THEOLOGY, DECONSTRUCTION, AND RITUAL PROCESS

by Charles E. Winquist

Abstract. Victor Turner's comparative symbology provides a description of liminality, marginality, and liminoid genres that can be usefully applied to positioning theology in a theory of practice, determining its social location, and assessing its future meaning. This paper argues not only that theological marginality is a result of the secularization of culture but also that the breach with theology's publics reflects a more significant internal breach that is essential to theology as a liminoid form of public reflexivity. The paper draws from deconstructionist philosophy and defines the interpretive task of theology as a deconstructionist hermeneutic.

The study of ritual processes can help position theology in a theory of practice and deepen our understanding of what might first appear to be an anachronistic discipline in the contemporary academic world. I am not suggesting that here we develop a practical theology or examine the practical implications of theological thinking. The focus of this inquiry is on the practice of theological thinking. What are we doing when we are thinking theologically? This question arises because of a series of dislocations that turned the theological use of language back on itself challenging everything from its felicity and usefulness to its possibility and meaningfulness. Theologians have announced the death of God and the end of theology while continuing to think theologically. The vitality of theological thinking does not appear to depend upon the specific content of its reflections. It is the process that persists. It is the process that can be located and described as a genre of human activity.

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Theology is the product of theological thinking and discourse. The written theological text is the epiphenomenon of the persistent process that we are seeking to understand. It is continually reintroduced into the process through its textual status but it is not identical with the process. That is, the materiality of the theological text is an important element in positioning theological reflection because it is a part of theological reflection but it cannot position theological reflection through its own achievement. It is something to be read, heard, or thought. It is always more than what it is in its material presence and this is what we need to understand when we place theology in a theory of practice. We need a deconstruction in theology to see how theological discourses are constructed so that we can assess the practice of theology with regard to the range of its effective action.

POSITIONING THEOLOGY

Prior to a deconstruction there are several general statements we can make about theology that help map the terrain of our inquiry. There are family resemblances among genres of symbolic action. These are open to general inquiry and can be thematized and articulated so as to form the interior limits of inquiry for which any specific critique of a discipline is responsible. A specific critique is responsible to questions no less far ranging than the questions enfranchised by the general inquiry. The general inquiry can set the tone for a specific critique and guard against its premature closure.

First, we can say theology has to do with words. "Whatever else it may be, and wholly regardless of whether it be true or false, theology is preeminently verbal."[1] Theology is formally a discursive act in the privacy of an interior soliloquy or in the drama of public reflexivity. It exists as a voice or a text that is spoken or written, heard or read. We speak to be heard even if we intend ourselves as the single auditor. There may be private moments of speech but there is no private language. The code is collective and public. Meaning is in principle a public affair. It is a semantic achievement and is established in a semantic field or domain that is structurally and historically collective.

To position theology we have to account for its public reflexivity because it is textual. The texture of the textual is semiotic and syntactical. This means that the generation of a text is a displacement of immediate presence into the semantic field. Language can never get beneath itself because its speech acts are always a further semantic displacement. Theology, a speech act, will always engender and encounter itself when it tries to dip beneath its achievement into a nonsemantic realm. Even if theology speaks softly and remains hidden behind cloistered walls, its speech is a public process using a public code

and a public dictionary. Neologistic flourishes make sense or have meaning because of their connectedness in the semantic field. Theological language and the theological use of language are augmentations within a semantics of meaning. Immediate events are complexified or deepened into experiential meaning through a displacement. Theology can be thought of as an experience but it is an experience of itself internal to language. The substance of theological experience is the text. It is an experience in language.

Theology is delimited by the range of the semantic world. Its achievement, the making of meaning, is the deferral of immediate awareness into the controlled world of the text. The deferral makes a difference. The primary event is no longer itself. The body of the event has been exchanged for the subtle body of the text. A mask has been substituted for a face and it can be assigned its role in the public theater of words. The actuality of speech initiates a public drama and if we are going to position the practice of theology it will have to be placed here.

