

Review article

Regnant signs: The semiosis of liturgy*

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As we all know, semiotic theory, especially on the Continent, has made whatever generic leaps it hopes to make from the launching pad of textuality. This, combined with what Sebeok calls 'glottocentrism', has served as the point of origin for any alleged analysis of any order of signification whatsoever. The correlation between signifier and signified, when the signified is even allowed a genuinely autonomous existence, is held to be by an internal act of textual/linguistic semiosis. This model derived from both speech and writing has hovered over pre- and post-semiotic orders (to be defined later) like an alien specter that drains the life out of anything that is not held to be a human linguistic artifact (with the linguistic being understood here as a subspecies of the semiotic). And when this obsession with the very late evolutionary product of language gets further combined with information models and the corollary concept of codes, the life-blood of extra-linguistic orders is even further siphoned off by what could be called a kind of vampire semiotics.

Lest his image seem too harsh or even downright silly, it must be remembered that most semiotic theories have rather strange rites of passage by which any potential order of meaning is 'allowed' to become a member of the order of genuine signification. What are these rites of passage that await some poor pre- or post-semiotic order as it begs for admittance into the inner chamber of the sign-using self? The first thing that is asked of the nascent order of meaning is that it clothe itself in some code that has been introduced to it from outside its own provenance. These codes are, of course, human constructs (or so the reigning myth goes), and when used symbolically, rather than iconically or indexically, they can mean whatever self-conscious sign-users choose them to mean. What was once a robust web of sign/object relations gets reduced to a

* Gerard Lukken, *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia: Anthropological, Theological, and Semiotic Studies on the Liturgy and the Sacraments*. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994.

far less vital tissue of internal linguistic references that almost seem to replace the flesh and blood power of the extra-linguistic order.

A second rite of passage, once the external relations are reduced in power, involves the shriveling up of all internal relations with the order of relevance that is suddenly wrenched into the human order of signification. Certain traits and not others are brought into the play of signification, and the powerful ambiguities of the object are covered over by an imperial semiosis that cannot (i.e., will not) be slowed down by too much secondness. After all, speed is of the essence when codes and information are the governing horizon within which signification takes place. The object has thus been compelled to give up two fundamental aspects of its being; namely, its causal and relational traits, and its internal configuration which may house richly incompatible traits within the same order of relevance.

A third rite of passage by which a pre- or post-linguistic order of relevance is brought into the penumbra of textuality is that of replaceability. What was once an order that fully embodied the principle of individuation is now reduced to a type within an expanding textual horizon that has little tolerance for dallying with something that resists absorption by a code. There is a kind of hypomania in human forms of semiosis that refuses to become depressed or arrested by the still presence of that which has its own semiotic rights (if we may stretch an analogy). In what follows I will argue that there is a fascinating counter-connection between religion and melancholy (but of this later).

Weaving our images together we can see that an extra-linguistic order of relevance must pass through the very narrow gate of the three rites of passage that drain it of its external relational traits, its internal and often ambiguously conflicting traits, and its absolute uniqueness as that order and not another. Textual semiology is indeed a vampire-like creature in that it can only live by taking away the life blood of extra-textual orders and then placing the wan, but still breathing, body (corpus) in the synchronic network of signification. The high water mark of this process of textual concupiscence was expressed to me once by a graduate student who said, 'Nature is a bad text'. To which I now make the Emersonian reply, 'Perhaps texts are bad signs of nature'.

What has all of this to do with religion and with the semiotic analysis of liturgy? Is there a correlation between my sense of nature (as being presemiotic, semiotic, and post-semiotic all at once) and that dimension of signification that can be called religious? Are there certain objects in our midst that still resist the devouring influence of textuality, and that hold forth a unique kind of secondness? And can these objects also hold forth an abjected firstness and compel the linguistic Juggernaut to stop

briefly in its tracks? And what of thirdness? Can it be freed from its captivity to the allegedly arbitrary codes that are held to be the true loci of all symbolic representation? Is there something unique about liturgical acts and objects, not to mention liturgical space, that radically reconfigures the three categories of (Peircean) semiotics?

For some time now I have argued that there is something fundamentally wrong about our manic semiotic analyses, and that there are forces of abjection (only some of which have been probed by Kristeva) that operate to close off the most enduring and powerful orders of signification (Corrington 1992, 1993a, 1994, 1996). Of all of the spheres of meaning that might appear to be at least partially immune to this covering over, the religious seems to assume priority. For here, as nowhere else, we have the chance of encountering powers and potencies that are not part of the growing network of human forms of contrivance. But does this claim already beg the question by assuming that the religious orders are more than human projections (sustained by vast underground transference energies)? By looking to the religious realm to rescue semiology or semiotics from constructivism, are we not already violating a principle dear to both structuralist and pragmaticist frameworks; namely, that whatever we talk about can only be talked about *after* it has been transformed into a manipulable sign or interpretant?

The burden to be carried by any semiotic theory of liturgy is great, especially in the light of the almost overwhelming cultural tendency (at least in so-called high culture) to put a veil of suspicion and irony between the hapless sign-user and anything that could invade the self-protective narcissism of its postmodern self. In spite of an endless stream of warnings about the merely spectatorial view point, we are still religious voyeurs insofar as we look at such phenomena as something that can be circumscribed and tamed by human linguistic artifices. The real irony is that those perspectives, often driven by otherwise valuable gender analyses, that abhor the human tendency to freeze the other in the gaze are the most guilty of perpetuating that very disease that renders extra-linguistic orders weak and powerless.

If this metaphysically inept model is applied to those objects that traditionally live at the center of religious communities, then it becomes clear that the very thing that liturgy is attempting to do; that is, provide for the invocation of the sacred, is undermined at the start. In Heideggerian terms we would say that the matter to be thought is at variance with the method used to describe it. In fact, continuing with his language we would say that we are given semblance rather than phenomenon. The heart of the liturgical object or act is covered over so as to save the semiological or semiotic model from having to encounter something

that grasps it rather than vice versa. Within this betrayal of the matter that is thought is a profound confusion that conflates the sheer indefiniteness of the liturgical referent with the absence of signification (where signification is always tied to determinate contrasts within a horizontal system). Another aspect of this general confusion/betrayal is the inability to distinguish between the revelatory power of performative structures or utterances and the assertive claims of a chain of linguistic interpretants. Liturgy does many things, but it rarely functions primarily in the realm of assertion.

