

SYMBOLIC TAUTOLOGY, NON-SYMBOLIC PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE “STRUCTURE” OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

CRISTIAN BODEA¹

ABSTRACT. This paper revolves around a logic of thinking that the Lacanian psychoanalysis calls *the logic of the not whole*. Within the confines of this logic, tautology is not only a truth that needs no demonstration, but also the proof that the absolute truth is always missing. In a certain way, the evidence of things being self imposing, it is always easy to fall into the illusion that things exist by themselves. The effect of this illusion is *the thing itself (das Ding)*, claims Marc Richir. In order to avoid the illusion that tautology is creating, Richir indicates that although there are a variety of elements involved by this problem, there is one that underlines the whole development of truth: *Sache* as affair, or as “*something to be done*”. Put in other words, while *das Ding* is an answer, *Sache* is a question waiting to be answered. *Sache* is an empty space, or a gap, which corresponds exactly to *the logic of the not whole*. Because of the *Sache*, the meaning itself becomes a question to be answered. It becomes a *sense-in-the-making*, if we are to use Richir’s idea of *le sens se faisant* which is situated at the core of his non-symbolic phenomenology. Counting on *the logic of the not whole*, this paper is following the consequences that *Sache* and *le sens se faisant* have in language, with the first one corresponding to the concept of the unconscious.

Keywords: act, *jouissance*, knowledge, sense, thing(s), unconscious.

1. Introduction

Taken in its most general sense, as a repetition of the same idea using different means of expression, tautology will help us to formulate a particular conception about the symbolic register and its implications. It is a conception specific to the phenomenology of Marc Richir, according to whom the symbolic, namely language as not restricted to the spoken word, cannot express something really and totally new. Nonetheless, the same author suggests, there is a need for

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Center for Applied Philosophy (CAPH)

a contact with *something* (*Sache*) beyond language, if the opposite is to take place, namely if there is something new to be expressed in language.

Something is not to be confused with the thing itself (*das Ding*). *Something* is not the Thing, it is just *some* thing that escapes language. It can be *any* thing and it is of no consequence what it is, as long as it works. We are not concerned with its attributes. It just is.

This new approach regarding *the thing* is designed to surmount a certain megalomania Marc Richir finds within philosophy. This is also one of the reasons why he proposes his non standard phenomenology, as he calls it. I maintain that there are well-grounded reasons to call his phenomenology a non-symbolic one, instead. As long as his phenomenology is trying to go beyond language, a reduction of the symbolic is necessarily involved.

Since what is to be found beyond language and beyond the symbolic is not the thing (in) itself, and is not *nothing* either, to question the status of this *something* (*Sache*) beyond language becomes unavoidable. Furthermore, what is essential about this phenomenological *Sache* is the fact that it represents “what happens in thought when someone is thinking”².

In one of his seminars³, Jacques Lacan is talking about a “knowledge” not known. Obviously, it is an unconscious knowledge, or the knowledge of the unconscious, as he puts it. Is this knowledge of the unconscious what happens in thought when someone is thinking? This is the main question raised in our paper.

If indeed there is an affinity between *Sache* and the unconscious, it means that thinking can also be found beyond language, along with the unconscious. But, most importantly, it means that there can be thinking without the artificiality of the symbolic. How such thinking is even possible can be properly explained by using Marc Richir’s phenomenology and particularly his idea of the sense-in-the-making (*sens se faisant*).

Keeping this in mind, if there is thinking that cannot be formalized, does this thinking have any relevance for us? Psychoanalysis proves that it does. As long as people continue to suffer from mental illnesses, this unformalized thinking certainly causes all sorts of problems.

2. There Is No Sexual Ratio

The title represents my personal account in translating Lacan’s famous formula: “*il n’ y a pas de rapport sexuel*” introduced by him in 1970. Usually translated as: “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship”, this formula has a

² M. Richir, *Eikasia*, p. 67.

³ Cf. J. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*.

rather "mathematical" implication than, so to say, a sentimental one. That is the reason why I don't think that we should translate *rapport* by using the word *relationship*. According to Lacan, it is not the sexual relation that is impossible, but the sexual proportion, namely a good parity between the sexes; a fact that has something to do with the structure of the unconscious, another famous Lacanian formula being: the unconscious is structured like a language.

Back to the first formula, it is resumed in *Radiophonie* as: "Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel formulable dans la structure"⁴. So, there is no sexual ratio that can be caught up in a structure. This is the same as saying: there isn't such a thing as a scale when it comes to the sexual. It always evades measurability and by that it evades any structure. Does this mean that it evades both the structure of the unconscious and that of the conscious?

When it comes to consciousness, it is not like we cannot speak about sex and sexuality – those times of purism and bashfulness are long gone. It's something else that evades sexuality and that, says Lacan, is a matter of the real.

