

# Transcendental Academia: Deleuze and Guattari in the Anthropology of Religion

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## **Introduction**

This article offers an introduction to the applied theory of Gilles Deleuze (c. 1925-1995) and Felix Guattari (c. 1930-1992) in the anthropology of religion. In work that explicitly cites Deleuze and/or the Deleuze and Guattari corpus, anthropological methodologies fall into two explicit categories. The first is what I have called a selective use methodology, in which Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology is employed without, or in contradiction to the metaphysical system that it emerged from. The second approach is the inverse, in which not only the concepts are taken into the study of religion, but the ontological baggage that the concepts come with. Unlike the selective use approach, this second type of usage maintains consistency between the object of analysis, the conceptual framework, and methodology.

Where the earlier Deleuze and Guattari work attempts to excavate concepts that could delineate the forces of movement within the “Mechanosphere”,<sup>1</sup> the later co-authored work develops a tripartite division based on the composition of noumenal and actual objects (ideas, material, events). It is in the creation of a metaphysics with a tripartite division between the virtual, the actual, and the plane of immanence, contained within an absolute continuum between them, that forms the bedrock of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought. The virtual as a realm of possibility forms a

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<sup>1</sup> What is intended by the turn of phrase “There is no biosphere or noosphere, but everywhere the same Mechanosphere” is that the compartmentalisation of domains can be bridged by an appropriate conceptualisation of the forces that flow throughout the spheres, re-orienting the study of spheres based not on their distinction from each other, but the substances that flow through them. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 60.

plane of immanence in feedback with the actual, which “falls from the plane like a fruit”, and the virtual relates the fruit “back to the plane as if to that which turns the object back into a subject.”<sup>2</sup> This process through which subject-object relations are removed from nominalistic suppositions (subjects can be conceived of as virtual objects and objects as virtual subjects) has great appeal for anthropologists of religion grappling with the ontological schemas of research subjects foreign to the anthropologist. In selective-use applications, however, we see tendencies towards nominalism render rigorous fieldwork inconclusive.

This article will proceed by elucidating the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of what religion is, as presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and *What Is Philosophy?* (1991). The differentiation between aesthetic figures and conceptual personae from the latter is key to the empiricism that Deleuze and Guattari want to bring to the domain of thought. Religion is described within these two works as a transcendental form of thought that forcibly evades an immanent-empirical approach to the world. The Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of ‘counter-effectuation’ elucidated in Jon Bialecki’s virtual anthropological methodology is then explored as a holistic theoretical approach to the anthropology of religion, and as a means to contrasting a set of works from the discipline that employ Deleuze and Guattari in their methodological approaches.

The application of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts sans their ontological baggage provides a means of explicating the problems that radical constructivism poses to academic work: in the scholar that affirms the self-constructed nature of reality, there is a tendency towards a form of solipsism that asserts the separation and unbridgeable distinction between subjects. I take the elucidation of radical constructivism as a note of caution for the scholar to be aware of one’s status as an embodied individual that could be otherwise, within a network of institutional and epistemic commitments that are difficult to identify, due to them being functions of the very technological apparatuses we use to engage in the world.<sup>3</sup> The warning: the use of a concept as a key for unlocking a poetic means of description can also illustrate the lack of care taken on approach to your subject, making the concept into an ‘aesthetic Figure’ that is no more than

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst von Glaserfeld, ‘An Introduction to Radical Constructivism’, in Paul Watzlawick (ed.), *The Invented Reality* (New York: Norton, 1984), p. 17.

the assertion of the researchers' perspectival orientation that results from technological extension. When this caution goes unheeded, concepts are extracted from their ontological framework and made to work within the researcher's, making the object of "counter-effectuation" not their research subject, but their "secret".<sup>4</sup> Thomas Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling* (2007) is the final discussion point for this article, in which the selective-use basis for Tweed's 'fallibilistic turn' in the study of religion is evaluated as a mode of religion in the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of it. What we arrive at is a conception of the scholar as a scribal elite of modernity, and a re-assertion of criticality as a core principle in methodological approaches to the study of religion.

### **Deleuze and Guattari's Conception of Religion**

The Deleuze and Guattari of *What is Philosophy?* conceive of religion in contrast to philosophy, each as thought-forms that produce particular visible movements of forces in the Mechanosphere. Each form of thought has its dangers: transcendence as the form of thought religion takes contains an active danger of "falling into ignorance and superstition", whilst philosophy's danger is to fall into error and prejudice. Religion is placed on the side of the despot: a supposed imperial One that mirrors the despotic form of reason is placed in service of religious personae (sages, priests), whilst philosophy is imagined as the function of heresy against the erected idols of religion, acting like a sieve against the chaos of a supposedly imposed order instituted by an absolute Other. Reason as transcendence-religion is contrasted with thought, which contains three characteristics in its modern image: the disruption of an oblique relationship between truth and thought, with the latter as a vehicle of creation (Nietzsche); thought as a simple possibility of thinking, shaped by the violence done to an individual that simultaneously makes them announce and renounce themselves as a subject (Heidegger and Blanchot); and, what Deleuze and Guattari call the "Incapacity" of thought, emerging as "snarls, squeams, stammers" of creativity before proceeding like "a dog

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<sup>4</sup> The 'secret' is a Derridean term for the tendencies of judgment one has that cements the idea of an individual as an individual, but which in effect is visible from outside of that individual in their treatment of everyday life. See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 108.

that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.”<sup>5</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, this constitutes the present state of thought in relation to immanence, and indicates the immense difficulty of thought, caught between the lack of a grounding principle (truth), the inherent nature of thought to create and dissolve subjectivity, and the uncoordinated way that thought proceeds. The ability for the aesthetic to be co-opted by transcendence and locked down in the sensory realm is contrasted with the ‘conceptual personae’ brought into being by philosophers, who constitute an image of ‘Thought-Being’ on the plane of immanence, unmediated by the instantiation of their employment on the terrestrial plane (i.e., a monument of Nietzsche is an ‘aesthetic Figure’, whilst Nietzsche is ‘Nietzsche-Dionysius’).<sup>6</sup> The ‘conceptual personae’ become the representatives of concepts, eluding the fixity of meaning through the simultaneous fusion of idea and personality through the vector of the author, who simultaneously brings into being the “conceptual personae” and, in to process, becomes it.<sup>7</sup>

Religions, on the other hand, come into being as vehicles of human-instantiated order: the creation of an empty sign that comes vertically onto the horizontal plane of immanence, settling “in accordance with a spiral” that “descends and crosses different hierarchised levels that are projected together on a region of the plane”, and instantiates itself through the creation of figures that “lay claim to prohibited resemblance.”<sup>8</sup> In the simplest sense of the word, the philosopher operates “conceptual personae” in order to speak in a voice other than their own, leaving the

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 43, 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 65, 175-177.