The problem with any semiotic framework which exists without recognizing the unique features of the religious referent is that it also has a truncated sense of worldhood. That is, the sheer availability of orders of signification comes from something that is indefinitely larger than the sum of all human codes and utterances. Nature, as a largely self-recording system, has as one of its orders of signification the realm of human sign-manipulation and assimilation. It seems to be a special feature of this late evolutionary domain that it masks its own embeddedness in its true enabling ground in the innumerable orders of the world. Put simply, the whence of my signs is clouded in mystery, but it is a mystery generated by my own species-narcissism. The whither is short-sightedly instrumental, where thought at all, and has no real convergence with extra-human dynamic objects. Of course, in 'real' life these dynamic objects are continually shaping all that we do, say, and contrive, but the cloud of manic semiosis hides this directionality coming from them.

The first step toward finding a semiotics worthy of religious objects is to pry semiotic theory away from its anthropomorphic and anthropocentric marriage to a truncated understanding of the human process. Strengthening Peirce's early insight, we can say that persons ride in and through vast semiotic currents not of their own making and the very shape of consciousness is given to it from extra-human nature. The self is what it is (at least) by becoming a clearing within which something like world semiosis can take place. The biological foundation for this is clearly evolutionary competence for the species. Insofar as we make good listeners to these semiotic messages, we survive to generate other similar sign-users. But if we let internal sounds drown out the signals of a robust and self-transforming nature we run the risk of becoming extinct. In some basic sense, it is that simple.

Before clarifying our primary terms (e.g., pre- and post-semiotic) and by way of a preparation for probing into the work that is the subject of this essay, two way stations will be visited that prepare the move away from anthropomorphic semiotic perspectives that serve to cut off genuine religious forms of semiosis. The first way station will help us to regain a

sense of worldhood as the true locus of signs, while the second will reawaken the priority of religious symbols as the meaning horizon within which liturgical acts and objects have their trans-human meaning. Gerard Lukken, the author of our text, is fully aware of these two horizons and uses them to locate his own understanding of how religious depth can be recaptured in an increasingly secular age.

Perhaps the most persuasive *locus classicus* for a rethinking of signs that fully embeds them within referential totalities which envelope and shape the human process, rather than vice versa, is in Heidegger's 1927 *Sein und Zeit*, where the analysis of how reference actually works in a primordial manner is lifted up out of the obscurity (of manic semiosis) that had covered it over:

Signs are not things which stand in an indicating relationship to another thing but are *useful things to circumspection so that the worldly character of what is at hand makes itself known at the same time.* (1996: 74)

Zeichen ist nicht ein Ding, das zu einem anderen Ding in zeigender Beziehung steht, sondern ein Zeug, das ein Zeugganzes ausdrücklich in die Umsicht hebt, so dass sich in eins damit die Weltmässigkeit des Zuhandenen meldet. (1972 [1927]: 79–80)

Several layers are of course manifest here. The sign is much more than an indicating thing, but is already part of a useful totality that makes it possible for the sign-using self to navigate in the world at all. Even at first take (when looked at primordially) the sign is far more than something that clings to linguistic contrasts as if to find a small hole from which to wriggle free to point in a weak fashion to something extra-linguistic. The linguistic use of signs is a very circumscribed species of the genus of signification, a genus which derives *its* measure from worldhood. The basic structures of worldly semiosis (or, world semiosis) are never objectively present as referents that can be gazed at. Heidegger gives the example of the farmer encountering the wind: 'Rather, the farmer's circumspection first discovers the south wind in its being by taking the lay of the land into account' (1996: 75), 'Vielmehr entdeckt die Umsicht der Landbestellung in der Weise des Rechnungstragens gerade erst den Südwind in seinem Sein' (1972 [1927]: 81).

The lay of the land is the given contour that enables signs to function within their useful totalities. If the farmer needs to know the direction and force of the wind, if the investor needs to know of the impending fluctuations in the market, if the analyst needs to read the features of his or her countertransference (and the analysand to read the traits of his or her transference), then the liturgist needs to know the sacred contour within which the liturgical acts and objects are to emerge as invocations

of their useful totalities. Each object, from a Tibetan bowl gong, to a flaming chalice, to a menorah, to a vestment, or to burning incense, must light up the totality which gave it birth in the first place. The circumspection (*Umsicht*) that is entwined with worldhood, and which is itself partly a gift of worldhood (world semiosis), must attain to the measure of its true object.

For some, of course, this language may sound hopelessly overburdened with weighty objects and weighty meanings that somehow emerge from the ever mysterious origin. It is easy, and sometimes useful, to become suspicious of any delineation that constantly brings us back to phenomenal structures that are radically different in kind than the objects with which we semioticians normally traffic. Yet it is also useful to remember that an invocation of worldhood (in whatever language) is one of the ways that can point beyond the contemporary obsession with self-generated interpretants. The world, manifest to us as worldhood, has its own interpretants, its own semiotic rhythms, and, so I would argue, its own religious orders that stand out as intensified dimensions of worldhood. It is not necessary to assume that these intensified religious folds of the world are themselves rooted in another power of being. Here the concept of 'fold' (derived from catastrophe theory) refers to the unique folding-back of a region of the world into a space/time field of enhanced semiotic density and scope.

Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions of how signs actually function within useful totalities makes it clear that the sign stands in the space between the self and its numerous objects. It points in both directions, better, it fully *participates* in the movements of the world-embedded self. Lukken will affirm this aspect of religious forms of semiosis by rejecting the spectatorial view that operates, even when denied, in most forms of semiotic theory. Our argument thus goes as follows: all signs are what they are because they participate in the structures of worldhood that fully envelop the human sign-user. Those signs that happen to be religious also, by definition, participate in worldhood, although they do so in unique ways. One aspect that makes them unique is that these religious signs share more directly in the power of that in which they participate. Religious ritual is an intensification, via repetition and invocation, of the power native to religious signs.

