PART ONE

AUGUSTINE AND THE PROBLEM OF POLYSEMY
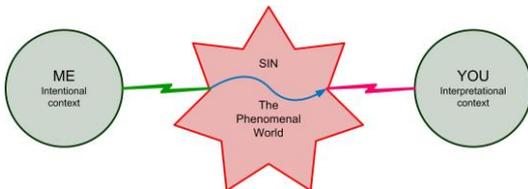
1

WORDS AND THINGS

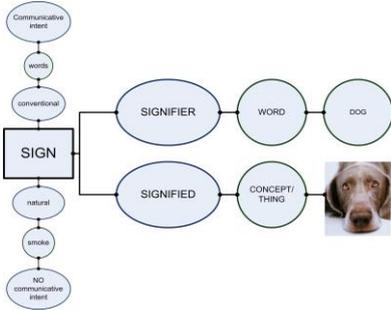AUGUSTINE ASKS:

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

WORDS & THINGS?

2

AUGUSTINE: the problem of communication
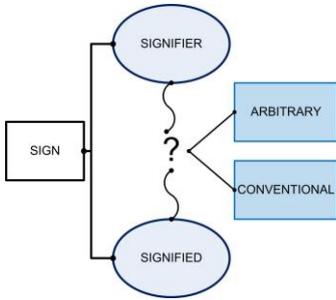

3

Augustine's Theory of the Sign 1

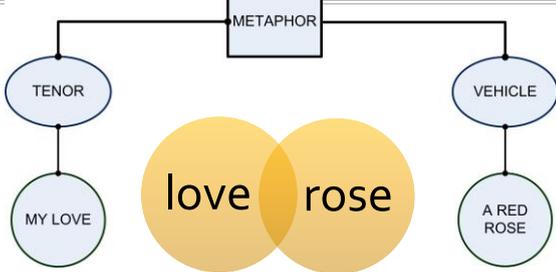4

Connection btn. SIGNIFIER and SIGNIFIED

5

CONNECTION btn. SIGNIFIER and SIGN

- What does a barking dog say?

- ENGLISH: Woof!
- ITALIAN: Bau!
- FRENCH: Ouaf!
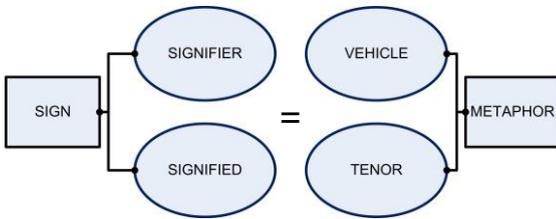- PORTUGUESE: Au!
- JAPANESE: Won!

6

Structure of Metaphor
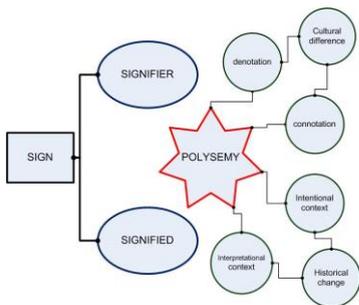

SIGN/METAPHOR

ALL LANGUAGE IS METAPHORICAL

SIGN/POLYSEMY

PART TWO: The Stakes
POLYSEMY

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WHAT'S AT STAKE?

AUGUSTINE ASKS:

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

SIGNS & TRUTH?

11

POLYSEMY: REAL WORLD CONSEQUENCES

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POLYSEMY:
POETIC COMPRESSION

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
　　Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a
　　billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
　　from "The Windhover" by Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1918

- BUCKLE
  o a fastening for two loose ends that is attached to one and holds the other by a catch
  o to prepare with vigour
  o to cause to bend, give way, or crumple

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ACCESSING TRUTH

AUGUSTINE ASKS:

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE CHALLENGES OF POLYSEMY, ESPECIALLY IN SACRED TEXTS?

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TRANSCENDENTAL SIGNIFIER
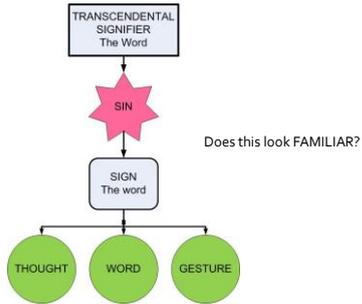
ASSUMPTION: There is an INTENDED TRUTH in the TEXT.

In the phenomenal world, Augustine says, we "see through a glass darkly" and can only get a glimpse of the Truth via signs. But,

"Whoever then, can understand the word, not only before it sounds, but before the images of its sounds are contemplated in thought ... can already see through this mirror ... some likeness of that Word" (*On the Trinity*).
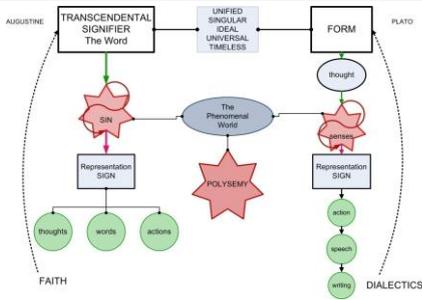
I.E. The Word *BEFORE* the word.
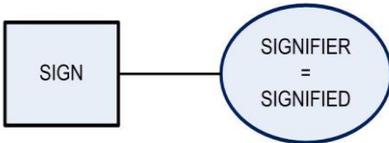
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HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIP

TRANSCENDENTAL SIGNIFIER
The Word

SIN

Does this look FAMILIAR?

SIGN
The word

THOUGHT · WORD · GESTURE

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AUGUSTINE v. PLATO

AUGUSTINE — TRANSCENDENTAL SIGNIFIER The Word — UNIFIED SINGULAR IDEAL UNIVERSAL TIMELESS — FORM — PLATO

thought

SIN — The Phenomenal World — senses

Representation SIGN — POLYSEMY — Representation SIGN

thoughts · words · actions

action

speech

writing

FAITH

DIALECTICS

18

NO GAP within the SIGN
NO POLYSEMY

DIVINE INTENT

SIGN — SIGNIFIER = SIGNIFIED

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6

HERMENEUTICS/EXEGESIS

The **assumption** that there is a TRUTH (intent) in texts leads to

a **definition** of interpretation:

HERMENEUTICS: the philosophy of interpretation that assumes that the interpreter's purpose is to DIS-COVER the TRUTH that EXISTS within a text.
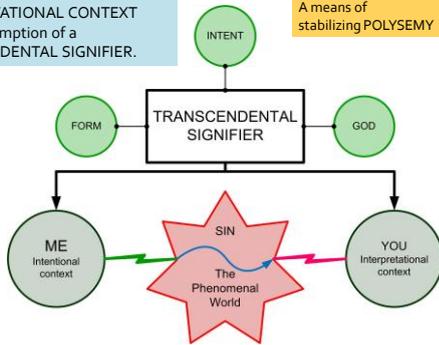
The definition leads to a **method**:

EXEGESIS: a **method** of interpretation which requires the APPLICATION of learned technique to a text for the purpose of REVEALING and explaining its truth and dispelling its apparent ambiguities.

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HERMENEUTICS and EXEGESIS link the INTENTIONAL CONTEXT to the INTERPRETATIONAL CONTEXT via the assumption of a TRANSCENDENTAL SIGNIFIER.

RESULT: A means of stabilizing POLYSEMY

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