<sup>7</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, Nietzsche is the ultimate figure for achieving integration with ‘conceptual personae’. With the death of God’s believability, Nietzsche becomes an inverted conception of Christ, who bore with Him “the suppression of the idea of sin, the absence of all *ressentiment* and of all spirit of revenge, the consequent refusal of all war, the revelation of a kingdom of God on Earth as [a] state of the heart and above all the acceptance of death as the proof of his doctrine.” Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 155. This is but one of many conceptual personae Nietzsche invoked. Deleuze and Guattari in fact subordinated the other conceptual personae (Zarathustra, Christ, Socrates, the Priest) to Nietzsche’s Dionysus; if it was an inverted Christ, it was a Dionysian Christ that Nietzsche had become. See Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 89-90.

identity of the author as a remaining tendency to say “I”, but leaving behind a trace that can be weaponised on the terrasphere as “aesthetic figures”:

The monument does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe.<sup>9</sup>

Here it is useful to look at the difference between belief as a transcendent figure and as an immanent concept. Belief extracted from the world into transcendent figures of thought shields one from the impact of empiricism (the formulation of the subject as “the habit of saying I”).<sup>10</sup> Belief, however, can be immanentised into “a genuine concept only when it is made into belief in this world and is connected rather than being projected.” This forms an explicit contrast between religion and atheism, where religion only arrives at the concept by denying itself (transcendence).<sup>11</sup> The application for the study of religion is evident: we can see transcendence operating in science in theories that are intent on “uniformisation and universalisation in the search for a single law, a single force, or a single interaction.”<sup>12</sup> However, in their ideal form, religion and science are irreconcilable, for religion ascribes causation to singular and absolute functions, creating the perception of linear proceedings that *transcend* the forms of thought they are defined against, whilst empiricism’s method of analogical reasoning proceeds via the immanence of our ideas to the state of world as it can be tested by varying forms of scientific principles. In other words, if we take our grounded, embodied epistemic functions as an umbrella that shields us from the chaos of existence, religions “invoke dynasties of gods, or the epiphany of a single god, in order to paint a firmament on the umbrella”, whereas science, art, and philosophy create slits in the firmament to “frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent.”<sup>13</sup>

We thus get a vision of the idealised forms of religion and philosophy, elucidated as a disintegrative dualism in which doing ‘-philosophy’ or ‘-religion’ can exhibit the thought-form of either. In *A Thousand Plateaus* disintegrative dualisms are the operative means by which the Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual schema are elucidated (deterritorialization vs reterritorialization; rhizomatic (horizontalist) vs

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<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 203.

arborescent (hierarchical) modes of thought; jurist-priest sovereignty vs despotic imperial sovereignty; nomadic vs striated space; abstract machines vs collective assemblages of enunciation, etc.). The point of proceeding in this manner is to illustrate that there is a hostile nexus that a subject wishing to *think* finds themselves within, and the immense task that thought has to individuate into a conceptual apparatus on the plane of immanence. From the perspective of the Mechanosphere, religion and philosophy thus amount to dispositions of the individual towards techniques of individuation: on the terrasphere in relation to the divergence of aesthetic figures, and on the plane of immanence in relation to the thought-forms of large-scale multiplicities. We can, perhaps, condense this even further: religion-as-thought is the universalisation of the particular from the position of a coded subject, and philosophy-as-thought elucidates the particulars of forces from the position of a subject that identifies their identity with their habits. Such is evident in the positioning of empiricism as a recognition of a self composed by the habits of the aesthetic field:

Empiricism knows only events and other people and is therefore a great creator of concepts. Its force begins from the moment it defines the subject: a habitus, a habit, nothing but a habit in a field of immanence, the habit of saying I.<sup>14</sup>

For a methodological turn towards an individualistic and functional definition of religion, a formal distinction between forms of subjectivity is a foundational block within a Deleuzo-Guattarian model. We can thus clarify the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of religion as 1) a distinction between aesthetic-transcendence and concept-immanence as modes of thought, 2) a corresponding difference between subjects that *form through* and *integrate with* each thought-mode, 3) the internality of reference between ‘aesthetic Figures’ and the transcendent that it represents,<sup>15</sup> and 4) the differentiation between forms of expression (religion, philosophy, art) that have the ability to cut across, amalgamate, or disintegrate the polarities. Where *A Thousand Plateaus* focuses on the function of religion as a territorial endeavour, it is the discourse on the territorialisation of the epistemic field in *What is Philosophy?* that Bialecki’s virtual anthropology uses to create a systematic methodology for the study of the Deleuzo-Guattarian umbrella, in which religions as territories on the plane of

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<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 89.

immanence become noumenal objects that can be ‘counter-effectuated’ through discovering their technics of mnemonic embodiment and ascription.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the one-dimensionality of Tweed’s desire to figure out what the turn towards religion does *for* subjects, Bialecki’s methodology adds the concern of what religion does *to* subjects. We will see in the proceeding sections how the selective use of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts fail to take this turn, and will instead pursue the universalisation of the rhizome as an idealised model of thought.<sup>17</sup>

### **Bialecki’s ‘Virtual Anthropology’**

Bialecki’s conception of Christianity as a virtual object of study has the object of turning the study of religion into a process of working backwards from an actualised state of affairs to the affective forces (aesthetic/conceptual) that bring an event into being. The event in Deleuze and Guattari is a transparent marking within the Mechanosphere that forms, in the moment of its actualisation, a diagram of the forces that brought it into being, which can be traced back to the virtual through the actual (effects), and “back up to the event that gives its virtual consistency to the

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<sup>16</sup> This is an additional element to the conception of religion as a mutable form within an immanent historical milieu that Brett Adkins elucidates in his close reading of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Where *A Thousand Plateaus’* conception of religion is concerned with forms of semiotic affect that can explain the genealogy of the State, *What is Philosophy?* and Deleuze’s later work are concerned with the role of religion as a realm of affect as it is encoded onto the plane of immanence, making religion a mode of thought rather than an artefact of the environment. The historical focus of many chapters in *A Thousand Plateaus* on the emergence of religion also suggests an evolutionary model, in which religion turns from a mode of environmental coding into the suppression of the semiotic environment by the individual. See Brent Adkins, ‘Deleuze’s Theory of Religion’, in F. LeRon Shults and Lindsay Powell-Jones (eds), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 30-36.

<sup>17</sup> The tendency for Deleuzo-Guattarian poetics to be taken into frameworks lacking negativity is the subject of Andrew Culp’s recent work, which identifies this very same tendency towards the universalisation of the rhizome as an uncritical affirmationist metaphor for all human endeavour. In Andrew Culp’s *Dark Deleuze*, it is the affirmationist tendency of Deleuzian scholarship that has occluded its analysis of power; instead of affirming creativity for Culp, we must now realise that creativity is the great force of capitalisation. It is the nondialectic application of the negative by Deleuze that analysis should be re-gearred towards, attempting to break the collusion between “institutionalised morality, capitalism and the state.” Andrew Culp, *Dark Deleuze* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 13-14, 18.

concept [i.e., Christianity, Islam], just as it is necessary to come down to the actual state of affairs that provides the function with its references.”<sup>18</sup>

Bialecki (2012) employs Deleuze as a means of creating an alternative methodology to the anthropology of Christianity that will avoid the tendency for nominalist anthropology to descend into analyses of subjectification, focus on an ill-defined object, and tend towards ethnographic analyses of singular examples. By beginning from the principle that Christianity is a global phenomenon, nominalistic suspicion is overturned, and the category of religion is renewed by placing transcendence as its marker of disciplinary specificity. By assimilating a Deleuzo-Guattarian metaphysics to anthropological methodologies, we grant ontological status “to both potential and the objects they engender, and to demarcate this potential as having its own characteristic apart from those of the ‘actual’ world.”<sup>19</sup> The nominalist approach to anthropology – the suspicion of abstract objects and universals – is juxtaposed to this “virtual realism”.<sup>20</sup> Bialecki shows how the nominalist approach fails to account for the directionality that Christianity as a virtual object imposes upon assemblages it comes into contact with in Jarrett Zigon’s ethnographic work on a Russian Orthodox-sponsored heroin rehabilitation clinic on the rural periphery of St Petersburg.<sup>21</sup> After mapping the constituting cultural realms that produced the Mill project – Neoliberalism, Soviet ‘new man’ language and secular Western therapeutic techniques – Zigon goes on to privilege neoliberalism as an overcoding force that imposes directionality in the project due to its “stronger discourse”.<sup>22</sup> The heresies internal to the Deleuzo-Guattarian schema are apparent: the call to think rhizomatically rather than in terms of arborescence is precluded by

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<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Bialecki, ‘Virtual Christianity in an Age of Nominalist Anthropology’, *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2012), p. 307.