The analysis of worldhood, however profound, does not fully expose the difference between the how of signification and the way of the religious symbol. That is, the movement of a useful totality, as bodied-forth by signs, is different in kind from the movement of a religious symbol as it opens up a given fold of nature. The second way station is that of the theological delineations of Tillich, who understood the religious

dimension of signification perhaps more fully than anyone else in our century. While we must reject the rigidity of his distinction between sign and symbol, we can affirm what the distinction is trying to do:

Special emphasis must be laid on the insight that symbol and sign are different; that, while the sign bears no necessary relation to that to which it points, the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands. The sign can be changed arbitrarily according to the demands of expediency, but the symbol grows and dies according to the correlation between that which is symbolized and the persons who receive it as a symbol. Therefore, the religious symbol, the symbol which points to the divine, can be a true symbol only if it participates in the power of the divine to which it points. (1950: 239)

Tillich failed to understand the indexical aspect of signs, which renders them anything but arbitrary, but understood that one class of signs, his 'symbols', functioned in a unique way. As we will argue, there is a special kind of secondness pertinent to religious symbols that could be called a 'sheer secondness' (with echoes of Schleiermacher's 'absolute dependence'). Sheer secondness, in my sense, is not a degenerate form of otherwise dyadic relation, but a ground relation that enables any subaltern and dyadic relation to emerge at all. Peirce worked backwards from the so-called pure category to its degenerate case (because of a fear of origins/firstness?), while I want to move in the opposite direction, from empowering antecedents that are more elusive and less circumscribed, but more important because of that.

The symbol is unique in the sense that it must participate in rhythms that are not fully semiotic, even while having, by necessity, semiotic manifestations. Note that I am using the term 'semiotic' in a very different way from Kristeva, who only confuses the issue by giving the concept of symbol too much of a role and denying the relative ubiquity of semiosis throughout nature and its innumerable orders (as manifest in the world *qua nature natured*). A better formulation would make the symbolic to be a highly valued species within the genus of the semiotic, with the semiotic (in the larger sense) being 'surrounded' with the presemiotic and the post-semiotic. Symbols thus have the role of riding on the back of depth-rhythms within the world that our species traditionally calls 'religious'.

The important link for Tillich is that between the religious object that permeates the symbol and the self that enters into the complex rhythms of the object as manifest by the symbol. There is a genuine life-history to any true symbol, manifest in the charge that it may give to the self who keeps the symbol alive, not by also propping up the object (as Feuerbach would have it) but by allowing the symbol its role as the place

where the object can open up part of its own inner heart. Here we see that mere semblance is replaced by the genuine self-showing of the phenomenon. Of course, a critical dimension enters at this stage, precisely because the symbol/religious object correlation is more intense and potentially dangerous than the sign/object correlation. In dialectical tension with the need to become permeable to the religious object through its dynamic and living symbol is the need to test the gods to see where demonic and devouring features may be present. A central part of what Raposa rightly calls 'theosemiotic' is this counter-tendency to trace out the power that comes from the symbol in the context of personal and communal value systems. Nothing is more dangerous or more uncanny than an unchecked epiphany of power that can tear out the moral center of a community. We need only think of the symbols that shattered life in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s or of the nascent symbols of might and power that are emerging fitfully within the religious right in North America today.

Tillich reminds us that genuine symbols are centers of power that can either connect us with the source of meaning or can shatter all form within the semiotic and symbolic orders that sustain meaning for finite selves. It is a commonplace that the liturgy of a Nuremberg rally (as expressed, for example, in Leni Riefenstahl's demonically brilliant 1934 film *Triumph of the Will*) is no less a liturgy than that animating the Christian eucharist. The question becomes: how do we, given our finitude and perennial blindness, make judicious choices between or among competing liturgical centers of power? Or is the human process addicted to the manic powers that swirl out of the depths of the symbolic? We are often driven to the tragic conclusion that an addiction to epiphanies of power often eclipses our sense of justice.

The above reflections are meant to drive home the point that symbols are never arbitrary cultural signs (although in their expression they will of necessity have these aspects as subaltern configurations) but are powers that are beyond good and evil. This fact makes it even more urgent that criteria be developed that can help sign-users know when a symbol is on the verge of shattering just communities. Following the American idealist Josiah Royce (1855–1916) we can praise communities of interpretation (Corrington 1995 [1987]) but we must also recognize that they are fragile, rare, and subject to all kinds of spoliation. Even Peirce's community of inquiry can only exist under very special conditions, conditions that are constantly being undermined by opacity and habit.

Let us probe a little more fully into the concept of sheer secondness and illuminate the distinction between the pre- and the post-semiotic upon which so much of my argument turns. It is my contention that

semiotic theory (whether that of Continental semiology or that of pragmatic semiotics) has abjected precisely those elements that sustain and envelop semiosis, which also manifest those great powers that punctuate communal life. By turning its back on these less available dimensions of semiosis, semiotic theory has in turn failed to gain access to the depth-rhythms of symbols and their liturgical reenactments. It is one thing to reawaken a sense of the indexical, and of locating it within a deeper sense of worldhood, it is another to show how signs participate in natural pulsations that are much stronger than even Peirce's little discussed 'ground'.

Sheer secondness is tied to the concept of worldhood. Seconds emerge fairly clearly out of the context of a meaning horizon (or even of an animal *umwelt*). They represent causal relations that impinge on all sign-users (at least) and that have their own vector force. Secondness as a category can be defined as the reality of dyads in the world, dyads which are pre-intelligible (since they do not yet participate in thirdness). Sheer secondness, in contrast, can be defined as the hidden horizon that makes all seconds available in the first place. It is their 'ground' or their enabling condition. As a shorthand it would be appropriate to equate sheer secondness with worldhood, provided that we are dealing with the specifically semiotic aspect of worldhood. In Heidegger's formulation we are talking about the 'worldly character of what is at hand', which can be translated as: the sheer availability of seconds within the context of the self/world transaction, insofar as that transaction is semiotic. Peirce almost always moved toward consequents, while the counter move here defended would also move toward the far more elusive antecedents that recede from view precisely as they are birthing finite orders of semiosis.

