which now becomes signed as signed-sense. The expanded theatre of sense to sign-sense achieved by desire’s register would not be plausible without the “force” of consensus. That is, restrained or forced consensus cannot merely be observed as a conspiracy of the speaker(s) but also must implicate the conspiracy of an ante-posed sense itself to gain its now expanded and unfolding semantic sensibility.

¹⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 76-78.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, in “*Religion, Religions, Religious*,” 281, citing James H. Leuba’s *Psychological Study of Religion*, 1912, in King, Winston L., *Introduction to Religion*, New York: Harper and Row, 1954.

However, we can observe that this forced consensus reveals the condition of instantiation as potentially unstable. Minimally, the instantiation of the sign renders an “epi-genetic” and functional instability to the semantic register – i.e., its vulnerability to debate and deconstructive critique. Maximally, the instantiation of the sign exposes the semantic register as vulnerable to not just deconstructive critique but more radically to the shadow of what we can speculate as the *dis-instantiation* of meaning registered in the extreme conditions of psychosis and schizophrenia on the personal level, or surfacing in, e.g., Sudhir Kakar’s analysis of the “...colors of violence”¹⁰⁶ on the global cultural level. We contend that these “zones of instability,” as also exfoliated by Homi Bhabha’s “...location of culture...”¹⁰⁷ may be accounted for by a revised theory of the semantic and semiotic registers and specifically of the instantiation and disinstantiation of the sign. Instantiation constitutes the potentiation of the sense to sign function and coincides with a structural semantic analysis; disinstantiation constitutes the de-potentiation of the sense to sign or sign *back* to sense function and coincides with the post-structural analysis; both are, however, emergent on the same semantic and semiotic field. We are remanding thought to an *ante*-posed depth that prescinds from structural deconstruction, that is we are claiming a semantic and semiotic economics to the epistemological registers of thinking.

¹⁰⁶ Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence – Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict*, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1996.

¹⁰⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London & New York: Routledge Classics, 1994.

Initial summary of the eccentric loop semantic: The semantic strange loop may compose a consensual, contractual foreground to the description of the meaning function, yet this consensus is always, by empirical observation, subject to the semantic economic equation from which it emerges. Derrida's critique, in particular, focuses on the semantic eccentric loop and the consequences, both intended and unintended, when a full accounting of this function is desired.

Native consequence: contracted words, by consensus, and hence circulating words, by their repetition in more or less consensual use, facilitate the semantic structure of the meaning function; the semantic field, however, is always open to its semantic background constituted in multiple and indefinite semantic definitions of discursive structures, their consequent applications and circulating repetitions of semantic meaning structures in this use and repetition in culture. Furthermore, the anticipated and therefore intended consequence of this open semantic field is the expectation of the open and competitive interpretive field, i.e., what, for example, Ricoeur stipulates as the "hermeneutic."¹⁰⁸ The discourse of "...religion(s)...the religious..." can function in this open field but is of course subject to the eccentric semantic loop, the open discursive field, and the consequent interpretive field.

Alter-native consequence: However, the eccentric semantic loop further exfoliates, in the particular study of "...religion(s)...the religious..." the empirical

¹⁰⁸ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*.

omnipresence of an alternative eccentric loop background, that is Smith's and Raschke's interpretive insinuation of the third term of "religio," or the function of the "*boundedness...to... .*" That is, the first two terms of "religio," "to read or re-read...an oral or textual discourse," and "to practice...rite or ritual," present observable references for study. Yet the unique and eccentric insinuation of "*boundedness...to...*" both in the intentionality of the first two terms and in the definition of the third term itself implicates, in the claim and desire of the academic study of religion, an *eccentric loop semiotic background* of symbol and symptom. That is, the semiotic structure of the semantic unintentionally implicates an alter-native loop to possible so-called "religious" meaning when it self-imposes "the question of the sacred...of God or gods...etc." by requiring discourse which can only be carried by portmanteau references.

To summarize the eccentric, negotiated, restrained, valued semantic loop:

Eccentric: Semantic terms are already *ante*-posed in a contingent context of other terms. That is, clear and symmetric definition is always challenged by the requirement that a term be defined by other terms which themselves have multiple usages and definitions. The "meaning" of a term is therefore rhizomically¹⁰⁹ embedded in language; moreover, a term is always carried to the scene of language by a speaker, who brings his or her own "context" of meaning. To

¹⁰⁹ cf. Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 7-14.

reiterate Eco, “*Semiosis explains itself by itself*,” this continual circularity is the normal condition” of the semantic and semiotic registers.

Negotiated: Terms nonetheless “achieve” definition, either in lexicons or in usage or in the organic inter-face of both. This explication of “negotiation” itself represents a coagulation, a “coming together,” and hence a consensus, more or less, of negotiated terms. I am negotiating with you the reader the accuracy of this accounting system and my writing and your reading enables a negotiation of meaning and usage. Because of the other factors (eccentric, restrained, valued) of the semantic loop, this negotiation is ongoing and under constant and preferably diligent critique and revision.

Restrained: The “eccentric” and “negotiated” attributes of the semantic loop themselves suggest a subtle semantic and psychic *economic* to the semantic register. That is, we must include accompanying “force” references (if only metaphorical) to account for the psychic energy required to perform the functions of *consensus* or *negotiation*. Semantic restraint is apparent in group speech situations as one must restrain oneself to “listen,” to at least heuristically consider the other speakers’ possible alternative definitions and usages of terms. This attribute must be acting systematically, if eccentrically, in the group psyche as all speakers listen heuristically and then participate in speech. Or, restraint may also be apparent as the reader *strains* to grasp, comprehend, e.g., this text. Semantic definition requires focus, concentration, and energy with which to discern and

explicate the intense foregrounding of “terms”. Or, from an alternative angle, terms constitute at least provisional *term*-inations of the semantic/semiotic process – to observe from the composite of these attributes, terms achieve explication only in their *eccentric – negotiated – restrained – and valued* termination.

Valued: Negotiation and the strain/restrain of terms/terminations thus imply intrinsic value(s) to the semantic/semiotic register – expression proposes (and *ante*-poses) both a semantic or lexiconal meaning value(s) to a term or set of terms but this textual value would always be to some degree of value negotiated and it would always be attended by an economic or *psychic* value, though of course “both” values merge in a composite valuation.

As such, we are asserting an economics to the semantic register which opens the table to both semantic *deconstruction* but, alternatively, to semantic *disinstantiation*. The former more or less critiques the structural and definitional variability to terms and meanings involved from linguistic interpretation, while the latter insinuates an economics of energetic or force to the sense-to-sign event. Both must be essential to a full accounting of the meaning register.

