

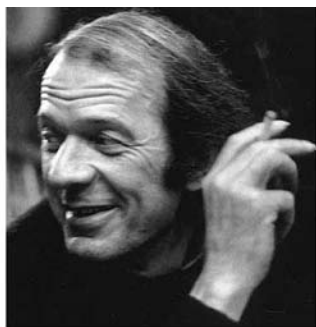


# process perspectives

NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE CENTER FOR PROCESS STUDIES

ISSN 0360-618X  
VOLUME 29  
NUMBER 1  
SUMMER 2006

...A RELATIONAL  
WORLDVIEW FOR  
THE COMMON  
GOOD.



(clockwise from top l) a.n. whitehead, gilles deleuze, roland faber, nelle morton, st. nicholas of cusa, catherine keller

exist, a creative practice. It is an action, a poem – and it just happens to translate into the Latin, *faber*. Keller also pointed out that under John Cobb’s leadership, process theology has always been political, and she is hopeful that a coalition with progressive evangelicals can be forged.

(4) Theopoetics is not just involved with theology-as-method, but also with the Logos of scripture. There is a multiplicity of oscillations waiting to be unleashed. Keller shared her theopoetics of Genesis—darkness and light, womb and word, death and face (surface), inhalation and exhalation.

Faber, in response, introduced the notions of “polyphilia” and “theoplicity.” Theopoetics is in one sense polyphilia: the love of and for multiplicity. Multiplicity is folded unity-in-difference. God, as poet of the world, helps create two types of multiplicity—possibilities (via God’s primordial nature) and actualities (via God’s consequent nature). Indeed, as poet, God is a multiplicity. The actuality of God is a multiplicity of processes of becoming. God multiplies in the process of creation.

Faber noted that poetry, culture, and religious expression, insofar as they are human representations or imitations of natural processes, require abstractness, and yet for this reason, are prone to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness if mistaken

(*Poetics* continued on page 10)

## Poetics, Post-Structuralism, and Process

by Steve Hulbert and Jeanyne Slettom

The first in a new series of events, aptly named “Process Conversations,” was held March 3-4, 2006. In this two-day discussion, Catherine Keller and Roland Faber shared notes on the concept of theopoetics. Keller noted that she and Faber comprise a subset of Whiteheadianism that holds together process theology and continental poststructuralism in creative contrast. They have both particularly emphasized the work of Gilles Deleuze. Whitehead and Deleuze share the idea of the primacy of becoming and its multiplicity, or the process of becoming multiplicity itself.

Keller identified four theopoetic oscillations. These oscillations suggest the vibratory motion that for Whitehead is the pattern of all existence while at the same time suggesting the rhythmic pulsing drive of poetic language. The four oscillations are:

(1) Theopoetics is not theology-as-usual nor is it “not theology.” Theopoetics takes place in oscillation with theology. It rhythmically destabilizes the certainties of traditional theological inquiry

(2) God-talk is mindful of its own edge, e.g., the unspeakable vs. the word, or between silence and language itself. Process theopoetics is the steady work of auto-deconstruction: the critique of abstractions in order to keep our own concepts vibrant and relevant.

(3) This discourse occurs in a space between theopoetics and theopolitics. Here Keller introduces us to *poiesis* - to make. *Poiesis* is the making of something that previously did not

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## Poetics (continued from cover)

for an actual Reality. Faber points out that poetry, more than philosophy, is conscious of *materiality* (i.e. fully concrete and particular descriptions of reality without reference to the homogenizing abstractions of “essence” or “form”). Poetry “matters” because it is capable of capturing the wholly contingent particularity of the multiplicities found in materiality.

The notion of theoplicity then, is the corresponding “pledge for infinite variation.” It is necessarily a political idea, a “bid for freedom” from suppressive abstractness, the divine “critique of abstractions.” Whitehead’s God-as-poet is the process of theoplicity.

On the following day, Faber and Keller engaged more conversationally, with speakers and participants sitting in a large circle. The two found several points of appreciation for each other’s work and also responded to questions from participants. Theopoetics and multiplicity emerged frequently as themes, and as the conversation unfolded, both theologians delighted in wordplay, employing such terms as “theoplicity,” “theopolitics,” “chaosmos,” and “transpantheism.”

Keller began the conversation by referencing Faber’s theme of theopoetics. His term derives from his thesis, stated the night before, “that process theology can be developed as theopoetics, and that the main concern of theopoetics is with multiplicity.” This insistent multiplicity becomes the means for overcoming dualisms and thus interrupting a theopolitics that suppresses diversity.

Keller appreciated the appropriateness of theopoetics as a process category, not simply because Whitehead referred to God as the “poet of the world.” Keller pointed out that “as a neologism, theopoetics has its origin in two people in the last century - Amos Wilder and Stanley Hopper. Next in this lineage are Nelle Morton and David Miller.” “Poetics” is not just

a literary form, she observed, but refers more broadly to any creativity. As such, it is a good word for God-in-the-world. At the same time, it refers to a style of doing theology that encompasses at least three things: one, it is helpful in deconstructing theological claims that have become hard, or fixated; two, it enables new theological constructions; and three, it conveys a sense of the limits of language. “Theopoetics lends itself to God-talk,” she observed, because “it suggests the God-inside-of-which we are doing our creating.”

Faber agreed, claiming that theopoetics has multiple meanings and is conceptually suited for a “theology of manifoldness.” We cannot create a theology that unites everything, he said, because we are always living in a manifold world. God’s relatedness to this manifold world suggests a “polyphilia”—a “love of and for multiplicity”—which in turn suggests a divine multiplicity or “theoplicity.”

These terms set the context for the ensuing conversation, which ranged from language to politics, from Deleuze to Nicholas of Cusa, and to the concept of the “fold” that occurs in Deleuze and is discernible in Nicholas. Additionally, Keller anchored the conversation in what she called a “context of emergency,” or the “lethal flattening of world culture.” The dominant structure takes for granted

its domination over multiple others, she noted, and the results have been English as an example of dominant logocentrism and empire as a mono-discourse amounting to a “Mardukian dismembering of the world.” Whitehead celebrates multiplicity, and with him, Keller said, we must “resist hermeneutical closure.”

An area of disagreement between the two theologians came in the discussion of theopolitics. Faber associates the term with theocracies, a top-down discourse that eradicates multiplicity. Despite some positive possibilities suggested by liberation theology, he argued that there is already too much God language in politics, and that it is used to legitimate oppressive unities. Keller resisted, saying that if we don’t claim theopolitical discourse, we cut ourselves off from the discourse of the church, and theopolitics then becomes part of a “messianic imperialism.” She referenced the secular left’s refusal to talk to progressive Christians and the need for a more inclusive language: “We can’t counter the right’s violation of church and state without including theopolitics in our language.” Faber countered that theopolitics takes away multiplicity; it results in a colonizing One that operates through dualisms to remove all trace of the Other, or render it invisible.

To conclude the conversation, moderator Marjorie Suchocki asked: what is the role of theopoesis in the future of theology and process theology? Keller replied: “Theopoesis helps us keep a foot in orthodoxy. It opens up doctrines that have been frozen and enables us to take part in the larger systematic project.” Said Faber, “The future of theology must always ‘take up’ the past in all its variety. We must look back and find all the multiplicities in the tradition, because to move forward, we must be open to the multiplicities of the past.” 🙏



*in claremont, a multiplicity of minds converge to discuss theopoetics*