Hence, sheer secondness is pre-dyadic, even while making all dyads possible. An analogy within the Peircean framework would be to say that sheer secondness stands to a given second the way an infinitesimal (as a point infinitely small yet greater than zero) stands to an actual point in space/time. The infinitesimal is not yet a contrast point with other points but is more like a birthing ground for that which unfolds on the other side of the great divide between the potential and the actual. Sheer secondness is not an object of a thematic phenomenological gaze but must be seen indirectly in terms of the contexts that it enables. In the same way we cannot see an infinitesimal, but we can, if we are friendly to Peirce's concept, see its manifestations and in turn know that the infinitesimal is somehow 'there' as the hidden ground for all space/time continua.

The partial equation of sheer secondness with worldhood prepares us for the further refinement that contrasts full-blown and manifest semiosis

with two distinct dimensions that are related to it, but which have a very different logic. As noted, Kristeva contrasts the semiotic with the symbolic in such a way as to make the semiotic preintelligible. The current perspective has, as also noted, moved to make the concept of semiosis far more generic to cover any type of signification that occurs within the innumerable orders of *nature natured*. Consequently, the contrast term from the standpoint of origin has to be the presemiotic. The domain of the presemiotic is very much like the domain of firstness, as augmented for human sign-users, by the reality of sheer secondness. There are no signs, objects, or interpretants within the elusive domain of the presemiotic. Stretching Peirce's language we could even call this domain the firstness of firstness (remembering that there is no such thing as degenerate firstness). Everything that we have come to understand as pertaining to signs comes 'later', although the realm of the presemiotic is nontemporal and without positions or contrasts.

Kristeva captures part of the logic of the presemiotic when she uses Plato's image of the *chora* (closed space or womb) which connotes a birthing ground that is fully self-othering (1974). While we cannot assign any internal traits to the presemiotic dimension of nature, we can observe, perhaps through a glass darkly, certain relational traits that show its strong relevance for what takes place in genuine semiosis. This ground which is unlike any other ground is self-masking. It seems to be like a heterogenous momentum which suggests, following Schelling, that it is an unruly ground (*das Regellose*). That is, there is nothing even remotely like thirdness in the presemiotic dimension of nature, nor can we deduce anything like secondness, but both will be present in germ.

In much more particular language, each and every sign, object, or interpretant will contain a trace of the presemiotic dimension from which it was ejected. This trace is unusually hard to see, especially since we are so blinded by the manic plenitude of interpretants (an actual infinite). Yet the religious order, as will become clearer, is one that struggles to reawaken a sense of the unruly ground that is still present within the heart of signs. The danger is that this self-masking origin will be converted into an all too secure origin (*creatio ex nihilo*) that contains either fully manifest or evolutionary thirdness (Neville 1968). The link between this constructed, and hence unreal, origin and the orders of the world is maintained by the principle of sufficient reason that asserts that whatever is in whatever way it is has a determinate ground that exhaustively explains its being and its essence. It should be clear that the current perspective (ecstatic naturalism) is looking for the more primordial folds within nature that cannot be wrenched into the mythological (and dare we say, colonial) structures of the Western monotheisms.

Thus far we have contrasted the presemiotic with the semiotic, linking the presemiotic to firstness and sheer secondness, while the semiotic is, of course, linked to all three categories and their degenerate cases (secondness and thirdness). The domain of the semiotic is that which emerges from the innumerable orders of *nature natures*, from which it follows that the domain/dimension of the presemiotic is correlated to *nature naturing*. The plenitude of the realm of the semiotic can also be described as the domain of the actual infinite (which is incrementally infinite as well). But what of the realm of the post-semiotic? How does it obtain in distinction from the previous two domains, and how does it relate to the religious and liturgical realm?

An initial delineation should be clear; namely, that the post-semiotic must obtain after the establishment of the semiotic domain. This means that the post-semiotic derives part of its inner logic from the manic interpretants that constitute the realm of signification. In this sense, the post-semiotic is different from the presemiotic which is not affected by what it generates, that is, the relationship between the presemiotic and the world of signs is asymmetrical. The relationship travels in one direction only — from unruly ground to sign, but not back again. But the relationship between the post-semiotic and the semiotic is more symmetrical in that there can be effects manifest backwards and forwards across the ontological divide. The realm of signification can cut deep grooves into the realm of the post-semiotic, while the post-semiotic can open up the semiotic through the power of a kind of developmental teleology that holds open semiotic space. If the semiotic order is manifest as the actual infinite, then the post-semiotic order is manifest as the open infinite, an infinite that hovers in and around the actual infinite as a lure toward depositioning and repositioning.

The presemiotic domain is pretemporal, nonpositional, heterogenous (unruly), and ejective of its nonobjective potencies. The semiotic realm is exploding with interpretants, objects, and nascent signs (representaments) that collectively constitute the actual infinite of *nature natures*. The post-semiotic lives within and against the semiotic, and also bends back toward the presemiotic whenever it, too, becomes open to the traces manifest in the heart of signs. These three dimensions in consort exhaust everything that can possibly be *said* about nature, as already and always fissuring into *nature naturing* and *nature natures*. Above all else, ecstatic naturalism struggles to locate the human process within this broadened conception of nature. In doing so it perhaps stands more of a chance than almost all postmodern perspectives of overcoming the hubris of the anthropocentric starting point. This is, of course, a very large 'perhaps'.

With the forgoing delineations roughly completed, it is now possible to enter into a discussion with our text, *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia*, to gauge how successful its author, Gerard Lukken, is in finding the unique features of a semiotics of liturgy. This collection of 19 of his essays (8 in English, 6 in German, and 5 in French), gathered together by Louis van Tongeren and Charles Caspers on the occasion of Lukken's retirement from the Theological Faculty of Tilberg University, The Netherlands, presents a fairly encompassing analysis of Christian liturgy from the standpoint of a fairly liberal and culturally open perspective. The essays were originally written in the decades of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. One of their primary concerns is with taking the growth of secularization, manifest as the conquest of religion by culture, seriously, so that the religious heart of culture can find a way to manifest its unique symbols to those for whom they might otherwise be dead. Remembering Tillich's admonition that symbols cannot be created by an act of will but have a life-trajectory of their own, it becomes especially difficult to find a path toward the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church (in this case) that does not trample of the intrinsic powers (or lack thereof) of the symbols themselves.