This brief deconstruction of a postulated eccentric semantic loop following Goux’s intriguing treatment of Marx’s materialist economic culture and Freud’s stages of infantile development leaves us suspiciously exposed to the dangers of the fetish, indeed,

of the “*fetishistic investment of the meaning structure...*”¹¹⁰ Yet, curiously, because of Marx’s own frustration with the question of “value” itself, on the other edge of the sword we must confess that we are left expectantly desiring a fuller accountability of its genesis: it would appear that this lack of intelligibility expresses a more perilous event horizon, a background still lurking. While Marx will endeavor to “discover the origin of the money form” and by implication the *valuation of the general equivalent* in the deconstructive analysis of the semantic process which ensues from the “*erasure of a genesis, the obliteration of a history...*,”¹¹¹ that is to explain the origin of a general equivalent of ultimacy in the social-economic materiality of culture, we will attempt to claim that what is observed as necessary for the completion of the equation of the meaning-value of the general equivalent is the re-dress of the semantic analysis to an analysis of the eccentric semiotic loop implied internally in the eccentric semantic loop. This second analysis does not make a claim of ultimacy but rather suggests that the empirical analysis of the semantic and semiotic registers are not completed or fully conceivable without an internally implicated *alter-native eccentric semiotic loop*.

The Eccentric, Non-Negotiated, Unrestrained Transvalued Semiotic Loop

An *eccentric semiotic loop* exfoliates as the internalizing *alter-native* implied in the examination of the eccentric loop semantic study of “...religion(s)...the religious...” This alternative eccentric field, we claim, alludes to what has at times been traditionally

¹¹⁰ Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 33.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

symptomized as “the theological.” So-called religious studies is implausible, by definition and by its empirical evidence, without this alternative eccentric loop which would exfoliate the “...*boundedness ...to... .*” This insight is gained by the empirical examination of the eccentric loop semantic and our larger objective for a full accountability of the possible field of the meaning register. We are therefore not claiming a “new” vision of “...*religion...religions...the religious...*” but rather we are proposing a re-visioning of the discipline’s approach to discourse.

If the sense-to-sign event of meaning achieves an expanded economics as the mere visual sensory input of “▲” expands into a vastly “new” sensory topography, that of the indefinite field of the full language-set, then we have substantially increased the *ante* of the semantic and semiotic equation. That is, we noted a native consequence of this subtle shift from sense to sign requires the analytical observation that the register and economy of sense has been expanded by engaging the sign-sense semantic register, what we have described as the consensual and circulated function of meaning terms. However, the alter-native consequence intrinsic to the total equation stipulates that both the total field of sense and the total field of signed-sense discourse appear sited in internalized indefinite topographies. First, so-called “sense” is always “sense of...” but “sense of...‘this’...‘▲’ ” which “stands-in” or *in-stances* in the totalizing context of “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ”: before any “sign of sense” we must observe that there is the equation of the differentiation of sense, *difference* as such. (We note the *mis*-fortune of our already embedded ante, our “bet,” that is that “difference” is now already “termed,”

anted, “not” as pure “difference” BUT *difference as signed-sense ‘difference.’*) Sense is already *anted* as differentiation: the “order” of sense is difference. Thus “▲” figures the foreground of the sensed “object” differentiated in contrast to its totalizing field in order *to* sense: again, the *order of sense is difference*. Deleuze will assert that “how” the philosophical arts *believes it can* elect to posit, characterize, to describe, and to account for this “order of sense” makes all the “difference:”

...thought is that moment in which determination makes itself one, by virtue of maintaining a unilateral and precise relation to the indeterminate. Thought ‘makes’ difference, but difference is monstrous. ...To rescue difference from its maledictory state seems, therefore, to be the project of the philosophy of difference.

...Difference must leave its cave and cease to be a monster; or at least only that which escapes at the propitious moment must persist as a monster, that which constitutes only a bad encounter, a bad occasion. At this point the expression ‘make the difference’ changes its meaning. It now refers to a selective test which must determine which differences may be inscribed within the concept in general, and how.¹¹²

That difference would express, and be expressed, as such instantiates the event of a sense of difference differentiating as sign but this differentiation constitutes both an event which *in-stances* the equation of an ante-position of the equation “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” but in so doing changes the value of pure or ante-imaged difference itself: the sense to sign event transvalues difference to the differentiated meaning register. Deleuze’s “propitious moment” accounts for this event and demarcates the event horizon of meaning differentiating from the sense of difference.

Yet we must note that the “▲” that *in-stances* cannot exclude its total equation, or “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ .” Thus “...all that is ‘not-▲’ ” stands in the now

¹¹² Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 29.

transvalued image as the implied background of “▲” because “▲” cannot be potentiated absent its background. Furthermore, the energetic momentum of the instantiating turn cannot be negotiated, again, because the image “▲” cannot be potentiated absent its contrast in the total background set. Thus from this ante-posed *totalizing* equation results the observed characteristics of the semiotic loop: eccentric, non-negotiated, unrestrained, transvalued:

Eccentric: The image “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” figures “▲” in contrast to “all that is ‘not-▲’ ” but we cannot measure its force nor qualify the attributes of the contrast because it is already given. The equation antes itself *as it contrasts*. The instantiating shift is therefore figured as now “▲” *more or less* contrasted to “all that is ‘not-▲’ .” “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” cannot be figured therefore as two static poles but rather must be given as the horizons of possible *difference as differentiation*, or difference differentiating. The “propitious moment” initiates on this horizon of the event of “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ .” Quantitatively, the event thus projects an eccentric energy – we cannot fully measure or determine the economic exchange generated by the energy of the contrast. (We might play or propose heuristically that the equation “oscillates” but this occurs after the fact of the event.) Qualitatively, the image results in an exchange of the contrasting functions’ foreground “▲” standing in and against its background “...all

that is ‘not-▲’ ” yet the contrasting horizons cannot be disconnected quantitatively nor disassociated qualitatively: the event horizon therefore persists as an *eccentric alter-nating* differentiating equation.

Non-negotiated: The setting of the event has not merely already occurred but is already occurring *as we encounter* the equation. But, alternatively, we could say that the equation constitutes the event horizon which precipitates the subject itself. The event horizon figures a fielded instantiation of the image(s) which we can attribute as “subjectivity” but any subject cannot negotiate this event horizon of “ ‘▲’ *and* all that is ‘not-▲’ ” because “it” as the subject is only itself figured as a symptomatic figure or figuring of the equation. Subjectivity thus eventuates *after the fact* of the event horizon and its energy and attributes cannot be negotiated except through secondary re-figuring and revisioning.