Theology cannot fall back on silence and claim a nonsemantic meaning for itself or claim that its display of meaning is nonsemantic. It has to live with its own creation. "Once speech has spoken, its voice establishes a world or a field, and that field is indissoluble, it cannot simply disappear or pass away. . . . While speech can be remembered it can never be re-called, it can never cease to be speech, never cease to be itself."[2] Theology cannot cease to be itself. It has its place in a domain of discourse that is on the deepest level indissoluble and public.

The positioning of the theological text in a public drama also means that the theologian has a public and that part of understanding the process of theological thinking involves an acknowledgment of the social reality of the theologian. David Tracy has suggested that the theologian address three distinct publics: the wider society, the academy, and the church.[3] What we are doing when we are thinking theologically involves one or all of these publics as a reference group. Theology is as much implicated in the hearing and reading of these publics as in the speaking and writing of the theologian. Positioning the practice of theology is a public determination that does not always correspond to the private intention of the theologian. When we want to know what type of phenomenon is theological thinking, we will need to know where it is located in the dominant discursive patterns of its public reference group.

What is starkly characteristic of much theological thinking today is that it is a marginal process which has been broken off from the regular, norm-governed social relations of the three publics that Tracy has identified as theological reference groups. The contemporary moment in the social history of theology is the story of a nomad

discipline filching ideas from neighboring disciplines to sustain its discourse or masquerading as a science in a pretense of acceptable normality.

THEOLOGY AND PUBLIC LIMINALITY

This story has the characteristics of social drama as described by Victor Turner.[4] In particular, although we may not want to identify theological thinking as a ritual process, we can outwardly describe this aharmonic phase of thinking as a rite of passage. Turner's analysis of social drama does not tell us why theological thinking has experienced a breach with its publics, but it tells us a lot about what it means to be thinking in the margins. Even in the margins theological thinking is a symbolic process. Turner's comparative symbology gives us a framework to see theological thinking as a representative symbolic process in comparison with other sets of symbolic processes. By making a structural comparison between a set of symbolic processes in theological thinking and a set of symbolic processes in ritual action, we can see how it makes sense to suggest that the study of ritual processes can help position theology in a theory of practice. Seeing a pattern of relations can help us understand the function of theological thinking in relation to its publics although the pattern will not explain why theological thinking fits into the pattern. That explanation requires both an understanding of cultural history and of the discursive structure of theology.

The four phases in a social drama that Turner says are accessible to observation are a breach of normal relations, mounting crisis, adjustive and redressive actions, and the reintegration with the group or legitimization of a separation from the group.[5] The time of the social drama between the breach and reintegration or legitimization has liminal characteristics, characteristics that mark a disorder and an openness to new possibilities. It is a time betwixt and between. A gap has appeared that is a space of indetermination. Possibilities can be displayed; new arrangements can be formed; a new order can be established. The liminal forms of symbolic action that follow the breach subject all previous standards of order to criticism.[6] The redressive actions reflect the mounting crisis and sometimes contribute to it so that the phases are observable but not clearly distinct. It is also possible that the liminal characteristics of the time following the breach mark the beginning of a marginal identity unless the process is contained within the structure and counterstructure of a stable society.

Unless we are looking back on a liminal period that has come to a close, the outcome remains unprejudiced. That is, liminality is characterized so that its outcome is uncertain. The identifiable characteristics

fashion an undetermined future. "Syntax and logic are *problematic* and not *axiomatic* features of liminality. . . . And if we find them we have to consider well their relation to activities that have as yet no structure, no logic, only potentialities for them."[7] Liminality designates an experimental field where not only new ideas or images appear but also where new combinatory rules govern their dissemination.[8] The meaning of meaning has a fluctuating signification. Disciplines of meaning such as theology float without anchor during liminal periods. This is a recognizable characteristic of liminality that can help us locate the practice of theological thinking.

The internal witness of theologians indicate that theology has experienced a breach with its publics, is in a state of crisis, and is a floating or nomad discipline. It appears to be in the liminal phase of a social drama. Its breach with its publics was the threshold of crisis that led to its present indetermination and possibilities for a new self-understanding.