<sup>20</sup> Bialecki ‘Virtual Christianity’, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup> Jarret Zigon, ‘Within a range of possibilities: Morality and ethics in social life’, *Ethnos*, vol. 74, no. 2 (2009), pp. 251-276 (2009); Jarret Zigon, ‘Phenomenological anthropology and morality: A reply to Robbins’, *Ethnos*, vol. 74, no. 2 (2009), pp. 286-288; Jarret Zigon, ‘Moral and ethical assemblages: A response to Fassin and Stoczkowski’, *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 10, nos 1-2 (2010), pp. 3-15.

<sup>22</sup> Bialecki ‘Virtual Christianity’, p. 305.

imposing Neoliberalism as a dominant discourse;<sup>23</sup> psychological formatting by Russian Orthodoxy predating the emergence of Neoliberalism is de-privileged; and, Christianity is treated as “heterogeneous and unstable”.<sup>24</sup>

The problem arises for Bialecki in Zigon’s use of the term ‘assemblage’, which is drawn from Ong and Collier’s *Global Assemblages* (2005) and not as it is conceptualised by Deleuze.<sup>25</sup> Bialecki’s criticism of Zigon’s work is therefore re-directed to the use of the assemblage in *Global Assemblages*, in which the contributors to the volume extract the “evocative power of the assemblage, and of Deleuze and Guattari’s writing in general... rather than any formal engagement with the specificities of their thought.”<sup>26</sup> Virtual anthropology attempts to invert this relationship through a methodology that works within the ambiguities of Deleuzo-Guattarian metaphysics, conceiving of the virtual plane as “historically produced and mutable... attached to, addressing, and predicated upon actual entities, creating a resonance between the actual and virtual as they go through their vicissitudes.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, Christianity is conceived of as a virtual object from which the divergent forms of it come into being; the virtual object is traced

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<sup>23</sup> A rhizomatic approach to the interaction between Russian Orthodoxy and Neoliberalism would track the transversal between each line, where the ‘arborescent pseudomultiplicity’ of Russian Orthodoxy enters into a multiplicity with Neoliberalism and the conception of transcendence in each converge, i.e., where the state and religion cross over, and the forces that constituted the event. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Bialecki ‘Virtual Christianity’, p. 305.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze is cited in the introduction to Ong and Collier’s edited volume as a means of correlating stem cell research, conceptualising mutations in history, and in reference to heterogeneity in cultural formation. In each example, the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts cited are not critically engaged, but poetically employed. See Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, ‘Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems’, in Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (eds), *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 4-5, n. 8, 15, nn. 47-48. Other selective uses in the volume include the use of Deleuze to talk of the changing character of man in the modern age, but neglecting to link up Deleuze’s account of the virtual; the use of assemblage as a codeword for reassemblage, whilst alluding to the discontinuity of “mappings”; and the description of Deleuze as a “social analyst” interested in the “forces of social regulation and identity-formation” without reference to the corpus of Deleuze’s work on subjectivisation, individuation and individualisation, let alone the distinct operations of each. See the chapters by Rabinow (pp. 40, 46), Ong (p. 338), and Lakoff (p. 197).

<sup>26</sup> Bialecki ‘Virtual Christianity’, p. 306.

<sup>27</sup> Bialecki ‘Virtual Christianity’, pp. 308-9.

back from its forces (e.g., Christian evangelism; carceral atonement; nomadic experientialism, etc.), the territories it actualises in (e.g., imperialistic Christendom; nineteenth century Japan; colonial Australia, etc.), and the point at which the virtual object becomes an actual, particular object.<sup>28</sup> By conceiving of Christianity as a firmament with continuous aspects (i.e., ‘aesthetic Figures’) that local instantiations employ to meet the demands of their to-be-territorialised milieu, the tendency for “nominalistic anthropology” towards the fixing of causal primacy is ameliorated by acknowledging a set of fixed aesthetic forms that Christianity maintains across its territories. Such an approach is not to minimise difference, but to affirm difference in the experiential arena as difference: the difference of one Christianity to another, rather than the difference between one definition of religion to another.

Conceiving of Christianity as a virtual object of study and taken into an anthropological methodology, the goal becomes the “counter-effectuation” of the virtual object through its actualisations,<sup>29</sup> in effect finding the “solutions” and tracing them back to “problems”, where we find the constituent forces “situated not in moments but always between them.”<sup>30</sup> Counter-effectuation becomes a methodology to excavate the diagram of a milieu, the map of its constitutive assemblages, their interrelations, intensities, and actualisations.<sup>31</sup> Here, examples from the anthropology of religion will be used to illustrate the pitfalls of selective-use methodologies, and the practicality of holistic theoretical applications.

### **Thaipusam and Singaporean Modernity**

In an ethnomusicological study of the historical changes in Singapore’s Hindu Thaipusam festival,<sup>32</sup> Deleuze and Guattari are employed to describe the People’s Action Party’s (PAP) use of the West “as the source of its

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 157, 159.

<sup>30</sup> Bialecki, ‘Virtual Christianity’, pp. 312-13.

<sup>31</sup> The diagram shows “the space of possibilities associated with the assemblage” and represents the “degrees of freedom” of an assemblage’s potential to actualise, i.e., its connection to the virtual image of an assemblage in the diagram of a virtual idea. See Manuel De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Sykes, ‘Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space: Tamil Music and the Ethical Life in Singapore’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2015), pp. 380–413.

postcolonial identity and state formation” to “*de-territorialise*... the various immigrant and local cultures as the means to create a society ready for the jump to export-oriented industrialisation.”<sup>33</sup> The study navigates a subaltern perspective on the differential “regulation of the senses” in postcolonial regimes, noting the regulatory changes to the use of loud drums during Thaipusam since de-colonisation as an inherited tool for the Singaporean State’s project of cultural homogenisation.<sup>34</sup>

The author touches on the particular necessary elements of secularism’s transcendence (capital), but contains this within a dimension that emphasises the oppression of the ethnic minority: the relocation (demolition and reconstruction) of Hindu temples, their merging with Taoist temples, and the removal of Indian labourers from old industrial heartlands has severed young Singaporean Indians’ relationship to their musical past, which is now “an ethnic, religious and ancestral relationship, not one that is sedimented in the structures of their neighbourhoods.”<sup>35</sup> The de-territorialisation of people from their places of worship and of people from their cultural practices is a means of insulating Singaporean cultural heteronomy from the carnivalesque forces of its imported ethnic minority.<sup>36</sup>

Through the restriction of musical instruments in Thaipusam, the PAP’s classificatory distinction of Hindu festivals and Chinese cultural festivals closes the valve on the minority’s cultural production, protecting a homogeneous State-endorsed sound-as-religious technology in public space.<sup>37</sup> The author contends that this amounts to the categorical separation of the secular public and private (communal, sacred) spheres by the PAP, in which definitional scrutiny is weaponised against Tamil culture, whose unhindered post-1973 musical processions are organised as movements “towards a ‘public’ realm”, crossing thresholds of temples and public spaces in a collective movement that creates points of contact between each.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> C. J. Wan-ling Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Sykes, ‘Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space’, p. 383.