Un-restrained: As the alternative to the restrained semantic loop, the unrestrained “dimension” of the general equation (the semantic/semiotic) accounts for the indefinite background of “...all that is ‘not-▲’ ” contrasted to the restrained “▲.” Terms such as “universe” figure this alternativity, as both a restrained sign of “physical being” or as the “time and space” of all that is purported to be, yet this restrained reference remains penultimate to the possibility of the indeterminate extension of

such a physical being in a time and space that, by ironic definition, remand their definition to their indeterminate background. The event horizon figured by the restrained semantic and the unrestrained semiotic equation constitutes what could be stipulated as the *grenzbegriff* or boundary of what science can empirically conceive and is of course stated by Anselm's "...that than which nothing greater can be conceived." "God," as an analogous expression of "universe," designates an actual *intra*-textual expression of the restrained/unrestrained semantic/semiotic: the goal of a fully expressive paradigm of the semantic and semiotic would appear to necessitate this observation. Indeed, the expression appears to self-assert from the ante-posed play of the equation.

Transvalued: The valuation intrinsic to consensual and circulated semantic terms nonetheless rests upon the alter-native potential expressed above in the eccentric, non-negotiated and unrestrained general equation. To reverse Anselm's equation, the restrained expressions which result from " '▲' and all that is 'not-▲' " have already transformed the potential of the statement from that which is seemingly inexpressible or incommensurable to a statement that now semantically "expresses" this "fact." This semantic configuration of the inexpressible may serve to account for language as symptomatic rather than merely expressive and it thereby addresses the "other" alternative "definition" of "semiotic" which

can refer to both “the study of signs” but also can refer to the “study of symptoms.” Or, we might say that the sign itself carries this alternating symptomatic potential. That is, the sign can be valued as a specific restrained figure of referred meaning but the sign can *also* refer to an *ultra-sign* of a non-designatable symptom. In physical medicine, deciphering physical symptoms represents the art of diagnosis; for psychology, however, the reading of the patient’s total narrative involves potentiating what may be only vaguely figured (if at all) in physical and psychological symptoms to a diagnosis which itself may not be comprehensive even over a lifetime. Freud stressed the inability to translate the expressions or valuation of the “un-conscious”: even the term “unconscious” constitutes an ante-posed, restrained, after-the-fact and indeed penultimate reference to that which expresses the dream. Freud speaks of the indecipherable “navel” intrinsic in every dream which remains embedded in the dream but which resists translation: the expression of the inexpressible.¹¹³ Derrida observes that in Freud’s

¹¹³ “By turning Freud’s hermeneutics of suspicion back on his own text, one discovers, not the transparency of self-reflexivity, but a fault in the mirror of reflection. ...In analyzing one of his own dreams, Freud glimpses a blind spot that simultaneously resists and solicits interpretation. Acknowledging what he would rather ignore, he supplements his narrative with a “revealing” footnote that effectively subverts his analysis. “I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning. If I had pursued my comparison between [*sic*] the three women, it would have taken me far afield. There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable – a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.” [Freud, Sigmund, *Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, New York: Avon Books, 1965, 311-312] This remarkable admission implies that every interpretation is incomplete because consciousness is doubled by an unconscious that not only is unknown but remains unknowable. As the point of contact with the unknown, the navel of the dream is the trace of the unrepresentable that every representation presupposes but cannot re-present. (Mark Taylor, *After God*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 184.)

method of dream interpretation “there is never a relation of simple translation...” from the unconscious image to conscious expression, and he pressures this observation further by suggesting that “what” cannot be translated is “the value of presence” of the unconscious image or the projected, ante-posed unconscious itself.¹¹⁴ But this “value” cannot be exclusive to the “dream” or the “unconscious” but rather stipulates the latent boundary, but the *expressed latent boundary*, of the event horizon of the semantic/semiotic configuration of meaning itself: all expression carries this embedded horizon and hence all expression potentiates transvaluation. We are suggesting that the language event tends to transvalue but conserve the equation “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” in the economics of the expression because the originary horizon of the equation cannot be cancelled in its expression. This transvaluation persists as potential symptom in any expression.¹¹⁵

Therefore, this event must be economically efficient in its psychic conservation of the energy of expression, that is the pre-semantic/pre-semiotic energy of sense cannot be lost or diminished but rather must be condensed or trans-valued to a new concentrated

¹¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 210-211.

¹¹⁵ Deleuze alludes to this transvaluative dynamic: “When we say that the sound becomes independent, we mean to say that it ceases to be a specific quality attached to bodies, a noise or a cry, and that it begins to designate qualities, manifest bodies, and signify subjects or predicates. ...sound takes on a conventional value inside denotation, a customary value in manifestation, and an artificial value in signification, only because it establishes its independence at the surface from the higher authority of expressivity. The depth-surface distinction is, in every respect, primary in relation to the distinctions nature-convention, nature-custom, or nature-artifice.” (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 187.)

energy field, i.e., sign-sense. However, sign-sense, while energetically condensed sense, nonetheless now eventuates as sense transvalued to sign-sense which also by definition semantically and semiotically condenses and displaces the total equation of difference. That is, pure ante-imaged “difference” must be both conserved in its expression but also continue to prescind from this expression: deriving from the total field of “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” it must express and conserve *de facto* that total field as it is energetically projected to the semantic and semiotic register which we have observed itself carries both a consensual and circulated registration but also conserves by condensation the total field by as well projecting and carrying the totalized originary field of difference. Any expression (of difference) is both determinate and *alter-natively* in-determinate because the totalized semantic/semiotic register must derive from the totalized differential field. The *alter-native consequence* of the expression of difference is the requirement for a composite semantic/semiotic ***total energetic critique***.

For example, we might postulate that the “difference” between what we have observed as the semantic and semiotic registers could be conceptualized as a kind of “dialectic alterity” of thought. Yet what we discerned is the overlap and over-gapping “between” the “two” (e.g., the consensual, circulated “thetic” terms up against the contrasted antithetic of portmanteau terms; in the equation of religion, rite and text “versus” the portmanteau “...bounded, boundedness.”) and while their distinction offered certain heuristic advantages, we found their clear difference to be problematic. This insight persists in the symptoms of the differences in the terms

“...*religion...religions...the religious...*” and makes the discipline of religious studies uniquely vulnerable to an unrestrained or total critique.