In a concluding section on the social reality of the theologian, Tracy has said that "each theologian has, in fact, internalized to various degrees three publics, not one. Each has experienced the force of conflicting interpretations and conflicting plausibility structures in any attempt to make sense of reality. Most have experienced the evaporation and eventual collapse of any first naivete toward any religious tradition, while sensing the presence of a second naivete toward that same reality. Many have come to recognize the presence of real doubt in authentic contemporary faith."[9]

The loss of the first naivete requires a break with the norm governed rules of ordinary discourse in theology's three publics. I do not think it is excessively reductionistic to suggest that in the marketplace of the wider public, in the groves of the academy or behind the walls of the church, ordinary discourse and the natural attitude toward the world is literal and hence one-dimensional. To be clear and distinct and to mean what we say is to say one thing at a time with a direct reference to the world. Parsimony is usually valued in ordinary uses of language. Even when complexity is acknowledge, ambivalence and ambiguity are distrusted. There is little evidence to suggest that the "common sense" of theology's three publics barters with anything other than enlightenment coinage.

Theology is not at home with its modern publics. It has designated itself as living in a postcritical and postmodern time. Its second naivete toward the symbolism of the sacred is an interpretive construction in the margins of ordinary discourse. Paul Ricoeur says that we "aim at a second naivete in and through criticism. In short, it is by *interpreting* that we can *hear* again."[10] An interpretive text is substituted for an

original text and the rules governing this substitution constitute what has been called the hermeneutical field or the field of interpretation. These are not the rules of ordinary discourse. In fact they often suspend ordinary discourse by bracketing questions concerning correspondence with the world of reference while allowing for the multiplication and deployment of meanings. Meanings multiply outside the limits of the secular city and outside the reach of ordinary discourse. The achievement of theology can be identified with its irrelevance in ordinary discourse.

Langdon Gilkey in a footnote comment on German hermeneutical theology compares it with a *Festung* or castle belonging to a reigning bishop removed high above a town at a time in the town's history when its presence is essentially unrelated to life in the town except as a tourist curiosity. He asks: "how can theological reflection, if it can, move intelligibly, honestly, and with regularity from our life in the town to an existence, insofar as such is possible, on these heights, and how does the Word of God heard there have credibility and usability in the life of the town?"[11] Gilkey warns against a tourist theology but it may be that his image of a *Festung* coheres with the liminal characteristics of theological thinking and that instead of moving back into the town we will have to ask how liminal thinking can have credibility and usability in the life of the town. If theology is a liminal phenomenon we misunderstand its potential if we try to relocate it in the center of societal life. Its relevance will have to be a feature of its liminality. It will only have an illusory relevance if it claims to be something other than what it is.

The breach experienced between theology and its publics was and is a crisis of meaning. Gilkey correctly noted in 1969 that to question the meaning of a metaphysical-theological system is more radical than to question its validity.[12] When theological statements are no longer admitted as meaningful in ordinary discourse, then the whole discipline is displaced. When even theologians doubt the possibility of their work being explanatory or assertive conceptual systems, then either they are doing something else when they speak and write or they are doing nothing of significance. The concept of meaninglessness implies a total disjunction with what we understand to be the world as we ordinarily know it.[13] The breach between theology and the world is certainly evident on the surface of modern life.

The breach between theological thinking and the mainstream of culture appears to be caused by the emergent dominance of a secular spirit in culture that is implicated in the thinking of all three of theology's publics. Theology appears to be a victim of secularization. Even if the church is a community of cognitive deviance when compared with the academy or wider public, its deviance follows the rules of ordinary

discourse. It sometimes describes a world picture that is not meaningless but false from the perspective of a secular society. The church appears not to understand its discourse as work in a hermeneutical field. Symbolic meaning is often decorative of the periphery of secular culture but it is not an enigma at its center.