<sup>35</sup> Sykes, ‘Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space’, p. 408.

<sup>36</sup> Sykes, ‘Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space’, pp. 385-86.

<sup>37</sup> Sykes, ‘Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space’, p. 409.

<sup>38</sup> Isabelle Nabokov, *Religion Against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.

It is through taking on an uncritical perspective of an oppressed minority subject outside of the competing forms of the transcendent that we situate Sykes' selective-use methodology, resulting in a failure to recognise the competing forms of transcendental organisation by the State's re-organisation of the Law to protect the sanctity of 'public space' as it is envisioned by the PAP, and the competing conception of public space as a place of cathartic bodily experience by Tamil Hindus. In this case, the map (i.e., categorical distinction employed by the PAP) is a vehicle of territorialisation, and the territory is demarcated by the operation of the transcendent idea of the State *as it is made possible by the existence of an Other to subordinate within its vortex*. The very existence of the Hindu 'religious' festival creates the possibility of a distinction that the Chinese 'cultural' festival can make in the service of a projected unity.<sup>39</sup> The miss on the behalf of the author is twofold: firstly, by focusing on the 'aesthetic figures' of each grouping (festivals and their material components), Sykes has missed this simple observation on the oppositional composition of the transcendent (i.e., the necessity of the Other). This produces a second corresponding failure: to properly disintegrate the categorical separation of the religious and the secular that is weaponised against the ethnic minority.

### **Thakur Baba and the Unsecularised Conceptual Personae**

In an anthropological investigation of the conception of sovereignty, Bhrigupati Singh (2012) notes the utility of Deleuze's conception of differing thresholds of life:

as a way of engaging ancestors, spirits, the undead and the not yet born, who subsist alongside the living... to denote points of passage across stages and phases of life, as the living have with their initiations, births, marriages and deaths, ritually marked with Thakur Baba. Secondly, thresholds also refers to varying degrees of intensity that may continue at postdeath thresholds, as a spirit is preserved or recedes from memory or ritual possession or vision... Such movements of life are not limited to humans, and the intensities involved are not fully knowable, even as they may compose or decompose our most "rational" selves.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sykes, 'Sound Studies, Religion and Urban Space', p. 403.

<sup>40</sup> Bhrigupati Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India: Sovereignty at Varying Thresholds of Life', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2012), p. 392.

Deleuze's conception of mutable human and nonhuman forms and energies constitutes a "vast continuum of human and non-human life"<sup>41</sup> in which the deity's presence and character is immanent to the world it is embedded within. In the examples employed by Singh, the transcendent force (Thakur Baba) is immanent within social reality as both a *devata* (deity) and a *shakti* (force). The study is an example of a virtual anthropology approach to religion, tracing a line of counter-effectuation from the 'solutions' of the believers (worship, ritual, experience), to the 'problem' of sovereignty (Thakur Baba's historical mutability) to account for "the shifts in the topology of the virtual."<sup>42</sup>

The author places the repression of Thakur Baba's worship by governmental authorities as a tendency of secular, modernising religious traditions, historically comparable with the early saintly epoch of Christianity, whose expulsion of 'conceptual personae' (saints) lead to the concentration of transcendent power in the higher realms.<sup>43</sup> The stigmatisation of "superstition" by secular authorities is re-imagined as a weapon of a competing form of sovereignty, utilised against the transcendent positioning of Thakur Baba by *Rajput* (warrior) lineages, and the figure of Thakur Baba as a possibility of life (i.e., an immanent 'conceptual personae' available to numerous castes and tribes). The author traces the changing "quality of life" that the deity experiences through first-hand investigation into stories of the deity's interaction with the secular authorities, and a younger more sceptical generation of Indians who maintain a mixture of scepticism and reverence at a distance.<sup>44</sup>

The structure of Singh's argument follows from this placement of Thakur Baba in competition with a higher form of sovereignty, mirroring

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<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, edited by Anne Boyman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Bialecki, 'Virtual Christianity', p. 312.

<sup>43</sup> Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', p. 403.

<sup>44</sup> The emergence of Thakur Baba as a deity occurred sometime in the Middle Ages, but, whilst being pointed to by privileged Rajput (a warrior genealogy) as a trace of "genealogy, property, and royalty", the minor definition of Thakur Baba points to "the figure of a warrior as a possibility of life, open for centuries to several castes and tribes", a myth developing from Thakur Baba's continuation of battle after being decapitated. This comes from the tradition of the ascetics (*Vir* and *Pir*) "will to heightened power over life... to enable their own journeys across thresholds, to bring the unborn to life, or to bring order to the lives of neighbouring spirits... thus, a particular type of death is linked to the regeneration and maintenance of life." Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', pp. 388-400, 404.

the divide between the lower and higher deities in India. Historically, the lower deities have distinct communication methods and territories to the higher deities (Varuna and Mitra). Lower deities are kept in immanent relationship with the human inhabitants of their territory, who prolong the mortality of the deity by integrating the immanent (the deity) and the transcendent (territorial goals) with the present situation by entering into a discourse with the deity involving meditative practices, prayer, negotiated ritual procedures, and the use of spirit mediums.<sup>45</sup> In the perspective of a virtual anthropology, Singh's conception of the changing quality of life of the deity a description of the change in diagrammatic features of Thakur Baba as a 'conceptual personae' that can be weaponised against intruding forms of sovereignty.

Two stories the author recounts to illustrate Thakur Baba's antagonistic disposition towards the secular realm illustrate the historical mutability and immanent utility of the deity to the inhabitants of its territory. First, Thakur Baba immobilises a tax collector (*Tehsildar*) in Shahbad who refrains from following established practices for approaching its shrine. The tax collector had proceeded towards the shrine without following the customary ritual of removing one's footwear, declaring his lack of care for the deity before being frozen still whilst sitting on the shrine:

His body froze! There and then the deity showed him the proof of his power!  
The Tehsildar learned to show respect.<sup>46</sup>

The second story adds to the concept of competing sovereign forms between the territory of the deity and the secular State by illustrating Thakur Baba's traversal of life and death thresholds. The authors' research assistant in Shahbad recounts that he had been born as a blessing, due to his fathers' engagement in childbirth request ceremonies (*mannat* or *jholi-bharna*) at Thakur Baba's shrine in Tilpassi. There is interplay between these shrines to Thakur Baba and the ancestral deities (*Preet*) of a household (deceased family members), with the latter existing within the territorial force of their local deity. When the authors' research assistant's wife fell sick with an illness "that couldn't be cured despite 'injections'" (i.e., pharmaceutical treatments, with the vernacular here implying a disdain for their inability to identify and solve the spiritual malady at hand),

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<sup>45</sup> Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', pp. 396, 402.