We may assert then that the “problem” of meaning derives from the very equation of difference which meaningful thought subsumes but which already and paradoxically prescind from thought. Thus Deleuze’s observation that “thought ‘makes’ difference, but difference is monstrous.” Here the rather philosophically imprecise and radical adjective “monstrous” is left intentionally open to the reader’s thought – in the term “monstrous” Deleuze appears to intentionally project an excessive force to the text. This includes a range of definitions which fall into five general genres of both qualitative and quantitative attribution: (1) abnormal in size (qualitative); (2) abnormal in biological structure as in plants and animals (quantitative); (3) outrageous, atrocious, shocking (qualitative); (4) huge, as in a monstrous fire (quantitative); (5) of or relating to or resembling a monster (qualitative/quantitative).¹¹⁶ And from its reference in the thesaurus we encounter an even broader territory:

1. outrageous, shocking, evil, horrifying, vicious, foul, cruel, infamous, intolerable, disgraceful, scandalous, atrocious, inhuman, diabolical, heinous...
outrageous good, kind, fine, decent, mild, admirable, honourable, humane, merciful
2. huge, giant, massive, great, towering, vast, enormous, tremendous, immense, titanic, gigantic, mammoth, colossal, stellar (*informal*), prodigious, stupendous, gargantuan, puny...
3. unnatural, terrible, horrible, dreadful, abnormal, obscene, horrendous, hideous, grotesque, gruesome, frightful, hellish, freakish, fiendish, miscreated...¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003.

¹¹⁷ Collins Thesaurus of the English Language – Complete and Unabridged 2nd Edition. 2002 © HarperCollins Publishers 1995, 2002.

Parenthetically, we can observe that the term “monstrous” thus adjectivally injects a sense of overdetermined force to any subsequent derived or “determined” meaning, and from a literary perspective is reminiscent of God’s emphatic speech at the conclusion of the Book of Job.

However, more curious than the ante-postulation of “monstrous” to the thought of difference is Deleuze’s assertion in the next paragraph that: “...Difference must leave its cave and cease to be a monster; or at least only that which escapes at the propitious moment must persist as a monster... At this point the expression ‘make the difference’ changes its meaning. It now refers to a selective test which must determine which differences may be inscribed within the concept in general, and how.” The “propitious moment” constitutes the event horizon of the sense-to-sign transvaluation: instantiated meaning can now be at once economically overdetermined (indeterminate) yet semantically and semiotically determined. In order to critique the total equation of a thought or philosophy of difference the critique exposes itself to the ante-posed order of difference: “...a total critique recognizes no restraints, no limits on its power, and is therefore necessarily insurrectional...”¹¹⁸ Yet such a critique is nevertheless ironically “already caught,” or to use Deleuze’s image of the dice-throw, “already thrown” in the ante-position of a thought laboring in the semantic and semiotic meaning register. This eccentric economic configuration insinuates a trans-valuing loop to the register of thought.

¹¹⁸ Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, Minneapolis: U. Of Minnesota Press, 1993, 29.

Recognition of a concept of instantiation as the momentum of sense-to-sign already (its *ante*) includes its own interior potential for disinstantiation as the return of the sign to its pre-sense, but this potential itself figures as a next instantiation, i.e., its repetition as difference. The efficiency of this momentum figures instantiation as a symptomatic event-horizon of meaning which now must be characterized as both energetic (economic) as well as semantic and semiotic. Meaning is therefore both overwhelmed by the monstrosity of difference as sense but nonetheless expressed in the terms of signed-sense.

And so we posit the question: *What* constitutes the monstrosity of a thought of difference? In the abstract, Job's metaphorical depiction notwithstanding, we have expressed the monstrous as the equation of " '▲' and all that is 'not-▲' ." This equation is a condensed, radically abstracted configuration of Lonergan's "full set of answers" or Anselm's "...that than which nothing greater can be conceived," each of which offer examples of the extreme condensation of the ante-posed total equation of difference – the commensurable expression of the incommensurably inexpressible, as such. In a radically cosmological "sense" we might imagine this figuration as the gossamer thin global surface and atmosphere, i.e., the inhabited physical "foreground," differentiated against the entire potentiated universe, the extreme background. However, we encounter the monstrosity of this figuration when we attempt to account for the "universe" as a conceivable term at all, as having a definitive space or time. In fact, as we found in our discussion of the "unrestrained," the term "universe" constitutes an

infinite and portmanteau term insinuated into determinate speech which both restrains the thought of ultimate difference but also expresses it – it constitutes the embeddedness of the radical indeterminate background within the register.

We will labor the reader to these various Deleuzian quotes in order to provide an experiential exercise of the complexity of “termining” the problematic of any anteed “difference.” And we would suggest that Deleuze’s style intentionally confronts the reader with the sensory and signed complexity and convolution of the register itself: his title *Difference and Repetition* abstractly remonstrates “difference” as already embedded in an economics of energetic “repetition” – *difference* itself, though already anteed as “explicated” “difference,” “is” rather, again, *de facto* “inexplicable” or to use our terminology *ante-explicable*: Difference, as a semantic/semiotic term, abstractly yet sublimely *expresses* the havoc and monstrosity of thought itself, but we are left with Deleuze’s question: “...But does not difference as catastrophe precisely bear witness to an irreducible ground which continues to act under the apparent equilibrium of organic representation?”¹¹⁹

Summary of the Eccentric Semantic / Semiotic Loops

These *alter-native* (each “native” at once to meaning) surfaces of the semantic and semiotic register can be imagined to work within language in a fashion similar to Deleuze’s image of the Mobius strip in which “sense” and “sign” hold simultaneously, or to use Žižek’s more radical term, *paralaxically*.

¹¹⁹ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 35.

The semantic/semiotic parallax derives from the projection of the eccentric, economic, monstrous equation “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” within the register. Intense strain and restraint notwithstanding, the monstrous equation defies the exclusion of “either” dimension to the terms and images of thought and therefore the composite equation is expressed either explicitly in the formal register or latently as depth symptoms. The monstrous equation thus constitutes the *exceptional compossibility*¹²⁰ to the full dimensionality of the semantic/semiotic register. So as surface or semantic terms themselves – “two” “ante—signifieds/signifiers” which hold on a “singular” surface – the Mobius image of thought is both determinate or finite, a loop, yet it is infinite or indefinite, unending, and its image furthermore *de-termines* the intrinsic indeterminate *nativity* and *compossibility* of the register: indeterminate because, as terms move along its surface it cannot be “determined” (without contractual or informal restraint) “which” surface of the text, the determinate or the indeterminate, is at this moment surfacing. So not only can we not break open the Mobius surface but we can say that the Mobius surface is investigating itself – hence the eccentric semantic loop textualizes the surface of a more eccentric semiotic loop but their composite nativity potentiates an extreme if latent economics to thought. This potential would seem to tend to persist within the sign-

¹²⁰ “The expressed world is made of differential relations and of contiguous singularities. It is formed as a world precisely to the extent that the series which depend on each singularity converge with the series which depend on others. *This convergence defines “compossibility” as the rule of a world synthesis.* Where the series diverge, another world begins, impossible with the first. The extraordinary notion of compossibility is thus defined as a *continuum* of singularities, whereby continuity has the convergence of series as its ideational criterion...The inheritance of predicates in the expressive monad presupposes the compossibility of the expressed world which, in turn, presupposes the distribution of pure singularities according to the rules of convergence and divergence. These rules belong to a logic of sense and the event, and not to a logic of predication and truth.” (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 110-111.)