In the secularization process, which is as unrelenting as it is uncanny, the symbolic realm loses much of its intrinsic momentum, precisely insofar as it is held to belong to an outmoded supernaturalism that stands in opposition to the march of interpretants within a horizontal world that has no sharp vertical dimensions. The conclusion is that 'it cannot be denied that this [Catholic] liturgical experience contained a large degree of estrangement, estrangement from the reality in which we live, from the world, and from the totality of the people's existence' (p. 50). In short, human cultural experience has been repositioned away from those epiphanies of power and meaning that were originally developed in a very different metaphysical horizon. The sacraments of marriage, anointing of the sick, baptism, penance, the eucharist, holy orders, and confirmation, have lost their connection to a source of empowerment and authority that stands, as Karl Barth might say, *von oben*, from above. To attempt to reinsert these liturgical events and objects into the secular meaning horizon seems doomed from the start. Unless, that is, some kind of translation can take place along semiotic lines that shows the curious mix of continuity and discontinuity that the sacred actually plays in our lives.

The route to this translation process travels through modern anthropology. The connection envisioned by Lukken is that between Jesus as the Alpha and the Omega and a renewed sense of 'the consistency of human existence' (p. 60). The assumption is that such consistency could

* not be fully attained from within the human process alone, nor could it be attained within the self/world correlation, but only through the actual living presence of Jesus as the Christ within the very center of secular human existence. This position is a bit reminiscent of Schleiermacher's Christology (1830) which asserts that the image of Christ is that of an archetypal humanity (a more robust earlier version of Feuerbach's rather thin species being [1841]).

Hence modern anthropology, with its emphasis on the correlation of the reigning secular paradigm with whatever may still be held to be religious, is the measure by and through which the Christian church (in this case) regains the power of its core symbols, as they are reawakened and reenacted within the liturgical events of the church calendar. But in far more concrete terms, what are we actually doing when we leave the purely secular sphere for the religiously symbolic? Earlier we ruled out the notion that liturgy operated fundamentally in the mode of assertive judgments; that is, of judgments that are held to be either true or false in the application of a predicate to a subject. Clearly, far more is going on:

In it [liturgy], we use *things* in such a way that the perspective is sprung and something breaks open. We use *words* that call up something of a deeper reality. And we *act* in a particular, loaded manner, so as to be able to open up space and admit something of a more distant horizon. (pp. 88-89)

Note the almost Heideggerian language in this wonderfully concise statement. Things, such as a chalice or menorah, are so placed that they call forth a new and deepened perspective that actually springs forth from antecedent behavior and ideation. What was once closed now comes into the open (akin to Heidegger's *lichtung*). The antecedent reality is usually tied to a real or alleged historical event, thus constituting an unbroken origin for the living community. For Schleiermacher, one of the characteristics of a positive religion, as opposed to the all-too-thin natural religion of the *Aufklärung*, is that it will have a founder who is unique in those respects that are fundamental to religious anthropology (1799). Hence all liturgical objects break open the meaning horizon and thus overcome some of the semiotic/symbolic opacity of the secular sphere.

The second dimension in Lukken's account makes it clear that the words used in liturgical events are not assertive in any but the most derivative way. This of course gets tricky when you look at the metaphysical underpinnings of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic world. If Calvin wants to move toward the Reformed idea that the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal, and if Luther wants the compromise solution of Real Presence (currently operative in the Anglican church), then what do you

make of the Roman analysis of substance and accidents as these tie to the body of the founder; that is, the theory that the accidents may remain the same but the substance is totally altered by an act of divine will through the priest's Act of Consecration (an Act that Calvin referred to as consisting of nothing more than 'magical mumblings'. [Thompson 1961: 185])? Clearly these three perspectives have strong assertive components: if one is right, then the other two must be wrong.

One could retort that in the act of taking the bread and the wine (where allowed) the metaphysical underpinnings are irrelevant to the average communicant. But is this true? Invoking Gadamer here we could say that one's prejudices (*Vorteilen*), whether conscious or not, have a clear impact on the shape and texture of one's meaning horizon. There is an abyss of difference separating a memorial Lord's supper in a Methodist church from a Holy Eucharist in an Episcopal church, not to mention the even wider gulf experienced between either of these and an Orthodox or Roman church. And this gulf is actually experienced, not posited assertively except through a derivative thematic act (in Heidegger's terms this would be the denouement when the handy become the merely present).

The nature of the enactment through the word is thus rather problematic, but this is rarely an issue in practice as the given experience is held to be self-validating by each communicant. The third dimension of the liturgical is the performative in which we enter into a different kind of space. This aspect of the symbolic is especially powerful because it has the means to break through the Cartesian tridimensional space that shapes our practical engagements. By dancing, kneeling, singing, being still, repeating creeds, or lighting candles, we enter into a 'loaded' space that has far more semiotic density than surrounding space. It is as if the symbolic use of space in the liturgical act functions like a miniature black hole to bend space back around it. In this vacuum things that usually lie on the neither side of our meaning horizon can come into view and abide within this thickened space. In Lukken's words, the presence of the symbol makes sure that 'something of that other is really present in the thing which symbolizes' (p. 89).

Remember the Tillichian distinction, shared fully by Lukken, between the distancing experienced with signs (whether conventional or not) and the robust form of participation found in and through symbols. The other, in Lukken's case the persons of the Christian trinity, can come closer to us through the unique logic of symbols when they operate liturgically to break open the secular horizon and invite religious depth. The 'how' of this process is through repetition. Like the rhythmic cadences of poetry that intensify and compress language, the repetitions

of each liturgical act reinforce the depth dimension that lies on the edges of normal forms of semiosis. This repetition is especially powerful during those boundary situations when the normal semiotic props are knocked away:

Immediately connected with the function of ritual as relief is the function of ritual in channeling the strong emotions that come with any crisis situation. In the case of another's death, ritual fills the lacunae and prevents a blind, random explosion of feelings. It helps one to react sensibly in this situation and actively seek an answer, before reaching the point of complete personality disorganization. (p. 101)

Again, Lukken gives a concise and wise account of how ritual can enter into our everydayness to protect its surprisingly fragile boundaries against internal disintegration. The boundary situations of guilt, death, shame, overwhelming desire, betrayal, creative ecstasies, or sheer psychic vertigo all cry out for the reorganizing power of ritual that realigns the self with the depth dimension of the religious. At the other psychic extreme, ritual can awaken an emotional life that had long since been abandoned to the dark chambers of memory.