We simply have to acknowledge that a literal reading of sacred symbol systems conflicts with the dominant secular spirit if we are to position theological thinking. This spirit, mood, or tone has accompanied the growth of our scientific-technological culture and is part of its legacy. Gilkey describes four characteristics of the secular spirit in a summary expression that is as important now as when he formulated it. Intelligibility is bounded by a sense of contingency, relativity, transience, and autonomy.[14] There is no warrant for an absolute, fixed, eternal, theonomous world view that is acceptable to secular understanding. "The given just appears; it can be described as it appears, and *that* is all that can be said."[15] If theology accepts as its task the description of the world within these limits it is hard to determine how it can remain theology.

The redressive actions taken by many theologians to stay within the boundaries of ordinary discourse sometimes have made theology except in title indistinguishable from history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political theory, literary criticism, and even some of the physical sciences. It is curious why theologians who work in a substitute discipline such as sociology do not refer to their work as sociology and take their place with the sociologists or in the community of whatever substitute discipline they have adopted. If theology belongs in the margins of secular culture it will have to shape and understand itself as a marginal discipline or else cease being theology.

I think that, if we do not construe theology to be a substitute discipline, we can assert that it is in a liminal state and that it is public discourse. This means that it can become a mode of public liminality if theologians can learn to live with the tension of being in the margins of the dominant secular culture. Theology then belongs to the counterstructure of its three publics and it is in this counterstructure that we can position the practice of theological thinking.

DECONSTRUCTING THEOLOGY

The move to marginal status is pragmatic and realistic since theology cannot remain itself under the rules that govern secular discourse. This flight from the center gives us some idea of what theology is not, yet we do not have a positive understanding of theological thinking. What we do know is that theological discourse cannot be the same as secular discourse. The concept of a second naivete corresponds with an altered

function of theological reflection which is also an elaboration of the meaning of the second naivete.

There is a breach or wound in theological thinking that is much deeper than its separation from its publics and also justifies the separation from the dominant patterns of secular discourse. This breach is within the process of theological thinking and it is also manifested in its content. Perhaps theology had to be pushed into a marginal identity before it could seriously take account of its internal wounds and implicit liminality.

The critical breach in postmodern thinking was the shattering of language as the mirror image of nature.[16] It had become increasingly clear that naming the animals removed them from nature and relocated them in a semantic world. Even more important is the recognition that the named animals are not animals but words—words governed not by natural forces but by the laws of syntax and lexical history. Naming substitutes words for things and forces and, although it may be our only access to meaning, it is at the same time a breach with the phenomenality of things.

The seminal work of Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, shows that the disenfranchisement of the mirror metaphor is not an intellectual quirk but is instead the expression of a major shift in thinking that is no less pervasive than the emergence of the classical thinking of the Enlightenment. "The threshold between Classicism and modernity (though the terms themselves have no importance—let us say between our prehistory and what is still contemporary) had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things."[17]

It is the relationship between words and things that has been fundamentally altered. The relationship between signs (signifiers) and concepts (signifieds) is a semantic determination and is what we mean by meaning. The relationship between words and things introduces the problems of representation and reference, which cannot be worked out in a theory of meaning but which suggest a scene of origination that can be glossed in a theory of practice. When language is reflexively folded back on itself to account for its own nature, it discovers itself and not nature mirrored in the virtual space of its constructions. Mirroring requires the presence of a material image to be reflected and the only materiality present in the semantic field is the materiality of the speech act. Language can endlessly repeat and replicate itself. This endless repetition can tighten the weave of language, which gives the illusion of a continuous surface and prompts a literalism that sees no blemish or wound to bring us back to the scene of origination. The continuous surface of a tight weave can easily let us forget that speech acts are a

semantic cloth that covers or masks the whole of reality in the creation of meaning.