<sup>46</sup> Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', pp. 394-95.

he visited his local spirit medium. Thakur Baba possessed the medium and directed right-worship of an abandoned household deity's shrine, with the individual approaching the deity not as an individual, but as a member of a household or clan that exists within the deities' territory. The authors' research assistant had become convinced not only of the power of Thakur Baba, but of the utility of the Brahmin spirit medium.<sup>47</sup>

We see here an example in which a 'conceptual personae' can fall within an orthodox category of religion as the study of non-human forces. It is the immanence of Thakur Baba to both the human realm that he interacts with and the transcendent bodies that he comes into contact with (higher deities, secular authorities) that illustrates the complexities of sovereignty operating in modern India. Where the selective use approach failed to identify the discourse between the immanent and the transcendent, or competing conceptions of the transcendent, Thakur Baba is here identified as a 'conceptual personae' (a warrior that continues to fight after decapitation, whose mortality is maintained through ritual service, and whose power remains immanent to a territory) that emerges in the public sphere when encroached upon by foreign forms of sovereignty.<sup>48</sup>

### **Wounaan and Rhizomatic Idealism**

In an analysis of the interaction between industrial development, conservationism and indigeneity in an ethnographic study of the Wounaan peoples of North-East Panama, Julie Velasquez Runk (2009) employs the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of the rhizome to explore Wounaan cosmogony, and the link between river systems and Woun identity. When asked where one is from, a Woun "will typically respond with the name of their river, rather than that of their village", the predominant settlements since the late 1960s.<sup>49</sup> These villages helped the de-territorialising regimes of the Panama government, as well as Catholic and Evangelical missionaries, whose visitation of Woun settlements was made easier by the construction of the Pan-American Highway that ran through North Eastern Panama, requiring the restriction of movement for indigenous peoples

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<sup>47</sup> Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', p. 391.

<sup>48</sup> Singh, 'The Headless Horsemen of India', p. 385.

<sup>49</sup> Julie Velasquez Runk, 'Social and River Networks for the Trees: Wounann's Riverine Rhizomic Cosmos and Arboreal Conservation', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2009), p. 459.

during its construction.<sup>50</sup> The creation of the highway allowed access by loggers, who would clear space that would allow ethnic majority Mestizo peoples to move in and become pastoralists in de-forested areas.<sup>51</sup>

Due to the association of Mestizo pastoralists and logging, the Wounaan have been re-imagined by conservationists as “forest-dependent conservators of the region’s environment.” This is identified by the author as “a binary, arborescent logic” operating within conservationism, in which trees dominate the higher discourse of Western educated conservationists.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the Mestizo pastoralists and indigenous swiddeners are vilified as forest destroyers, whilst the highway is seen as beneficial for development. Wounaan peoples have adapted by emphasising their relationship to trees and forests, whilst city dwelling merchants of Wounaan crafts “have adopted a discourse of tropical-forest dependence to better sell forest-produced art.”<sup>53</sup> The privileged discourse of both conservationism and development, according to the author, means that conservationists and the Wounaan miss opportunities to work on other projects in both parties’ interests (water health due to runoff and deforestation), as well as the maintenance of a rhizomic kinship network that the Wounaan culture is drawn from heterogeneously.<sup>54</sup> The author’s suggestion, drawing from the poetics of the Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome, calls for a future approach to conservation that should organise around “more dynamic states, such as rivers and social relationships.”<sup>55</sup>

Whilst the emphasis on the dynamism of river-based identity and the holistic integration of economic, non-human (polluted river systems, forests), and social forces integrates aspects of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, Velasquez Runk’s analysis is problematised in a way that mimics the subaltern disposition of Sykes’ Thaipusam study. It is the mismatch between an essentialised holistic “indigenous identity” and the rightly pointed out heterogeneous nature of Woun culture that the author fails to recognise in her own work, lamenting the inner-city Woun who “benefit”

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Ryder Howe, ‘The forgotten highway’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 287, no. 3 (2001), pp. 20-21.

<sup>51</sup> Alaka Wali, *Kilowatts and Crisis: Hydroelectric Power and Social Dislocation in Eastern Panama* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> Velasquez Runk, ‘Social and River Networks for the Trees’, pp. 461-62.

<sup>53</sup> Velasquez Runk, ‘Social and River Networks for the Trees’, p. 462.

<sup>54</sup> Velasquez Runk, ‘Social and River Networks for the Trees’, pp. 462-63.

<sup>55</sup> Velasquez Runk, ‘Social and River Networks for the Trees’, p. 463.

from their new “arboreal” identity.<sup>56</sup> The through-line of Velasquez Runk’s analysis amounts to a lament for the rhizomic Woun identity that cannot assert itself in the process of cross-cultural integration with the process of capital development, whilst mentioning only in passing that a significant development undergone in Woun culture was a shift to sedentary village-life, aided by Christian missionaries. The author points out the “syncretic beliefs” held by the Woun, but the passing remark leaves a set of questions deemed over the course of the article as unimportant: what is the relationship between Christian missions and sedentarisation? Is there an epistemic shift during the period that changed the disposition of Woun to the oncoming globalising forces of capital? Is the heterogeneity of the Woun an idealised conception of Woun cosmogony?

In lament of the failures for the complexity of Woun identity to be raised against the invading Other, the author fails to recognise that those traits the Woun are presenting – an adaptability to capital development, the ability to reconfigure Woun identity as arboreal custodians – are inherent traits in the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of the Western episteme.<sup>57</sup> Such a point would lead one to think that the willingness of the Woun to adapt to the arboreal narratives of the conservationists may have an antecedent epistemic juncture, but the possibility of this avenue of research into the religious overlay is missed by the scholar.

### **Thomas Tweed**

Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, we come to Tweed’s theory of religion. Where these previous examples offer an illustration of the pitfalls of selective-use methodology with its consequences contained to journal article-length pieces, Tweed’s work shows how the inability to see this can solidify into a dogmatic assertion of differentiation that is inherently unscholarly. To illustrate this, we must begin with the utility of Deleuze and Guattari for Tweed, which

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<sup>56</sup> Of note is the lament towards city-dwelling Woun who “benefit” from that identity in the marketplace. See Velasquez Runk, ‘Social and River Networks for the Trees’, p. 460.

<sup>57</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 54.

begins with a remarkable footnote on the differentiation of aesthetic figures and conceptual personae in the opening chapter of *Crossing and Dwelling*:

In suggesting that theory involves tropes [i.e., Figures] as well as concepts, I am disagreeing with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who suggest that the former is the province of religion and the latter the domain of philosophy.<sup>59</sup>

Not only has Tweed supplanted the Deleuzo-Guattarian designation ('Figures'), but with this footnote has negated the entire Deleuzo-Guattarian corpus' discussion of religion as a concept, whilst co-opting the metaphor of 'crossings'; a metaphor employed by Deleuze and Guattari in the cited pages from the above quotation.