sense register. The flight of aircraft into structures which symbolized secular *semanticized* economic power marked the event horizon of this latent potential and no doubt was expressed and announced at the propitious moment by the emergent *terms* “*Allahu Akbar...*”

Careful consideration of the semantic register reveals its consensual/contractual and circulating status as a register of meaning on the one hand, yet as Derrida and Deleuze and Eco imply, can we apply the semantic register to fully account for the semantic register? What we have termed the “eccentric loop” quality is similar to Kurt Gödel’s undecidability theorem in the mathematical register, i.e., that the principles of mathematics cannot be used to validate or verify mathematics. This insight does not immobilize thought but rather opens our thinking to more radical possibilities of accountability, that is, an economics of exchange “between” these surfaces. Thought now requires a conceptual framework with which to account for these empirical eccentricities.

Further, we must acknowledge that what we have termed the semantic and semiotic registers appear to be accountable only as an inclusive composite equation, or what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a “common assemblage.”¹²¹ Undoing the assemblage of the equation would be tantamount “...to breaking open and unfolding the

¹²¹ Inna Semetsky, “*Semiotics*,” *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Adrian Parr, editor, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 242.

Mobius strip.”¹²² A revisioned concept of the register arises subject to the following working insights:

1. The accountability of the meaning register has brought us to the distinction (*différance*) of the semantic (contractual/consensual/circulating) *foreground*; the exfoliation of this foreground, however, further requires the assignment of an eccentric and overdetermined symptomatic *semiotic background*.
2. Transcendentalizing principle of the semantic: the semantic register cannot empirically account for itself without reference to a transcendental concept of its eccentric excess.
3. Immanticizing principle of the semiotic: the semiotic register, which would carry the assignment of reference to that which is in excess of the semantic register, is itself nonetheless language or semantic-bound.
4. Accountability of these meaning registers has forced us to recognize an intrinsically implied third loop, the *paralaxical loop*, similar for example to the image of the Mobius strip, also homologous to the DNA helix. The complete equation of the meaning register is constituted in the paralaxical register which, theoretically, may at the minimum provide a semantic register with which to address this possible composite equation.
5. We can suspect that the equation of the semantic (contracted/consensual/circulating foreground) +/- the semiotic background may be intrinsically unstable. That is, while the “surface” micro-analytic

¹²² Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 123.

representations of the semantic may be assigned a consensual stability, due to the excessive eccentricity and economic energy of its semiotic background “depth” we can, along with Freud or Marx or Nietzsche, or Derrida and Deleuze, etc., surmise a macro-analytic always lurking, that is by the definition of a principle of complete accountability. This interstitial instability may constitute the *event horizon* of the meaning equation.

6. Finally, we must acknowledge that our request for a full accounting of the meaning equation has a momentum which exceeds its own register: semantically, we will term this excess the “register of desire”; semiotically, however, we observe that this request, this desire for accountability, remains at this juncture an open field or horizon.

The Copula & Caesura and the Exceptional Inception of Thought

“The caesura lies in thought itself: with the thinking of the meaning of meaning (total reflection), a heterogeneous sphere of conditions must be at issue that precedes thinking as the thinking of meaning (determinate reflection), and the thinking as the thinking of being (external reflection), as well as the thinking as being (positing reflection). It is the sphere of ‘pure heterogeneity’ which constitutes itself in itself as the logical beginning.”¹²³

But, once again, everything changes nature as it climbs to the surface. And it is necessary to distinguish two ways whose personal identity is lost, two ways by means of which the contradiction is developed. In depth, it is through infinite identity that contraries communicate and that the identity of each finds itself broken and divided. This makes each term at once the moment and the whole; the part, the relation, and the whole; the self, the world, and God; the subject, the copula, and the predicate.¹²⁴

There are no simple concepts...Even the first concept, the one with which a philosophy “begins,” has several components, because it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning, and if it does determine one, it must combine it with a point of view or a

¹²³ Werner Flach, *Negation und Andersheit: Ein Beitrag zur Problematik der Letztimplikation*, Würzburg: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1959, 64; quoted by Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 88-90.

¹²⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 175.

ground [*une raison*]. Not only do Descartes, Hegel, and Feuerbach not begin with the same concept, they do not have the same concept of beginning.¹²⁵

The inflection of the copula¹²⁶ “to be” in the instantiation of the subject-predicate expression suggests an internal economics, the *assertion* of expressed force, of the implied equation of the term. That is, there resides an *exchange* of both the implied correlation or relation of subject to predicate and at the same time, on the same surfacing, the energetic *assertion* of that relation or correlation. The proposition “*The leaf is green...*” compresses the abstract semantic/semiotic equation “ ‘▲’ and all that is ‘not-▲’ ” or “the equation of difference” to a meaningful statement. The predicate “green” relates a sub-set of the term “leaf.” The copula “is,” however, instantiates the term “leaf” with the term “green” as an energetic assertion: we do not say “*the leaf green*” but we say “*the leaf is green.*” The copula thus insinuates a subtle, energetic pause, the caesura,¹²⁷ between the terms. The proposition asserts that the “sense of leaf” correlates to the “sense of green” but these senses must pause energetically between the terms of the proposition. The senses of “leaf” and “green” are then formally asserted to carry an exchangeable quantity and/or quality in the copula “is” while the subtle energetic caesura, the pause of sense(s), implied *between the senses* exchanges the energetic economic of the proposition. Difference is differentiated as the economic *exchange* of

¹²⁵ Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 15-16.

¹²⁶ (OED, V. 1, 977) *Gram.* and *logic* “That part of a proposition which connects the subject and predicate; the present tense of the verb *to be* (with or without the negative) employed as a mere sign of predication.”

¹²⁷ “1. (Literature / Poetry) (in modern prosody) a pause, esp. for sense, usually near the middle of a verse line. Usual symbol 2. (Literature / Poetry) (in classical prosody) a break between words within a metrical foot, usually in the third or fourth foot of the line.” (Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003).

the heterology of sense(s). The inception of the proposition derives from the heterology of sense.