What is real with regard to sexuality is the *jouissance*.

As a consequence, when we say that there is no sexual ratio it means that when it all comes down to *jouissance* there aren't equivalences between two human beings, whether these human beings are of different sex or not. In a sense, the question of sex is put aside, as sexuality and *jouissance* imply having a relation with the *difference* as such, namely with the *phallus*. That is what Lacan's formulas of sexuation reveal.

For him, sexuation is a matter of choosing one's own position (as far as we can name "choosing" something that is done unconsciously) concerning this master signifier that is the father, namely the one who has the phallus. I will not go deeper into details regarding the technicalities of these formulas of sexuation but the main point is that for someone who is entirely caught up under the law of this master signifier, meaning he is blocked over the question of difference, the side of his sexuation is the one of the man. On the other side of the formulas of sexuation, the side of the woman, there are to be found those who are *not wholly* under the authority of the phallus. The representatives of each gender, male or female, can be found on either side. As a result, the *jouissance* itself is the one that is divided: there is a male and a female one, corresponding to the logic of *the whole*, respectively to the logic of *the not whole*. Surely this logic is reflected by language and represents one way language is sexualized.

If language is sexualized, than *jouissance* can also be found in language. As *jouissance* is a matter of the real – without being the real itself though –, language necessarily pertains to the real as well.

⁴ J. Lacan, *Autres écrits*, p. 413.

According to Lacan, the real is the impossible.

Jouissance deals with this impossibility of the real which is to be found in language. Therefore language, in its *jouissance* dimension, is an *impotent* *jouissance* – I claim – meaning language is *tautological*. Of course there are also moments of fecundity in language, which is equal to say that language can sometimes be creative and full of sense. This implies that there are moments when language creates *something* entirely new and by the instrumentality of this creative act, it reveals the very impossibility with which it is in contact, namely the real.

If there is no sexual ratio, it is because of this real that makes impossible the sexual rapport itself. Returning to the question above: does this real that cannot be apprehended by any structure exceed not only the conscious but also the unconscious? This is the point where the idea of the phenomenological unconscious finds its place.

As long as the unconscious is seen as something structured, the impossibility of the real exceeds the unconscious itself. This means that what is present in this – let's call it by its name – symbolic unconscious, namely the symptom, is, in a way, nothing more than impotent *jouissance*; the symptom is tautological. This is a claim that raises the question regarding the relation between tautology and repetition, as the symptom is something that repeats itself, or, better yet, insists itself – I'll leave this question open.

So, there is this impenetrable core of the symptom in which psychoanalysis is interested, and which leads to the real unconscious – the phenomenological one, in other words. As this unconscious does not have a structure, what lies behind the impossibility of the sexual rapport is contained by the virtuality of the phenomenological unconscious. There certainly is *something* behind, but what exactly *is* cannot be formalised.

3. Phenomenological vs. Symbolical. Sense as *Sense-in-the-making*

According to Marc Richir, the phenomenological unconscious represents the register of the phenomenological freedom. This freedom being one that escapes the structure of any language, it is a kind of *anarchic* freedom, if by this term, anarchism, we employ a certain way of being without a unique principle. This assertion is in contradiction with what Lacan is saying about the *unitary trait* that reflects someone's way of being. But, once again, this only shows the difference between the phenomenological unconscious and the symbolic one.

Phenomenological freedom lays behind language, but not in the same way as the symbolical one does. One thing is to be free in the confines of a

structure, yet entirely another thing is to have unrestricted freedom, beyond any structure. This unrestricted phenomenological freedom is not without its own risks, since such a wild freedom can always bring someone on the verge of madness. Phenomenological freedom is the place from where something new can emerge; it is the very place of creativity. No wonder most of the great artists directly felt this danger that the phenomenological freedom brings about, and sometimes even fell apart because of it.

On the other hand, symbolical freedom offers a certain assurance in terms of one losing his mind; though the price to pay is that of the symptom.

Instead, to be without symptom, as Lacanian psychoanalysis indicates from time to time, is similar of being in this creative state that, nevertheless, can cause problems. To be without symptom is a problem connected to the question, raised by Lacan, of the real unconscious.

Bottom-line, what Richir named the phenomenological unconscious is the same as the one called by Lacan the real unconscious. And this point of convergence between non-symbolic phenomenology and psychoanalysis represents a guideline in constituting my argument.

Back to the phenomenological vs. symbolical, there still remains a *hiatus* between the two. The gap that keeps them apart is exactly the real / the phenomenological unconscious. And it is here, in this gap, that meaning takes shape. From a phenomenological point of view the sense is only sense-in-the-making or, as Marc Richir puts it, only a *presentment* of the sense to come.