This claim of non-distinction between 'Figures' and concepts can be related back to Deleuze and Guattari: in an orthodoxal Deleuzo-Guattarian reading, the utilisation of an aesthetic (i.e., the word 'crossing' from the concept it is embedded within) in service of negation constitutes both a fall into error for the empirical aspect of the project, and an attempt to weaponise the transcendent.<sup>60</sup> The empirical fall into error is a fundamental mis-reading of Deleuze & Guattari's conception of religion, whilst the weaponization of definitional rigidity in service of the transcendent follows a line of thought elucidated by Marcel Gauchet that, in the process of secularisation, religion as a functional, structuring institution of human life has been distributed into aesthetic domains and the institutions of the State that guarantee collective solidarity.<sup>61</sup> In Tweed's case, the transcendent is the attempt to universalise the definition of a word, and to funnel the entire praxis of a discipline through the author's own experience of that word's meaning.<sup>62</sup> In all Tweed's tendency to take a

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<sup>59</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 2, 89-93.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze and Guattari *What is Philosophy?*, p. 38.

<sup>61</sup> Gauchet's "infrastructural religion" is a concept used to elucidate the emergence of a "visible" form of religion that emerged in the vector of Western history in dialectic with an "invisible" that, as humans developed more integrated relationships with material production, took on both a more distant and powerful quality. The modern development, beginning around 1700, elucidates this as the religious being functionally absorbed into secular institutions: "the political, the intellectual, the economic and the technical." In the process the "otherness" of the previously co-standing worlds (Church and State) is disintegrated and distributed into the "here-and-now" of secular institutions that use the "substance of religion" (the gap between the "visible" and the "invisible") as their "developmental mainspring." Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 162.

<sup>62</sup> Such is the point made in the pages of *What is Philosophy?* quoted by Tweed: transcendence is a projection of theoretical unity that vertically instantiates itself on the

position against correspondence as an epistemic paradigm for scholarship, what emerges from the project can justifiably be called a correspondence theory of religion, as what religion is, is whatever religion does for a subject. Rather than “realism with a small r”, we get a Realism of the Believing Subject.<sup>63</sup> It is the selective-use methodology that inverts Tweed’s intention, and this can be isolated into two mistakes by Tweed: 1) negating concepts in favour of definition and concurrently proceeding via the negation of an arbitrarily established (i.e., unconceptualized) category of non-religion, and 2) the proceeding Realism made possible by the definition’s creation of ontological gap between belief and non-belief.

If there is a Deleuzo-Guattarian maxim in relation to definition, it must be that definitions are latent concepts, waiting to be supplied with the clarifications that make the concept (or ‘conceptual personae’) link up with its constituent forces. Tweed begins his definition through the negation of this maxim whilst co-opting the poetic terminology and imagery used to elucidate it. We find then a trait of selective-use methodology: where for Deleuze & Guattari, clarifications “saturate” concepts, Tweed’s aestheticization of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts (*dwelling* and *crossing*) constitutes the de-saturation or *dehydration* of the concept.<sup>64</sup> We can elucidate the saturation of a concept as both the creation of gradations or hermeneutical lines from which the concept can spill forth and communicate its constituent forces in larger volumes of subjects. Deleuze & Guattari formulate this as a choice – to follow the constructive work done to elucidate a problem and saturate its concept, or to give in to aestheticisation through a weariness of thought that:

falls back on the relative speeds that concern only the succession of movement from one point to another, from one extensive component to

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plane of immanence with “aesthetic Figures”, contra to the concepts that form saturated constellations horizontally across the plane. Deleuze and Guattari *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>63</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 3-29.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts gather saturation whilst *crossing* the plane of immanence, whilst the transcendent picks a point on the plane of immanence and plants figures on it, making space for the *dwelling* that arranges the vortex. There are three clarifications: concepts are syntagmatic, connective, and consistent, not paradigmatic, hierarchical, or referential. The attempt to clarify the concept is how one brings saturation to them, and is a process of “counter-effectuation” in and of itself. See Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 89-91.

another, from one idea to another, and that measure simple associations without being able to reconstitute any concept.<sup>65</sup>

Tweed follows this latter trend, seeing the saturated Deleuzo-Guattarian concept (religion) and *dehydrating* the concept's interconnection of stasis and movement, in effect making the "simple associations" of 'movement' the investigative frame.<sup>66</sup> In an orthodoxical Deleuzo-Guattarian schema, Tweed's attempt to universalise his experience of religion is to "do" religion by establishing an "aesthetic Figure" (movement) that "lays claim to hidden resemblance."<sup>67</sup> Tweed's motivations are transparent in this regard: beginning in his postgraduate years, Tweed's encounters with Cuban Catholics celebrating their national identity through the experience of mourning for an idealised version of the homeland made him desire "a theory of religion that made sense of the religious life of transnational migrants and addressed three themes—*movement, relation, and position.*"<sup>68</sup>

But why does this disposition towards the *dehydration* of the concept emerge? Tweed's description of his experience has its corollary in Freud's conception of cathexis. As another case of a holistic approach to methodology, the Deleuzo-Guattarian extraction of cathexis' function into their own schema takes with it the fundamental ontological aspects, leaving behind Freud's nominal ascription of causal forces (the ego and its repressed oedipal objects). For Deleuze & Guattari, the cathected object can express itself in the individual (as a trait, a characteristic, a twitch, a nervous habit, etc.), but forms within gradations of collectives (self,

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<sup>65</sup> Deleuze and Guattari *What is Philosophy?*, p. 214.

<sup>66</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* is refuse with calls to recognise the structural linearity the codified "Word" imposes on thought, which is not a linear proceeding into new forms of meaning, freedom, or research, but a directional movement that instantiates new dynamics of power within the constituting semiotic apparatus. Where Tweed attempts to delineate movement from stasis, Deleuze & Guattari differentiate between 'despotic signification' and 'social subjection' semiotic apparatuses through the particular forms of movement and stasis inherent within each. The 'despotic signification' semiotic carries a signifier with it, with the intention of re-charging it by ascribing movements of desire back into reference with the constituting signifier. The subjection semiotic instead works as the false description of "a linear proceeding into which the sign is swept via subjects." It is thus a differentiation in the stylistic (i.e., aesthetic) representation of the signifier that constitutes the subjection semiotic, and not the claim that there is an actual divergence between the enunciator of a line of flight and the regime of meaning they are enunciating from. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>68</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 5.

intimate relationships, families, clans, nations, etc.) as an expression of the tendencies within their constituting milieus that prevent the free movement of desire's potential to enunciate within the collective.<sup>69</sup> There is, however, a more worrying aspect to identifying Tweed's definition as a cathected object of his experience. To find this, we must go back to Deleuze & Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1968), where cathexis is an expression on the 'Body without Organs' (i.e. a territory) that is allowed to emerge *due to the composition of the territory itself*.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the cathected substance of Tweed's experience that expresses itself in his work is an arboreal idea of religion as 'movement' that *transcends* all of the functional aspects that point towards stasis. The repression is not located within an individual, but within the constituting milieu, raising the question of every expression: what allowed you to emerge?