But before the synthesis of the object “leaf” and the quality “green” the heterology of sense has itself derived an originary specific “*sense of leaf*” against or in contrast to the “*leaf and all that is not the leaf*” or what we have called the equation of difference. Likewise for the term “green”: “*Sense of green*” is derived from “*green and all that is not green*” or the non-sense of “*green.*” Deleuze terms this event horizon of sense the *passive genesis*:

...We establish the two stages of the passive genesis. First, beginning with the singularities-events which constitute it, sense engenders a first field (*complexe*) wherein it is actualized: the *Umwelt* which organizes the singularities in circles of convergence; individuals which express these worlds; states of bodies; mixtures or aggregates of these individuals; analytic predicates which describe these states. Then, a second, very different field (*complexe*) appears, built upon the first: the *Welt* common to several or to all worlds; the persons who define this “something in common”; synthetic predicates which define these persons; and the classes and properties which derive from them. Just as the first stage of the genesis is the work of sense, the second is the work of nonsense, which is always co-present to sense (aleatory point or ambiguous sign): it is for this reason that the two stages, and their distinction, are necessarily founded.¹²⁸

“Thought” derives from the “pre-individual and impersonal transcendental play” of sense vis à vis nonsense. The inception of thought derives from the exceptional play of sense, i.e., “*sense of green*” excepting “*all that is not green.*” This exception must imply an energetic economics of strain and restraint as sense labors to sense “*leaf*” or “*green*” in contrast to “*all that is not leaf...and all that is not green.*” The exception of sense is an energetics of restraint, yet always restraint in contrast to an unrestrained background, non-sense. We cannot speak of sense without an efficiency of force or an

¹²⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 116-117.

energetics. The inception of sense constitutes a forced exception of sense, a determined foreground in contrast to “its” indeterminate background. These insights themselves derive not merely from “pure” or “pre-textual” sense but from and within their co-implication in what is now sign-sense: the inception and exception of sense expressed as sign-sense. We cannot conceive of this line of the thought of sense without the surface of sign-sense so we are caught and surfacing on the Mobius surface of sense/sign. “*The exceptional inception of sense constitutes the ante-posed* (in this “sense,” the signed-sense) *of sense*” but this statement is not possible without the sense of the sign. We are on the surface of thought only because, paradoxically, we can both sense and sign. In this sense we have discovered “sign-sense.”

Thought cannot thus determine the heterological ground of its inception in sense, yet neither can sense assert a ground without the surface of heterological thought as sense/sign-sense. Nonetheless, and this is a **big** “nonetheless,” from its exceptional inception in sense/sign-sense thought asserts or would force a claim to that inception in each term it lays down in the sense-to-sign play. Thought *nonetheless* forces or energizes the instantiation of its terms on the semantic and semiotic registers. We cannot comprehensively observe if sense energizes thought or if thought energizes sense but we can assert that a text is forced as an exceptional inception. Each term constitutes itself as a microcosmic article and articulation of an asserted, *anted* bet that the sign-sense term may achieve “accurate,” “useful” and indeed powerful signification in the language register. There would appear to be a certain monstrosity to any thought that would assert

it can think *at all*. Thus our thought, here, in this text, would assert that this ante-posed fact of thought's monstrosity must include a radical due diligence and ongoing critique of itself *by itself* of the most derivative components to its thinking, specifically the approach to which we envision or must constantly *re-vise* thinking at all as potentiated on these surface(s) of the meaning register.

These eccentric and more eccentric loops insinuate that discourse must claim an inception, a beginning, when, indeed, we can discern only the traces of “where” or “when” “it” began: the inception of thought is, of course, its radical *exception*. The naming of this exceptional inception is already an *ante*-position – we must *already* (“ante”) “pose” and “possess” and be possessed by our discourse in order to speak it: the proposition(s) of thought require multiple *pre*-position(s) with which to *pro*-pose itself. Yet, in observing the empirical metrics of the eccentric loop equations, we acknowledge that “we,” as discursive subjects, are already “posed” and “possessed” by the equations themselves.

This “*ante*-” concept, however, may illumine the complexity of the naming of this exceptional inception. That is, “ante-” denotes a time/space reference, the “antenatal” or “anteroom”¹²⁹ into which sense and sign-sense have already been positioned or insinuated *in order to think itself* as discursive thought. Indeed, can we “say,” or, in the metrics of the equation, have we not already subsumed “what” is prior to thought by

¹²⁹ 1. Prior to; earlier: *antenatal*. 2. In front of; before: *anteroom*. [Latin, from *ante*, *before*; see *ant-* in Indo-European roots. (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved; cf. thefreedictionary.com.)

already being shaped in the metrics of the question itself? That is, what is thought's conceivable inception? Curiously, in language's auto-eccentric (its abstracted sense) or auto-energetic (its economic sense) play with its own thought, the address of this "antenatal anteroom" is heard in its alter-native sense as "*ante*," that is, the "*ante*"¹³⁰ which the player/thinker must "put up" into the betting pool before receiving a hand of cards – it is the "price to be paid" in order to play the game.

We cannot fully account for this exceptional inception but this exceptional inception claims discourse. A hyper-vigilance cannot arrest the radical eccentricity of sense/sign-sense but only "sense" and "sign-sense" "it." However, curiously, a hyper-vigilance may offer to potentiate discourse as the sensed/sign-sensed and fore-grounded instantiation of the term or proposition; at the same time it may potentiate the more radical unfolding of the back-ground of thought in the disinstantiation of sense/sign-sense discourse as a derivative of difference. Thus "*called...*" or "*...not called...*" "*God...*" (or any exceptional inception) "*...will be* (the copula/caesura of the proposition)...*there...*" holds as the event horizon of thought but this exceptionally incepted monstrosity makes us stutter.^{131 132}

¹³⁰ 1. *Games* The stake that each poker player must put into the pool before receiving a hand or before receiving new cards. See Synonyms at bet. 2. A price to be paid, especially as one's share; cost. (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by [Houghton Mifflin Company](http://www.thefreedictionary.com); thefreedictionary.com.)

¹³¹ Creative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium. *Ill Seen, Ill Said* (content and expression). Being well spoken has never been either the distinctive feature or the concern of great writers. (Deleuze, Giles, "*He Stuttered*", *Gilles Deleuze Essays Critical & Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith & Michael A. Greco, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 111).

IV. Towards a Theory of Semantic/Semiotic Exchange

Semantic Exchange

Rowing backwardly, like Dionysus on the frog pond, we observed that the proposition “*The leaf is green...*” instances the sense of “leaf” and sense of “green” in the disjunctive copula/caesura arrangement and that this arrangement sites the proposition as one sensory field (the object leaf) in contrast to an alternative sensory field (the quality green). The semantic arrangement derives both an abstraction of difference (object to named object “leaf” contrasted with the shade of the object to color “green”) as well as the energetic assertion of the verb “is.” Thus we note both a discursive or nominal exchange of terms as well as the energetic exchange which *pro*-poses the terms as alternatives of their proposition. We must contractually agree upon the validity of the proposition before it is accepted and circulated in “common” parlance.