Sense-in-the-making (*sens se faisant*) is a concept Richir uses in order to show that there is more to be involved in the sense/ the meaning, than the simple fact that it provides cognitive data to our conscious. Sense as sense-in-the-making engages not only unconscious dispositions pertaining to someone who uses language, but it also implies the fact that our body is caught up as well in this process. The body Marc Richir is referring to is the one Husserl names *Leib*, the body as *lived*, different from *Körper*, the body as "material" object.

Sense-in-the-making contains all this so called wild essences (*Wesen sauvages*) that remind us of a certain "synaesthesia" concerning sense formation. But this *state of anarchy* proper to the sense-in-the-making is coming to an end immediately after a sense is uttered. This doesn't happen gradually, but by a determined act that... (*de*)*terminates* the sense. It's an act that brings order into this state of anarchy, and particularly because of that, it is possible for *something* to be said.

This idea takes us back to the Lacanian psychoanalysis, for which the *act* is an important concept. To act is to have a certain relation with the phallus, and that *something* beyond language remains untold unless such a relation is

established. In the event that the relation with the phallus is missing, what lies beyond language becomes *a thing* that is present as such in hallucinations – the characteristics of the psychotic states.

4. Knowledge and to Know How to Act

With regard to knowledge, Lacan says that it is paranoid.

The paranoia being a state in which the phallus is problematic, as it is missing, the paranoiac tries to fill the gap of the missing phallus by creating empty images of it. It is only because of these creations that the paranoiac can enjoy something. He is delusional in his knowledge, that's why he creates a story conducted in such a way so that *the other* is to be blamed for the persecutory fact of the phallus that is missing. That which was meant to regulate, to give a *ratio* to the institution of meaning, is not doing its job, but on the contrary, makes things worse. That is why the paranoid needs to create his delusions: to give a meaning, namely to manage somehow to situate himself in language.

As there is no sexual ratio, he tries to compensate this lack, not by signifying it with the help of the phallus, as we all normally do. Instead, he tries to fill the gap as if he doesn't want to know about such an impossibility regarding the sexual. By his denial, the paranoiac is, in fact, very aware of the impossibility as such. What is for us (and by us I am referring to the majority of people, the neurotics) hidden by the indeterminacy of the unconscious, for the paranoiac it is "hidden" in the plain sight, so to say. It is there, hidden in his delusions.

But isn't it true that, in a certain way, we all try to forget this impossibility of the sexual? In other words, isn't it true that we all try to leave aside the fact that language is tautological and also the fact that saying something really meaningful is not a matter of plain volition? The answer is *yes*, and that's why Lacan postulates knowledge as being paranoid.

Knowledge is *paranoid* but not *paranoiac*. So, this doesn't mean that we are all paranoiacs but that in our way of thinking we kind of *act* like paranoiacs. It's like we don't really want to know about this impossibility and we wish it wouldn't be true. Nevertheless, we know it to be true, and we only *think* we have the phallus, without actually having it.

The phallus is operant for us. All that we can create is not a delusion but a fantasy. As Lacan says in *Ornicar*, "Knowledge is a fantasy that is only for enjoyment/*jouissance*". So, knowledge is a fantasy. That's why knowledge is paranoid (and not paranoiac).

As such that is, made for *jouissance*, knowledge still misses the *jouissance* as a whole, says Lacan. Because of this failure knowledge is the one that subverts the subject.

So, knowledge is a means of *jouissance*. This statement is also present as a chapter title in the edited seminar of Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. What exactly is this *other side* of psychoanalysis? It represents, according to Lacan, the master's discourse, the same as the discourse of the philosophical tradition.

On the other side, concerning the philosophical discourse, there is to be found the discourse of the master: that's why Lacan is a non-philosopher. He is not exactly against philosophy as it is often pointed out; it's only that he is not a *master* (or, at least, that's what he pretends). This fact puts him on the other side of philosophy, on the verso, thus making him a non-philosopher.

Marc Richir, although a person for whom philosophy represents his *raison d'être*, is nevertheless critical of what he calls *the megalomania of the philosophers*. So, it seems both Richir and Lacan are on the same page regarding the master's discourse. Because what does this megalomania Richir is critical of involve, if not exactly the master's discourse?

It is easy to see that all this talk around megalomania or the master's discourse has something to do with the paranoia, or at least with the fact that knowledge is paranoid. Since being paranoid implies, as I mentioned above, a concealment (not a denial like the paranoiac's) of the fact that there is no sexual ratio, the phallus is not taken properly in its dimension of lacking. This means that it is quite easy for someone to think that he really has the phallus. To have the phallus is the main trait of the master discourse.

So, the master has the phallus (supposedly). If this is the truth of the master, then the truth of the psychoanalysis represents the fact that the phallus is lacking. That's why there is a certain analytic subversion at work, one that the psychoanalyst facilitates. What this subversion implies is nothing more than the castration of the master.