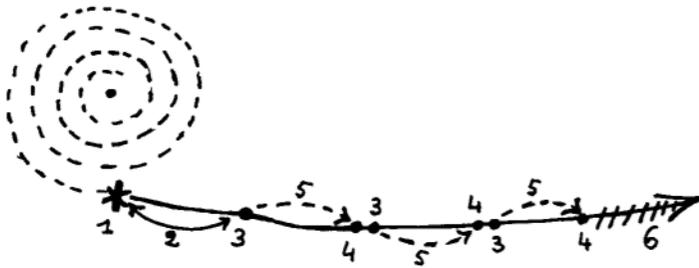
This is where things become difficult for Studies in Religion scholars. Is it possible that Tweed's work is allowed to come into being because it re-affirms a methodology that approaches the subject of religion from the point of view of a particular religion? Could it be that there is a signifier that Tweed's fallibilistic turn attempts to furnish, at the same time as following a postsignifying line of negativity? In other words, could it be that Tweed's theoretical approach is analogical to the Christian semiotic?<sup>71</sup> A structural analysis of Tweed's centralisation of 'movement' suggests as much, correlating with the Deleuzo-Guattarian description of a priestly or bureaucratic class that utilises the thought-form of religion to inscribe movements as transcendental, linear movements (see Figure 1).

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<sup>69</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 106-7. The discourse on who or what the arborists are in *A Thousand Plateaus* is notably absent. By identifying cathexis as the agent of arborescence helps to clarify the collective form of agency the model is attempting to elucidate. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 3-25.

<sup>70</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 8, 293.

<sup>71</sup> Such was the problem Max Müller addressed at the birth of the tradition, noting that scholarship is a territorial endeavour "in the name of true science" that requires a specific form of technical expertise; in the case of religion, this requires one to learn the languages the great books were written in, and to "protect its sacred instincts from the inroads of those who think that they have a right to speak on the ancient religions of mankind." Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (Oxford: Longmans, 1882), pp. 26-28.



(1) The point of subjectification, replacing the center of signifi-ance. (2) The two faces turned away from each other. (3) The subject of enunciation resulting from the point of subjectification and the turning away. (4) The subject of the statement, into which the subject of enunciation recoils. (5) The succession of finite linear proceedings accompanied by a new form of priest and a new bureaucracy. (6) The line of flight, which is freed but still segmented, remaining negative and blocked.

Figure 1 – The diagram of the Deleuzo-Guattarian subjection semiotic, taken from *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>72</sup>

And here lies the sleight of hand that emerges from Tweed’s argument for the necessity of disciplinary boundedness *through* definitional rigidity: the fallibility of the observer in relation to the object of research is now given, and the observer can only speak insofar as they become a bureaucratic scribe for the ‘movement’ of believers.<sup>73</sup> The researchers’ “positioned representations of a changing terrain by an itinerant cartographer” that “emerge from within categorical schemes and social contexts”<sup>74</sup> clarifies the position of the scholar as a documenter of what believing subjects say of themselves. This makes Tweed’s a theory of effect, comparative to Bialecki’s virtual anthropology as a methodology focused on affect.

An immediate problem becomes visible: the fallibility of the scholar due to their embodied position<sup>75</sup> corresponds with the fallibility of

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<sup>72</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> “We are stuck with the category religion, since it fixes the disciplinary horizon, and our use of it can be either more or less lucid, more or less self-conscious. So we are obliged to be as clear as possible about the kind of definition we are offering and the orienting tropes that inform it.” Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 53.

<sup>74</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, pp. 13, 15-16.

<sup>75</sup> The fallibility of the scholar is a principled position that we should attempt to inculcate in our pedagogical strategies to bridge the divides between differing methodological conceptions for the study of religion. This is present in *Crossing and Dwelling*, but made explicit in Tweed’s presidential address to the American Academy of Religion. Thomas

the believing subject contra to a superior, unattainable (i.e., divine, all-seeing) position that has independent access to the realms of experience.<sup>76</sup> The consequences of the selective-use methodology in Tweed's case lie in this reintroduction of an ontologically necessitated fallible subject. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that absolute ontological differences necessitate Tweed's selective-use of Deleuze and Guattari, for Tweed's assertion that there is no distinction between the aesthetic and the conceptual fails to see that his definition lacks every clarification of the concept that Deleuze and Guattari propose of it, and is in and of itself a religious endeavour (i.e., that religion as a thought structure is hierarchical, referential, and paradigmatic).<sup>77</sup> Nowhere so obvious is this trait than Tweed's placement of religion as a supreme form of expression:

Most important for delineating religion, religions mark and cross the ultimate horizon of human life. Other cultural trajectories – for example, art, music, and literature – can mark and traverse the boundaries of the natural terrain and the limits of embodied life. Those other cultural forms, however, usually do not appeal to superhuman forces or map cosmic space – and they do not offer prescriptions about how to cross the ultimate horizon.<sup>78</sup>

It is this attempt to fix the concern of an “ultimate horizon” as a guarantor of religion as a weak *sui generis* form that leads Tweed to this conclusion, and us to the most perplexing state – by making the ‘trope’ of “ultimate horizon” as a distinguishing feature of religious and non-religious cultural forms.<sup>79</sup> It is clear that this trope, combined with the centralisation of *movement* and *relation* as a corrective for “theories that have presupposed stasis and minimised interdependence”,<sup>80</sup> is intended as a *concept* of religion that dissolves the ‘aesthetic Figures’/‘conceptual personae’

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Tweed, ‘Valuing the Study of Religion: Improving Difficult Dialogues Within and Beyond the AAR’s “Big Tent”’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 84, no. 2 (2016), p. 298.

<sup>76</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, pp. 17, 193 n. 18.

<sup>77</sup> The assertion of *relation* occurring *across* boundaries (i.e., an ontological gap) creates 1) an ontological gap between the believer and the non-believer, the latter suddenly deprived of the medium (religion) through which boundaries are crossed, and 2) a bridge between believer and researcher that requires an entirely new *referential* medium (definition) in which haves/have nots (*hierarchy*) can be delineated, and returned into a scholarly format as a truth in the experience of the scholar and the academy (*paradigmatic*). See Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>78</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 76.

<sup>79</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 77.

distinction. As a concept of religion, however, it relies on the trope of an “ultimate horizon” as its concept, requiring the scholar to accept an arbitrary distinction between concerns of this world and concerns of another world in the eyes of a believer as the determining variable that makes religions distinct from all other cultural forms.<sup>81</sup> As a theory of the subject, we get a Realism of the subject in which methodological considerations are based in the epistemic co-ordinates of the researcher and their subject within the net of a world with an “ultimate horizon”. As a result, any set of declarations from any perspectival orientation, such as the biases inherent to a “white, male, middle-class professor of religious studies”,<sup>82</sup> become excuses for any and every theoretical debasement.

Peeling back a layer, we can apply Deleuze and Guattari to discover that the above self-declaration of subjectivity by Tweed is in fact a mis-labelling. It is best to understand Tweed’s work, I propose, as the work of a scholar that has embodied an epistemic framework functionally equivalent to a scribal elite class. The Deleuzo-Guattarian qualification of the role of the philosopher as a functionary of the State is instructive: the philosopher becomes a functionary of the State (a public professor) at “the moment the State-form inspired an image of thought.” The relationship, however, is reciprocal – the form of reasoning the State requires is produced by its scribal elite.<sup>83</sup> Thus, we can expect that a renewal of the utility of a bureaucratic class will come through its discovery of a means with which it can become a more effective appendage of a State apparatus.