Given the different metaphysical claims operating in some uses of the liturgy (e.g., in the symbol of the chalice that can function to hold the literal blood of Christ in the Roman church to the flaming chalice of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship that has no relation to Christ or to blood but to the light of reason and wisdom), what can we say about the concept of participation that animates Lukken's account? Just what is the ritual or symbol participating in? How do we move past the competing metaphysical claims without destroying the power of the depth dimension? The answer comes, so I would argue, by looking toward the above worked out delineations between the pre- and post-semiotic dimensions of nature.

From the standpoint of ecstatic naturalism, the symbol has the unique status of participating in all three orders of signification. It is clearly fully embedded within the semiotic orders as it has traceable interpretants, often historically inaugurated, and has a penumbra of actual and possible meanings that can be articulated within the community for whom the symbol has strong relevance. Yet I also want to argue that it has roots in the presemiotic insofar as it opens out a strong sense of origin in that which is not an actual object or sign. Needless to say, there is a very complex dialectic connecting the presemiotic with the semiotic, especially since the signs of the semiotic orders have an almost manic desire to swallow up the presemiotic mysteries and make them their own. But there is a kind of shipwreck within the symbol that has the uncanny

ability to shake off the clinging signs and interpretants that wish to clothe it too fully with finite meanings.

Part of the mystery 'contained' within a symbol is thus its tie to the ever self-masking dimension of *nature naturing*. But what about the post-semiotic? How does a symbol participate in the open infinite that is post-temporal yet relevant to the foundlings of *chronos*? A fuller answer must await a discussion of the spirit, but at this stage we can say that the symbol is also the locus of the *not yet*, which Jews and Christians understand in terms of eschatology. A powerful living symbol will become open to the *no longer* while also becoming more and more permeable to the *not yet*. Here too, of course, the dialectic with the semiotic presents its own problems insofar as the manic drive of interpretants is to fill the *not yet* with very clear content. Hence the authentic posture of being broken open to an inviting open infinite often degenerates into a content-filled expectation of a concrete state of affairs. When this concrete expectation become apocalyptic it sets up brutal dyadic tensions between the elect and the nonelect that shatter healthy communal life.

Returning to the empirical realm we can ask: how does a ritual open up the pre- and post-semiotic and make them available to the sign-using self who is almost always lost and entangled in the world of finite semiosis? Repetition has been mentioned as a key ingredient in the way or how of the liturgy. Deeply entwined with this repetition is the condensation brought about by liturgy:

In ritual, the normal and everyday is accentuated and stylized, so that the perspective on it can alter. Ritual condenses reality. It sets something apart, and in a certain sense lifts the thing, act or word, out of the realm of the ordinary. The contours become more sharply accentuated. The pace is restrained in order to stride ahead. One stays still, creates a private space, keeps distance. One can speak of a certain effect of estrangement with regard to what was actually expected. (p. 105)

The ritual estranges the self from its own everydayness, and lifts it into a new realm in which the ordinary is seen to float on something far less available. It is as if the figure background relationship moves to a new level. Before, there were specific figures against delimited backgrounds (as portions of worldhood). With the entrance of liturgy the ritual object becomes a highly illuminated foreground that has as *its* background that which is without contour. What was once a mere bowl from which one could drink becomes the vessel of the holy through which one can pour a libation to the unnamed power. In the former case the circumspective gaze passes right through the bowl to its usability, while in the latter case the bowl becomes 'more sharply accentuated' as something of unique

status within the handy or present objects that surround the sign-using self. Yet it is never merely present as a thing, but has its own radiance that sets it apart from all other things in the world.

Of course, rituals can be profoundly negative in their impact on personal and communal life. If they are separated from a living religious context they can become tools of narcissism, of 'pure magic and superstition' (p. 107). For Lukken this happens when a purely vertical dimension replaces the equally necessary horizontal and cultural dimension. On a less dangerous level, the loss of the horizontal can also take place when the liturgical scholar focuses too exclusively on the conceptual elements embedded in the ritual:

La liturgie a bien un contenu de notions conceptualisables, mais ce contenu n'est pas l'essentiel, et il se trouve enfoui dans toute l'expérience vitale. La recherche du contenu théologique de la liturgie doit toujours tenir compte du contexte assez élaboré où celle-ci se trouve. (p. 246)

When the ritual itself is seen in its relationship to vital experience (l'expérience vitale) it shows that it has far more to convey than its conceptual content. The context that sustains the ritual is one rooted in vast historical currents that help to shape the meaning(s) of the ritual within its given time period. Hence, theological research on the content of the liturgy (*La recherche du contenu théologique de la liturgie*) must thoroughly deal with the context of the liturgy itself. For Lukken, this rejection of a kind of misplaced intellectualism entails that we look at the liturgy from the three axes of: the liturgy as it was in the past (and not just conceptually), the liturgy as it is officially understood today, and the liturgy as it emerges in experimental contexts.

The primary dimension of the liturgy is its full context, while its secondary dimension is its conceptual structure. Thus, in the Eucharist the primary dimension would be the fully sensual elements that awaken all of the senses, combined with the spatial and architectural contexts within which it occurs. The secondary dimension would be the doctrine of transubstantiation (briefly discussed above). Like Peirce, Lukken places his emphasis on those elements that are more immediate (sensual and practical), while deemphasizing those conceptual elements that could divide communicants.