We can further observe the fixation of meaning by contract/consensus/circulation. The anteed investment which *pro*-poses the terms “leaf” and “green” and “is” represent the semantic instantiation of the “sense of...*leaf...green...is...*” from their sense to now their sign-sense. Theoretically, this proposal generates the intelligibility we call the

¹³² ...One of the most fascinating symbols of the absolute is *Saccidānanda*, a cumulative name with a dynamic movement which takes you from reality (*sad*) to reality’s own conscious, shining depth (*cit*) and thence, continuing the inward journey, to the profoundest center and source of reality itself which is bliss (*ānanda*), pure and infinite, the ultimate truth of being.*(footnote: Sat-cit-ānanda (reality or truth/mind or consciousness/bliss) become in combination saccidānanda.)

The expression “Saccidānanda” seems to have arisen spontaneously from the heart of India’s seers, when they tried to find some way of referring to the mystery which they intuited beyond the range of thought. The welcome given to this term in the tradition undoubtedly proves its affinity to the Hindu soul . . . for many hundreds of years it had been accepted in the spiritual vocabulary of India as one of the best symbols for the innermost mystery of God himself, so far at least as man is capable of stammering about it.*(Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1974, 167.)

“green leaf.” This semantic arrangement requires both an abstracting shift (from “sense” to “sign-sense) but it also requires a semantic energetics. There is therefore an abstracted exchange between the signs as well as an energetic exchange. Neither of these exchanges may be fully accountable or comprehensible. The abstracted exchange cannot be objectively qualified because the terms of the proposition are already contingent upon the use of other contingent terms in the semantic assemblage. The energetic exchange cannot be objectively quantified because the energetics overlaps into the contingencies of the abstracted exchange. The sense(s) and sign(s) of the terms are both contingent and co-contingent. However, order is generated, and we are already ante-posed in this order of language as the transcendental contingency of the assemblage of language.

These hypothetical exchanges both express what we ante-pose as the semantic order of the real but this order has already been passively generated in order to allow for the conception of their ordering. Sense/sign-sense thought is already an exceptionally incepted order before it is a semantic order.

Investment – Instantiation

Thus thought appears to be already a self-imposed *spontaneous order* of the semantic register, the order of sense/sense-sign. This order has been imposed by the ante-position of the instantiated sense-to-sign event which is achieved by both the ante-posed abstraction of the sign but as well by a self-imposed energetic restraint. The ante-posed abstracted term as well as the ante-posed energy of the exchange event have passively generated an ordered investment which nonetheless becomes the active

investment of a now imposed “order” to the world. The instantiated micro-order of the semantic register potentiates the larger investment of the macro-order of the meaning registers including, e.g., the “political” or “cultural” orders.

The semantic register thus both tends to originate passively but also to impose an active register upon the macro-cultural orders. The naming of the world orders the world and imposes a semantic dominion upon that named world. Sense is not lost but potentially radically expanded to a larger, more sense-energized potential order of its sign-sense. We cannot discern either a “critical mass” or a non-liminal boundary for a hypothetically “pure” sense to achieve sign-sense but rather both are ante-posed senses/sign-senses which instantiate *alter-native* dimensions of a disjunctive composite. We can just as easily posit that sense is expanded in the sign-sense register as to say it is diminished because of the eccentric semantic and semiotic loops. Though sign-sense is theoretically achieved by energetic restraint, its new expanded sense remains itself of unlimited and indefinite potential and immeasurable energy: the severely repressive rhetoric and politic of, e.g., Hitler’s 3rd Reich, nonetheless conquered or threatened to conquer most of the Western world.

The macro orders are therefore seen as contingent upon the stability or instabilities of the originating semantic register. Because the semantic macro-orders such as politics and culture originate in the investment of the instantiated sense-to-sign or sense/sign-sense micro-register they remain vulnerable to the investments of instantiation as well as divestment of disinstantiation: culture derived from meaning registers may

either prosper or decay. There must reside in the sense/sign-sense event the internal and alternative exchange of investment to perpetuate the order of meaning.

Semiotic Exchange

...metaphor is essentially metamorphosis, and indicates how the two objects exchange their determinations, exchange even the names which designate them, in the new medium which confers the common quality upon them. Thus in Elstir's painting, where the sea becomes land, the land sea, where the city is designated only by "marine terms" and the water by "urban terms."* [*Proust, I, 835-837] This is because style, in order to spiritualize substance and render it adequate to essence, reproduces the unstable opposition, the original complication, the struggle and exchange of the primordial elements which constitute essence itself.¹³³

*"Here in the usage of our language we must consider that the ending –ance is undecided between active and passive."*¹³⁴

As a young child Carl Jung, from the prominence of a large stone, inquired: "Am I the one sitting on the stone or am I the stone upon which *he* is sitting?"¹³⁵ This extraordinary soliloquy captures the radical yet ubiquitous siting of awareness because in the subtle contrast of speakers we are posed with the question of how or if meaning originates as a conjugate of the formation "I" but even more subtly how meaning differentiates between its internal registers. Jung's relaxation of the pretense of the pure "I" allows sense to sense itself as an active and passive *intra-sensed* field, as the exchange between an inflected sense as *sense of itself* and sense as *sense of world as world sensing*. In Jung's configuration sense is imaging itself as neutrally essential (e.g., Jung's experiment pressured his sense to neutralize the weighting of its "subject sense"

¹³³ Deleuze, *Proust & Signs*, Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust & Signs*, New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1972, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁴ Derrida, *Difference*, in *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 136-137.

¹³⁵ Carl Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections, Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, New York: Vintage Books, 1961, 20.

and “predicate-stone/world-sense”) in the energetic momentum of its expression: that is, its semantic/semiotic infrastructure abstracted to “*I*” as subject, “*am sitting*” as the copula/caesura, and “*on the stone*” as predicate, can now be ordered in the flow of subject/predicate but can also be inverted and re-ordered allowing the original predicate to be expressed as the subject. The reader is left in the expressed conundrum of the subversive energetics of subject/predicate or now “predicate” as “subject”, and *vice versa*, in a hypothetically indefinite series. The child’s soliloquy sites the Mobius surface of the stone-I as the subtle event of semantic and semiotic exchange and exchangeability of the meaning figuration. The figuration of the stone-I-world is given literally in the terms of the soliloquy, but the literal flow is disrupted and subverted to reveal a subtle and essential order of meaning which renders either figuration – the “I on the stone” or conversely “the I of the stone upon which he is sitting” – in play as now mere symptoms of their only figured configuration in the terms. The literal semantic order is deliteralized *via the literal* to reveal the force of the figuration as anterior to the literal, as its sub- or *sub-tle* but also common Mobiusly looped surface. And we get to peek through the child’s mind’s eye the exchangeability of meaning figurations and their attendant energetics.