The scene of the origination of thinking is the scene of a wound. The wound is a gap in thinking of what is unthought and must remain unthought for thinking to be itself. We acknowledge the unthought not in itself but only in the transgression of what we can think. It is a shadow that does not come into speech except for the silences and broken figures that have become so characteristic in modern voices. "Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *episteme* without thought at the same time discovering both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught."[18] This unthought is, according to Foucault, a "shadow" cast by men and women as they emerged in the field of knowledge and a "blind stain" by which it is possible to know them.[19] "In any case, the unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly, since the nineteenth century."[20]

The scene of origination is the scene of repression. What is repressed is the economy of things and forces as they are given in relationship to each other. It is this economy that remains unthought and must remain unthought because thinking is a substitute and substitutive activity. Repression occurs through the process of representation. When we look at object language, it is very easy to see that object language, written or spoken, evokes an object through the means of a substitute that is not the object. The word "tree" is not a tree, does not materially resemble a tree, and its use is wholly governed by a code that is separate from the life of a tree. The semantic tree can become mythological, anthropomorphic, or divine. It can be locked in botanical rhetoric or transgress these boundaries in a fanciful zoology of the imagination. The repression of the economics of force through semantic substitution of a textual world is an erasure of the body in its environment. There is only a trace of the body in the body of the text because it is always other than the text.

The relationship between the body of the text and the body is elusive because what is present in the text points to what is absent in the text but it does not point directly. It points to an absence by always turning on itself and what is present. It is really not possible to make a reference outside of the text except to acknowledge that the object reference is absent and other than the text, because what is deferred is no longer present so that what is present differs from what is deferred. Force comes to meaning through a substitution that tames and civilizes it so that it is no longer itself. Primal forces become secondary forces, that is,

the vicissitudes of instinct become the vicissitudes of meaning.[21] The images of forces or things are overdetermined at their origin in linguistic and extralinguistic experiences, but the extralinguistic connection is rapidly effaced by the inability to replicate it in the semantic realm. It can be present only as a shadow in discourse because in discourse its presence can be known through an image that is at the same time a mark of its absence. The dissimilar realms of force and meaning, things and words, connected in the singularity of an image is known through a process of substitution that is past before it is known. The mimesis of the origin of meaning within meaning is metaphorical.

The origin of meaning is an approximation of the meaning of metaphor: within the bounds of meaning, meaning can reference itself only as a metaphorical achievement. As long as we stay within a discourse of meaning, the basic metaphoricity of language and its speech acts can only be known metaphorically. Metaphors of metaphoricity are particularly lucid metaphors. They announce what they are not by announcing what they are. The wound, the shadow, the gap, the breach, the erasure, and other figures of brokenness speak of an absence by their presence. They augment the spread of language and contribute to the creation of meaning while at the same time referring to the discontinuities of force and meaning at the origin of speech and writing. By imaging the failure of things and forces to speak on their own terms they draw speech toward a failure on its own terms. Lucid metaphors are impertinences in the flow of speech acts. The imperialism of speech is forced to halt before the image of its origination.

Speech acts are forced into the recognition that they cannot be prior to themselves. Understanding is not a standing under experience or a standing behind experience. It is a supplement.

Vincent Descombes, with a slightly different emphasis, also acknowledges the heterogeneity of experience and language, and the alteration of experience when it is spoken. "The meaning of the message is not the meaning of experience, nor is it the meaning experience would have, prior to all expression, if this were possible. It is the meaning that experience can *receive* in a discourse which articulates it according to a certain code."[22] The theme is familiar. Life, forces, things come to meaning by becoming other than themselves. The supplement is not the code but it is the world articulated according to a code. Meaning is not the code. Meaning is the supplement.

The body of experience has a dialectical relationship with its textual supplement of which metaphoricity and metaphor are the textual representations: the overdetermination of meaning is a representational approximation of the overdetermination that is the origin of meaning. Meaning is created as the world is received into speech, but

neither the world nor the rules of speech can by themselves account for the supplement. Meaning can replicate and repeat itself but not be its own origination. The dialectic of presence and absence that involves substitution and repression is the ever present stain of the world on the world of meaning. This means that theological discourse supplements the world, is marked by a relationship to the world that remains fundamentally unthought, and can only know itself as a world of supplemental meanings.