Another dimension to this distinction between the primary and secondary aspects of ritual is the rejection of purely textual models as a basis for understanding liturgy. While Lukken is friendly to the semiotic theory of Greimas, he also wants to insist that the true heart of liturgy lies elsewhere than in the linguistic clash of signified (content) and signifier

(expression). There is one key link between the semiology of texts and the nature of liturgy and that is in the concept of difference. For Lukken, the ritual derives much of its power from its ability to sharpen the play of differences in perception. Rituals signify through perceptual contrast (at least). The problem with Greimas's scientific project is that it is too generic precisely where it must bend its categories to the particular. Earlier we said that one of the features of ritual objects was that they embodied the principle of individuation and leapt out of the genus in which they had been previously ensnared. While a text, as a structure of signification, will embody a synchronic web of meanings, a ritual represents the intersection point of innumerable such webs, and actually turns back and through those very webs to create new meaning, thus 'rituals are creators of sense' (p. 282). More fully put:

The distinctive features are to be found especially in the specific formation of the narrative structures and in the syncretism of many 'languages' which come together in various ways (each time differently) in the ritual. For this reason rituals make an appeal to the integral human being and can be salutary in a holistic way. (pp. 282-283)

While a text can certainly be polysemic, a ritual has the added feature that it more directly opens up to the clearing (the open infinite of the post-semiotic) that houses an intersection of discourses in a much more generous way. As Tillich argued, the power of the symbol is directly related to the movement of the self toward an integral wholeness that is only possible in and through the symbol or ritual. Contrasting ritual to theatre, Lukken adds the further distinction that ritual involves 'only participants' (p. 282, n. 18), while theatre, for the most part, has observers. One could say that the stage actor also enters into ritual space whenever she or he has fully internalized the lines of the character and is thereby free to unfold a kind of presemiotic unconscious in the character. This is why a stage actor can repeat a performance night after night without becoming stale — more and more of the character is coming to meet the actor out of the nexus between the actor's and the character's unconscious (if we may be allowed some metaphysical license on this latter point).

Earlier the concept of melancholy was introduced. Kristeva has persuasively argued that the inner momentum of signification involves the loss of something primal that is always sought by the now separated sign-using self (what she calls the 'self-in-process/on trial' *en procès*) (1974: 22). This subject is caught in the web of the symbolic yet longs for the ever receding lost object that belongs to the semiotic (my pre-semiotic). This longing constitutes the fundamental melancholy of finite existence.

To long for something is to have already dwelled within it, and to have been ejected from that antecedent home by an act that comes either from the self or from outside the self. Concepts like matricide or patricide are far too narrow in scope to illuminate the much more natural and primal rhythm by and through which the self is expelled from the garden. The true depth-logic of the expulsion from the garden comes from the eternal fissure between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*.

This melancholy is fundamentally religious at its heart, a point never fully grasped by Kristeva because of some inadequacies in her fundamental categorial structure (derived in part from her dependence on Freud and Lacan rather than on the more phenomenological and empirical perspective of Jung — not to mention the self-encapsulation of her dyadic scheme which lacks the explanatory power of Peirce's triadic semiotic to open up the full dimensionality of the object sphere, the heart of which is the religious object). Yet the concept of melancholy can function in a more generic and capacious framework precisely because it shows how the asymmetry of the presemiotic/semiotic relation works vis-à-vis the symmetry of the semiotic/post-semiotic dialectic. In the former nondialectical relation melancholy emerges when the sign-using self, caught fully in the domain of the semiotic (the actual infinite of interpretants) senses a primal lack connected to its whence, a whence that is shrouded in mystery. In the latter fully dialectical relationship the sign-using self is driven on the one hand to course through the actual infinite in search of the lost object, while on the other simultaneously sensing (under the right conditions) the lure of the post-semiotic that can serve to transfigure the lost object. Using gendered language (always precarious at best) we can say that the lost object (Kristeva's material maternal) can be reborn in the spirit that lives out of the space held open by the open infinite of the post-semiotic. It is impossible to return to the lost object qua lost object (a mistake envisioned by all potential suicides), but the lost object in the *no longer* can return out of the *not yet*.

One of the best brief descriptions of the dialectic that can take place between the *no longer* and the *not yet* occurs in the inestimable Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables*, which represents the decline in fortunes of the once imperial Pyncheon family of Salem, Massachusetts. In the following passage, best read out loud, Hawthorne describes an aged descendent:

Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon sat in the oaken elbow-chair, with her hands over her face, giving way to that heavy downsinking of the heart which most persons have experienced, when the image of Hope itself seems ponderously moulded of lead, on the eve of an enterprise, at once doubtful and momentous. (1983 [1851]: 388)

The leaden horizon of the lost *not yet* crowds out the prospects that might otherwise be promised by the enterprise at hand (in this case, Hepzibah's opening up of a small retail shop in the infamous house that was obtained by a kind of theft during the 1692 witch trials). Doubt is a product of a collapse of the open infinite that hovers around all relevant signs to open up prospects for amelioration. The remaining actual infinite of world semiosis becomes a leaden bad infinite (to use Hegel's concept) that has no developmental teleology. The image of Hepzibah covering her face with her hands is a perfect icon of the melancholy that can, under the right conditions, open a path to a return of meaning from the *not yet*.

Compressing the above delineations and literary description into a bald assertion we can say: without melancholy there can be no religion, and without a religious quest/drive there can be no melancholy. Of course, this entails separating melancholy from depression (biochemical or psychogenic), and further entails probing into the depth rhythms of melancholy that make it unique among the human moods. Inverting Heidegger we can say that melancholy is the fundamental mood (*Stimmung*) of authentic existence, not anxiety. The problem with anxiety is that it is too free-floating in the face of the nothingness or no-thingness of the world of involvements, whereas melancholy has a direct link to the lost object that is always there in the heart of the self, no matter how successfully it can be masked by the frenzy of manic semiosis. If culture is manic, then religion is melancholic. The fundamental disease of melancholy has no cure, but it can be transformed by the post-semiotic that alone has the power to still the unrelenting sweep of the actual infinite.

The primary aspect of religious semiosis is that it frees itself from being ensnared in an all-too-clear object with precise boundaries, whether understood through praxis or through conceptual analysis. The opening/clearing power of melancholy, as *the* inaugural (but not final) religious mode of attunement, is what keeps the presemiotic fully relevant to the sign-using self. Coming from the *not yet*, the spirit, in its own form of *jouissance*, moves in and through the melancholy that vibrates out of the lost object to realign the self toward another dimension that is also without contour. Michael Raposa, refining and deepening some of Peirce's categories, develops a fuzzy logic that is pertinent to religious semiosis, and that is the philosophical analogue to the highly sensual realm of ritual. In either case, whether through liturgical invocation or via a theosemiosis of fuzzy logic, the indefinite and elusive quality of the pre- and post-semiotic can become clarified. For Raposa:

Religious experience is itself semiosis, itself a mode of interpretation, part of the vague meaning of vague religious symbols and utterances. Likewise, behavior

that constitutes the response to a vague religious utterance forms part of the interpretation of that utterance, in much the same way that a dancer's movements and gestures can be regarded as the interpretation of a musical composition. (Corrington 1993b: 110)

If we try to condense the pre- and post-semiotic into some kind of interpretant or interpretant chain, we violate the very nature of the religious object, which must, by definition, traverse across and through the three domains of signification. Religious objects are fully part of nature (as there is no nonnatural realm), but also have a kind of proto and extrasemiotic existence. Benedict M. Ashley, writing out of the Roman Catholic perspective, argues that sacramental and ritual objects 'are both archetypal (natural) and historical' (Corrington 1993b: 74). As archetypal they can move across cultural divides, and as historical they must also be bound to specific and nongeneric conditions of origin (Schleiermacher's positive religion).