And here, we turn to Tweed’s presidential address to the American Academy of Religion (AAR). The address continues the attempt to disseminate the ‘fallibility of the researcher’ turn that *Crossing and Dwelling* proposes, proposing that warring factions (theologians and non-theologian researchers of religion) take an approach based on “empathy, humanity, and generosity.” An olive branch between the factions is opened up by identifying a common cause (continued employment) and naming the solution: a pragmatism that can identify the effective discourse in which members can lobby State benefactors for the continuation of their departments, based on the constituting history of each members’ State

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<sup>81</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, pp. 76-77, 216 n. 25.

<sup>82</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 376.

apparatus.<sup>84</sup> Whilst Tweed's speech is refuse with pragmatic suggestions for the utility of religious studies programs to civil society, the most instructive example for the nexus between the academy and the State is in Tweed's use of a statement by then United States Secretary of State John Kerry:

I often say that if I headed back to college today, I would major in comparative religions rather than political science. That is because religious actors and institutions are playing an influential role in every region of the world and on nearly every issue central to U.S. foreign policy.<sup>85</sup>

For while thus far we have seen the theoretical misgivings of Tweed's work, the case of Kerry's appointment – Shaun Casey, of the Wesley Theological Seminary – to the Kerry-formed Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the US State Department is instructive as to the function of Tweed's fallibilistic turn. Where Tweed wishes for the insertion of scholarly fallibilism to act as a medium through which scholars with differing cosmological persuasions can empathise with each others projects, we see in a recent interview by Casey that the fallibilism of the individual can just as well be weaponised against competing truth claims in the public sphere. Tweed's insertion of fallibilism as a means for empathy can only function with in-group solidarity, based around the necessity of maintaining employment and the formation of a discourse that can leverage the groups' position in the corporatist nexus of the democratic nation State. We see in an interview on Christian interpretations of Trump's border wall how, without the in-group solidarity, the principle of empathy is inverted by Casey dismissing his opposition by pointing to their fallibilism:

Well, I think there is a minority of American Christians – they're overwhelmingly white. They're overwhelmingly Republican. They're overwhelmingly influenced by this sort of ragtag group of folk, you know, on the evangelical advisory board the White House has – who are going to endorse any kind of strongman move the president makes because ultimately, a passage like Romans 13 and this very strict, narrow misinterpretation of it authorizes that view.<sup>86</sup>

Casey's attack on the perspectival interpretations coupled with the lack of personal diatribe in preceding attacks on the Republican

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<sup>84</sup> Tweed, 'Valuing the Study of Religion', pp. 297-300.

<sup>85</sup> John Kerry, 'Religion and Diplomacy', *America*, vol. 213, no. 6 (2015), pp. 1-5.

<sup>86</sup> Michel Martin, 'The Moral Question of Trump's Border Wall', *NPR* (2019), at <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/27/689191255/the-morality-question-of-trump-s-border-wall>. Accessed 19/02/2019.

administration<sup>87</sup> illustrate the ‘aesthetic’ of fallibilism: an arena of public tender in which everyone’s perspective is fair game in the pursuit of becoming a bureaucrat. The pragmatism of grounding disciplinary cohesion as Tweed envisions it is hard to square with this conclusion. In the flow-on effects of fallibilism, it is impossible to envisage how empathy as Tweed envisages it can result in anything more than a temporary, politically pragmatic ceasefire, with an absolute inability to agree on the current composition of a State preventing the formation of tactics that could make one’s practice function for it. Instead, we see another example of how a selective-use methodology is unable to follow the conclusions of its premises due the tendency the arbitrary perspectival observations of a researcher to debase, through simplification, the complexity of ontological apparatuses that thought comes into contact with.

### **Conclusion**

This essay began by problematising the selective-use of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory within the anthropology of religion. Noting the key aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s framework as a distinction between the ‘images of thought’, conceptualised as ideal forms of philosophy and religion, the methodology proposed by Jon Bialecki was evaluated for its adherence to a Deleuzo-Guattarian schema. Using practical examples, we saw how selective-use methodologies employing Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts were unable to describe the ontological function of religions as a

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<sup>87</sup> Casey’s reactive tendency to ascribe interpretation other than his own as misinterpretation point misses the obvious: any argument for present-day morality based on ancient texts are grounded in contingency, and misinterpretation is, within a discourse that maintains a principle of fallibility, to be expected. For the matter at hand, reconciling “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17, King James Version) with Casey’s position at the State Department seems to require a degree of interpretation that, from another perspective, can just as easily be construed as misinterpretation. In the context of the preceding discourse, however, Casey’s disdain for the administration that folded the office he had helped to set up is instructive for reading his call for its reinstatement by a future administration as a call for the necessity of his particular bureaucratic form to the United States role as an agent of global influence. Shaun Casey, ‘How the State Department has Sideline Religion’s Role in Diplomacy’, *Religion and Politics* (2017), at <https://religionandpolitics.org/2017/09/05/how-the-state-department-has-sideline-religions-role-in-diplomacy>. Accessed 19/02/2019.

competition between transcendental schemas, and unable to accurately identify religion as a primary historical actor. Thomas Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling* was then critiqued for its inadequate dispensation with the Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual distinction between forms of thought. In Tweed's case, the selective-use methodological approach not only simplifies the rigorous complexities of Deleuze and Guattari's thought, but opens himself up to criticism by the Deleuzo-Guattarian corpus itself. We found that the selective-use methodology employs embodied meaning that, in the assertion of a principle of fallibilism, amounts to the creation of an infinitely applicable excuse for a lack of critical engagement, based on the identity of the researcher. In the place of this tendency, Bialecki's methodological approach to the anthropology of religion is an integrated work of applied theory. Using the entirety of the Deleuzo-Guattarian schema, we see how the fallibilistic turn that Tweed attempts to make can be re-engineered to accurately place the scholar as a scribal elite class in modernity.

In place of Tweed's proposal, the simplest route is to revert to a model of scholarship for the study of religion advocated by Bruce Lincoln, in which we speak with "a human and fallible voice" but as an authority through "rigorous critical practice."<sup>88</sup> Lincoln's call follows that of his predecessors: J.Z. Smith's claim that the classical materials for the study of religion – the work of scribal elites (maps, territorial markings, cosmogonies fixing order)<sup>89</sup> – should be approached with scepticism is here reimagined as a cautionary note for the scholar, who occupies a role structurally analogous to the scribal elites of antiquity. Simply put, this note of caution is twofold. 1) The scholar must recognise their place within an institutional net in which it is not just biological or socioeconomic identity that structures your perspective, but the basis of your epistemic givens as they are *developed through your own habits, within technological environments, and at the demand of our constituting institutions.*<sup>90</sup> 2) The

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<sup>88</sup> Bruce Lincoln, 'Theses on Method', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1996), §3.

<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 293-94.

<sup>90</sup> Here, Walter Ong's work is instructive. Taking from Ong's differentiation of the oral and literate modes of thought, troubling inferences emerge in that we appear to embody the perspectival orientation of the discursive tools we use (e.g., literacy or orality). Continued discourse on the position of the scholar in modernity should follow lines that emphasise the

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scholar must understand the tendency for aesthetic preferences as unqualified theoretical assertions to be an amputation of style from substance that debases any argument for authority that the academy may wish to make.

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intensive relationship between our tools and our perspectives. See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).