This is not nearly as complex as it first appears. What is present in knowing is the substitute materiality of speech acts, and what is absent are the primary relationships that constitute our embodiment in the world. The presence of the world is made meaningful and known through substitution. The presence is metaphorical. The literal presence of the world is absent in the semantic supplement and relates to its metaphorical presence as a dialectical other. The surplus of meaning in a metaphorical presence, metaphorical potential, is not more meaning but is the reality that is other than meaning. The verticality of language resides in what it is not and this is why any discursive discipline that in principle cannot delimit the range of its questions transgresses established meanings.

Theology cannot delimit the range of its questions. The simple entertainment of a concept such as God, absolute reality, ultimate reality, supreme nothingness, or any other conceptual variation of "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" enfranchises an unrestricted range of questions. The surface of every text can be called into question and folded back on itself. Theology cannot be itself without discovering its material presence that instantiates the absence of the otherness that is repressed. When Robert Scharlemann writes about "the being of God when God is not being God," he sees that "the word *God* refers to the word *word*, and the word *word* refers to the word *God*" in such a way that "God means the negative that can be instantiated upon any object and any subject by the saying of the word."[23] The word God transgresses the text not simply by being absent but by negating the text. Unless theological thinking prescinds from the exigencies of its own conceptuality, it must entertain language in an extreme distention of intelligibility that makes it marginal to ordinary discourse.

The theological text imposes a sense of loss. This has sometimes been conceptualized as the death of God, and it is here that we see a direct relationship between theology and deconstruction. Carl Raschke's announcement of the end of theology, combined with his thesis that "deconstruction is the death of God put into writing," is an exemplary agenda item for theological thinking that is self-consciously a liminoid genre, the postindustrial analogue to liminal forms, processes, and

phenomena in traditional societies.[24] Parable and apocalypse in Thomas Altizer and John Crossan trope the narrative flow in story theologies giving them vertical significance and adding to the agenda of theology as a liminoid genre.[25] The agenda is as complex as the texts to be victimized.

When theological thinking moves into the margins of ordinary discourse the trajectory of its work is inverted. This is why the language of deconstruction rather than reconstruction seems closer to the actual practice of a postcritical theology. Since the work of theology is discursive, its shape is determined by our understanding of language. "Where, at the end of the eighteenth century, it was a matter of fixing the frontiers of knowledge, it will now be one of seeking to destroy syntax, to shatter tyrannical modes of speech, to turn words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them."[26] In his quote Foucault is not describing a deconstructionist hermeneutic that has a clear place in theology or philosophy. He is staying with the task inflicted upon modern consciousness by Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. They helped bring us to a knowledge of the wound that is part of knowledge. We now have had enought time to know that the wound does not heal and is actually a part of what it means to think theologically. The construction of limit concepts is a continual deconstruction of fixed frontiers.

Sublation and subversion mix as we shift the metaphor of theological practice from transcendence to transgression; the metaphor of transgression is closer to the practice of theological thinking. "Transgression, of course, is not simply the act of passing over. It is a movement-beyond which violates, penetrates, fractures.... Transgression inscribes the *via rupta*. Interpretation is a *hostile* act in which interpreter victimizes text. The followers of Hermes are, after all, thieves (who come in the night?)."[27]

The standard postcritical understanding of theological thinking as the making of meaning needs a twist if we are also to understand its transgressive character. As we have already noted, the making of meaning is the substitution of signs (words), their dissemination, and their display in multiple configuraions. However, the substitution is overdetermined, so that the dissemination and display is a dialectical performance that overspills the semantic achievement even when it remains unthought. What is repressed, the body in the body of experience, can always return through the seams and fissures in the body of the text when the text is deconstructively displayed. The creation of meaning can be transformed into a dialectical theater and instantiate the reality principle by drawing the semantic achievement into the margins of discourse where the seams are more clearly displayed. The