As I said before, knowledge itself is subversive. So, the cause of the master's castration is to be found in his own knowledge, not in the knowledge of the analyst. Since there is no parity between one's and the other's *jouissance*, there can be no parity between the two types of knowledge. What one knows is entirely something else than what the other knows. For the master the *jouissance* follows the path of the *whole*, while for the analyst the *jouissance* follows the path of the *not whole*.

As a paradigm for the master's discourse Lacan uses Socrates' dialogue with the slave (see Socratic dialogue *Meno*). When Socrates proves that the slave

knows something and all that remains for him to do is to extract the knowledge from the slave, he assumes for himself the role of the master. This represents the birth of the *episteme*, Lacan maintains.

The slave is the one who knows how to do things despite the fact that he doesn't have a theory about what he does. On the other hand, there is the master who knows things, but doesn't necessarily act upon it. He is a free thinker whose capital (the knowledge) is produced by the slave. But, Lacan says, it is not the work that produces *jouissance*, but the knowledge. To "know how to" is therefore a different type of knowledge, different from the knowledge that produces *jouissance*. But is this the type of *jouissance* the one that he, the master, is aiming at?

Around this question revolves the outcome of the analytical cure. If the answer is "yes", then the cure doesn't fulfil its purpose. If the answer is "no", then its subversive role was fulfilled. This means that the subject leaves the place where he was situated before, namely the place of the master, in search for the *other jouissance*.

To "know how to do things" doesn't simply produce *jouissance*, but the *other jouissance*. Indeed "words make love with one another", as André Breton says. Nevertheless, the signifiers don't. This means that to "know how to do things" operates strictly at the level of the signifiers, which are transcendental. It doesn't concern the words; that's why the *Other*, namely language, is barred.

5. Conclusion

When speaking from a non-symbolic phenomenology perspective, the place where the pure signifiers and the sense-in-the-making are to be found, the barred language indicates the *beyond* of the symbolic register. Marc Richir uses sense-in-the-making to emphasize the fact that sense is never fully presented to us. It contains this *Wesen sauvages*, this *wild essences* that remain utterly impossible to be put in words. Just like the signifiers.

Even though the signifiers cannot be formalized, they still exercise influence inside language. They are not to be found in words, but between words. Even so, they are there, the same way that the phenomenological is always present in the symbolic institution, according to Marc Richir. Regarding the Richirian symbolic institution, a certain type of passivity is needed. Better yet, an *active* passivity, as Husserl once stated regarding the synthesis.

Husserl's theory of intentionality as active or passive synthesis is not to be restricted to this dualistic view. There is also this active passivity that

involves the subject in *a non conscious way*, if I may say so. Because of this, the logic of the whole seems to be surpassed by Husserl. The fact that the *not whole* is comprised within the conscious leaves room for nothing else than the unconscious.

Anyway, Husserl is not a theoretician of the unconscious. But Freud – his contemporary (both attending Franz Brentano's classes at one point) – is. And his theory about sexuality places on the side of the unconscious both the passive and the active state of the subject; even though only for a short time, as he quickly renounce this dualistic view of his theory in favour of a unified one.

In other words, what I am trying to emphasize is that both these "fathers", one of Phenomenology, the other one of Psychoanalysis, found inside the framework of their own systems the *truth* Lacan is speaking of, namely that knowledge is in itself subversive. And this is exactly what makes them founding fathers.

According to Lacan, "knowledge is something spoken, something that is said [...] Knowledge that speaks all by itself – that's the unconscious"⁵. If knowledge is to be regarded as paranoid, then it is so only as long as it is spoken. On the other hand, when knowledge speaks by itself, it breaks the so called structure of the unconscious to go beyond, right into the realm of the real where the phenomenological freedom is to be found. This freedom implies a certain responsibility on the part of the subject, an acknowledgement of the sexual difference and, consequently, an acknowledgement of the missing phallus. This is done according to a certain innocence, not a maturity as we may think; it is an innocence placed by Richir on the side of the phenomenological unconscious.

I maintain that for Lacan, the real can be found in this place of the phenomenological unconscious, namely of the real unconscious. The real taken in this way implies an ethics of the real which is the one Psychoanalysis stands for. It's an acknowledgement of the fact that even though the phallus is missing, there still is something beyond language, namely the *Sache* (something). That's why any creation is not a creation *ex nihilo* but it has *something* to do with *some thing* that the language touches.

⁵ J. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, p. 70.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Lacan Jacques, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
Lacan Jacques, "Radiophonie" in *Autres écrits*, Seuil, 2001.
Plato, *Meno*, Focus, 1998.
Richir Marc, "La refonte de la phenomenology", *Eikasia*, september/ 2011, pp. 55-71.
Richir Marc, *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique*, Ed. Jérôme Millon, 1988.
Soler Colette, *Lacan - The Unconscious Reinvented*, Karnac Books, 2014.