If we were chasing the tiger through the woods or over the stone, or if the tiger was chasing us, we would be less concerned about the literalizable/deliteralizable figuration of the I and the world and we would no doubt be using command literals (as literal as possible!) to save our sweet semantic/semiotic asses, so to speak. Perhaps the

stone-I-world instances in the pre-hunt (or post-hunt) and darkly figured cave rituals whose traces we find figured on the stone walls of ancient *homo-semanticus-semioticus*?

Stones notwithstanding, and returning to our critical trajectory, we can observe along with Deleuze that the determinations "...I and the stone" or the "boy and the stone-I..." "exchange their determinations...even the names which designate them..." (footnote 133) and, when we are not chasing or being chased by the tiger, they confer more or less "unstable oppositions." And, listening to Derrida's observation, these opposing terms and their figurations require passively and/or actively energized momentums with which to be "held" or opposed in their figurations. And though the semantic figurations may be only more or less energetically stable in their exchanges, their ante-posed essence nonetheless may render the "birth of a world," an exceptional inception and a figuration of meaning. Such exceptional inceptions may or may not be transparent to the question of their passive or active genesis, that is they may be only more or less able to hear the child's soliloquy in the heart and exchanges of their expressions.

However, lurking in Jung's stoned-world and in the ritualized tiger-world appears not only the juxtaposition of the I/stone-I but the syntax and underlying energetics of the definitive I and the in-definitive I. That is, if the "...I' is the stone upon which 'he' is sitting..." then the I now corresponds to the indefinite field of "...all that is not ▲": the figuring syntax subject/predicate has been ruptured to expose the always lurking and potential "general equation" but now only as expressed symptom. If the "I" is the world

or, for example, the full set of all possible time and space – if only *figuratively* or *metaphorically* or *symptomatically* – then what has entered the limiting syntactical structure is the unbounded possibility of “world.” At the same time, the syntax appears to have lost or had suspended its limiting, organizing authority, and we thus find ourselves thrust into the “world” of portmanteau expression, Alice or the figurement of Alice in Wonderland, or the child Jung and the figurement of Jung in the stone-world. Secondly, the subject and predicate are not posited as opposing one another but rather as *alternatives* which arise in the figuration of the meaning proposition – that their syntax may be inverted allays them as *altering natives* or *alter-natives* of a singular meaning structure. This energetic inversion tends to subsume the hypothetical “other” to the subset of the total text, that is it tends to subordinate alterity as constituted outside the text to now constituted as an expression within the text: so-called “alterity” is now native in the text as *alter-native*. Philosophies of alterity are thinkable yet they appear to confuse the figuration of the semantic and semiotic order we have proposed: (a) They remain expressed in the register which first potentiates alterity as at least partially registered as sign-sense; (b) Then the term “alterity” appears to abstract and instantiate its sense to an signed exceptional inception; (c) Which subjects it to a more or less efficient energetics of its pressured terms in the register; and (d) The composite of which further potentiates alterity as dis-instantiateable to the extent that this very composite process is now exfoliated to its possible and also exceptionally excepted terms and conditions. “Alterity” thus falls into the set of portmanteau terms which are themselves

subject to the semantic and semiotic registers. Though portmanteau terms may express “alterity” or “God” or “..that than which...” they do not exit the meaning register but rather they remain instantiated *as expressions of the sense/sign-sense register* as part of the exceptional inception of the order of thought. For Deleuze, The transcendental remains textually empirical. We are thus in league with Derrida’s assertion that philosophy must re-vise its conceptualization of text as mere supplement to speech¹³⁶; this revision appears to be potentiated by the revival of not merely the question of how we think we can express meaning in text but rather how the supplement is energized within the semantic and semiotic registers as the limited *and* unlimited expression of the full equation of difference, that is as the always implied if truncated “▲and all that is not ▲...”

Summary of Semantic/Semiotic Exchange: The pressure point of our soliloquy (on I’s and stones and tigers) would be to consider an accounting of the semantic and semiotic and now energetic registers which appear to be revealed in the exchange and exchangeability of any proposed subject/copula/predicate. Even if incomplete or penultimate, such an accounting reveals the instability of any universal structure to thought. That is, we have observed in our examination of the semantic surface the need to account for the instantiation of the sensed object to what we have termed sign-sense and we have termed this play the “ante” or the wager of sign-sense to speak or textualize the objects of sense. There is an energetic exchange as objects of sense textualize to

¹³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 6-7.

sign-sense and this exchange may be observed to be more or less stable. However, the play of sign-sense is itself always in the play of the general equation of language or the assemblage of other alternative senses. But this observation is always potentiated (whether acknowledged or unacknowledged) by the convergence of sense and sign-sense as the exceptional inception of thought derived from the general equation of difference or “▲and all that is not ▲...” The text “▲” appears not be fully comprehensible or composite without “...and all that is not ▲.”

VI. Summary and Implications

Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.¹³⁷

Returning to our thesis statements, we may observe:

If Anselm's, or Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawī's, or Lonergan's statements express the term 'God,' then this term may be read as the backgrounding "boundedness" of the third term of "*religio*" and furthermore may be understood as the desire for the complete epistemological condition of thought; language expresses this condition in statements of 'meaning.'

If 'religion' expresses this desire in texts and ritual practice, and this 'third term' is understood as the condition of being 'bounded to or by,' then the study of religion is itself bounded to this desire for the completion of thought, and its study requires the continuous and radical epistemological interrogation of its expressions in the semantic and semiotic registers.

Following Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, this desire for the complete epistemological condition of thought cannot be understood as an 'alterity' of thought but is rather the internal native or '*alter-native*' condition of thought itself.

The 'religions' constitute in native texts and ritual practices this desire to know and express this complete condition. While they appear to each claim an exceptional inception to the expression, because the expression emerges from the energetic and unstable disjunctive synthesis of difference each expression appears therefore to be

¹³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, New York: Verso, 1999, pp. 55-56.

rendered unstable and open to differentiation. As such, each religion expresses itself as a ‘singularity’ of this universal condition of thought. However, because of the native factors in the epistemological condition, specifically, that thought desires but cannot fully express the condition, no particular religion can claim hegemony to the expression of the condition: ‘God’ as such is the full expression of thought, yet by the ‘definition’ of the terms of thought, its expression remains fully its *alter*-native exception to thought.

Finally, the academic study of religious texts and rituals would appear to be incomplete and epistemologically nonsensical without their third native term, *religio* as “bounded to or by.” An internal semiotic symptomatology pervades the semantic register: the terms of the text and ritual are always called by the “sacred.” There persists a bounded and unbounded theological imperative to the discipline.

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