The question always becomes, can the generic momentum of an historically based symbol system overcome the oftentimes demonic conditions of its origin (e.g., the patriarchal enscripting of the Western monotheisms)? Or is there a sense in which a true theosemiotics must leave positive religion behind in order to enter into a more just relation to the semiotic powers? While I have become increasingly persuaded that the latter position is by far the more compelling and urgent, it must always be remembered that the lost object is always a fundamental presence/absence within theosemiosis, and any attempt to abject it in order to attain an easy liberation must be paid for by a loss of empowerment that can uproot the self so that it spins manically in empty semiotic space. And this empty autonomy (where the self legislates its measure to itself) quickly degenerates into an artificial self-grounding that is imperial in its own right (precisely because it has no genuine measure outside the self).

Returning for one last time to more particular aspects of ritual within the context of Lukken's Roman Catholic church, I want to focus on the issue of embodiment or incarnationality as it becomes the most empowered place (for the Christian) where the three realms of signification entwine together. Setting the tone for these concluding reflections is a passage from the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who is also deeply sensitive to Heideggerian phenomenology and its ability to reawaken the sense of the sacred within phenomena. In preparing to discuss the two sacraments of baptism and confirmation Rahner says:

To make sense, the individual sacraments have to be considered on the one hand from the perspective of the church as the basic sacrament, and on the other hand they have to be incorporated into the history of an individual life. Here they

become manifest as the sacramental manifestation of the Christian life of grace in the *existentially fundamental moments* of human life. (1978: 524)

The church, as the body of Christ, is the fundamental sacrament, the place where the Christian would encounter the ultimate coming together of the three realms of signification. Rahner uses Heidegger's technical term '*existentiell*' to denote the ontic versus the ontological and categorial aspect of the self. The ontic self is the concrete self in a given situation of meaning, understanding, and mood. These fundamental moments (akin to boundary situations) become the entrance points for grace. In our terms, grace emerges out of the return of the *not yet* as it reawakens the nondemonic aspects of the *no longer* (lost object). For Rahner's Christian, the church is the locus of this intense dialectic within the life of signification.

We have talked about perceptual contrasts within the sensual experience of liturgy, and have stressed the fact that religious symbols must be concrete and embodied within a community for whom the object is held to be strongly relevant by its members. Since the author of the text under review is a Roman Catholic semiotic theologian, it is appropriate that we conclude with his analysis of the meaning of corporeality in liturgy (*Über die Bedeutung der Leiblichkeit in der Liturgie*). Of all of the components of a central liturgical act, that of language or speech seems to be the least corporeal, but it is precisely because of this mistaken view that Lukken reminds us of the ways in which language must be particular in embodiment:

Die Kulturbestimmtheit der Sprache geht sogar so weit, dass jede Sprache in sich selbst, in ihrer inneren Struktur, eine Analyse der Welt, die dieser Sprache eigen ist, enthält. Wenn man also eine Sprache lernt, dann lernt und erwirbt man eine *partikuläre Sicht* der Welt, für die die Sprache einen sehr authentischen Filter bildet. (p. 130)

All speech is culturally determined, and each given speech as a part of language, is determined by a horizon of meaning (analysis of the world/*eine Analyse der Welt*) that gives shape to it. In learning a language (regional or generic) one also learns and employs a particular view of the world (*partikuläre Sicht der Welt*) that cannot fail but to be embodied in that language or speech. This finite and horizon-generated language serves as the filter by and through which the world is seen.

Lukken thus brings home the full particularity of that most elusive of religious and liturgical phenomena, language. The speaker within a ritualistic setting will have particular intonations, colorings, cadences, local dialectic flavorings, and other particular patterns that enact the liturgical

drama in specific ways. For the Christian, all particularities of ritual such as language, sound, sight, smell, touch, and movement, will point to as well as participate in the church as the living body of Christ (cf. Rahner). The particularities of a view of the world bound in language will also reflect the above discussed tension between the past reality of the ritual, the current official view, and the current experimental views. Corporeality entails the principle of individuation, the reality of personal and cultural variations within a momentum that derives its meaning and power from that which is without shape or texture.

In his very careful and subtle analyses of particular rituals, e.g., baptism, the Eucharist, funeral eulogies, and marriage, Lukken also probes into a generic model, derived from Greimas, that can serve these particularities while still honoring the Christian metaphysical underpinnings that make liturgy a window onto the depths of the world. While my own perspective (ecstatic naturalism) is decidedly post-Christian, I still find much in Lukken's careful phenomenological descriptions of ritual that commend themselves to those who work outside of the Christian theological circle. In his own way he sheds great light on the three worlds of signification (presemiotic, semiotic, and post-semiotic) and successfully probes into the nature of corporeality and participation that marks the depth-logic of liturgy.

Combining our respective languages, each coming from *eine partikulare Sicht der Welt*, we can say that the lost object is manifest to the Christian in the body of Christ that is the primary antecedent structure of the church. The semiotic domain is constituted for the Christian by the words (derived from the Word) that invoke and empower rituals. The post-semiotic for the Christian is found in the holy Spirit that/who hovers in and around the words (interpretants) of the liturgy, filling them with the ultimate meaning of the *not yet*. While ecstatic naturalism must move in a different metaphysical direction (being indifferent to God and Christ but retaining a naturalized understanding of the spirit), it shares with Lukken's perspective the commitment to full corporeality for all regnant (reigning) signs that stand at the center of our always so fragile communities of interpretation.

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