tone is depressive because the deconstructionist display pulls theologi-
cal thinking toward what was repressed by the very fact of representa-
tional origination in metaphorical substitution. The dialectical theater
approximates a reenactment of the scene of origination. The dialectical
theater in theological deconstruction is a theater of memory, an opta-
tive intellectual liturgy returning meaning to the scene of its origina-
tion without ever being able to go behind it. The dialectial theater is a
theater of acknowledgment that the vital forces that are transformed
by a work into meaning remain intact. Meaning is transgressed in order
to be known as meaning. Theological construction brings force to
meaning through substitution and repression; theological deconstruc-
tion brings meaning to force by displaying the negative capability of
speech acts in the witness to their origination. Thinking can turn
language back on itself through speech and writing in a witness to the
metaphoricity of meaning. This act is an acknowledgment of force and
meaning. It is creation and memory.

THEOLOGY AS A LIMINOID GENRE

The practice of theological thinking as a deconstruction is a choice to
subvert quotidian patterns of discourse to better display the
supplementarity of the text that is its own achievement. It is a choice to
define a space where language can be drawn into a free performance
displaying its own material presence and witness to an otherness that is
absent. It is a process or practice that has shaped itself, defined its task,
and relates to its publics as a liminoid phenomena. The breach that
theological thinking has experienced with its publics is not merely a
matter of modern circumstance. Deconstruction in theology causes a
breach with the discourses of its publics and a breach within itself in
order to be what it is. Like other liminoid genres such as literature,
painting, sculpture, architecture, and theater, it can only "develop
apart from the central economic and political processes, along the
margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and servicing in-
stitutions."[28] Its own alienation from the center of discourse subverts
the alienation from the experience of vitalizing forces that define that
center. This is part of the significance of theology as a liminoid genre.
Marginality gives the freedom for a play of words and images that is full
with the possibilities for new configurations, exploratory fissures, and
movements toward and among fields of force.
    Theological thinking is relevant because it is other than ordinary
discourse and because it is a discourse that can transgressively display
the otherness of its semantic achievement. It is needed by its three
publics as a form of public liminality, as a public critique, and as a
display of alternative possibilities. Its internal breaching relieves its

publics from a tight weave of meanings that are blind to their meta-phorical potential. That is, theology with its radical conceptuality can create spaces in ordinary thinking and rend the fabric of ordinary discourse. This is a process and a practice that offers freedom and the space for new meanings and a memory of the significance of meaning.

Turner suggests that "in the evolution of man's symbolic 'cultural' action, we must seek those processes which correspond to openended-ness in biological evolution. I think we have found them in those liminal, or 'liminoid' (post-industrial revolution), forms of symbolic action, those genres of free-time activity, in which all previous stan-dards and models are subjected to criticism, and fresh new ways of describing and interpreting sociocultural experience are formu-lated."[29] The danger is that what is liminal becomes stabilized and what is marginal becomes central. Theology needs to stay on the margins to be itself. Its relevance for its publics is the openendedness of its pres-ence.

NOTES

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4. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 37-42.
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6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. Ibid., p. 225.
8. Victor Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage* (New Delhi: Concept Publish-ing, 1979), p. 21.
9. Tracy, p. 30.
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12. Ibid., p. 17.
13. Ibid., p. 19.
14. Ibid., pp. 39-71.
15. Ibid., p. 41.
16. Cf. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).
17. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 304.
18. Ibid., p. 326.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 327.
21. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 6.
22. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-sity Press, 1980), p. 98.

23. Robert P. Scharlemann, "The Being of God When God Is Not Being God," in *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 102.

24. Carl A. Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God," in *Deconstruction and Theology*, p. 27.

25. Cf. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Self-Embodiment of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), *Total Presence* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); and John Dominic Crossan, *The Raid on the Articulate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), *The Dark Interval* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975).

26. Foucault, p. 298.

27. Mark C. Taylor, "Text as Victim," in *Deconstruction and Theology*, p. 65.

28. Turner (n. 8 above), p. 53, 115.

29. Turner (n. 4 above), p. 15.