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HETEROGENEITY OF THE FREUDIAN SIGN: KRISTEVA'S SEMIOTIC CHORA AND LACAN'S NOTION OF LALANGUE

ABSTRACT

In this contribution, our aim is to explore and analyse the interplay between the approaches of Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan during the 1970s. By seeking to transcend the limitations inherent in the structuralist framework, both authors endeavour to introduce new concepts that can account for the heterogeneity of Freudian sign. Previous studies examining the relationship between these two authors predominantly focused on Kristeva's critique of Lacanian structuralist theory during the 1950s. From this standpoint, the semiotic *chora* is perceived as a force that fundamentally challenges Lacanian concepts. However, it is important to note that Kristeva was acquainted with Lacan's later teachings, particularly the notion of *lalangue* that he introduced. Our argument posits that her critique stems from a misinterpretation of certain key concepts that Lacan put forth in the 1970s. Moreover, while Lacan would abandon the dialectical relationship in favour of the logic of triplicity, Kristeva continued to engage with the notion of heterogeneity through the lens of Hegelian dialectics.

KEYWORDS

semiotic *chora*,
lalangue, Kristeva,
Lacan, Hegel, Name of
the Father, *sinthome*,
dialectics, letter,
topology

Introduction

Both Kristeva and Lacan dedicated a large part of their teaching to the pivotal role that language acquisition plays in psychic life. During the structuralist phase of Lacan's teachings, he underscored the dialectical interplay between the symbolic and the imaginary realms. The paternal metaphor, substituting the enigmatic desire of the mother by the privileged signifier Name-of-the-Father, institutes the order in the chaotic world of the imaginary and makes the signification process operative.

The majority of authors see Lacan's and Kristeva's approaches as completely opposed, with Kristeva giving the central place to the maternal, non-conceptual signification in the opposition of the privileged position that paternal law and conceptual signification have in Lacanian theory (Barzilai 1991, McAfee



2004, Sjöholm 2005). In their arguments, they start from Lacan's classical definition of the signifier as "what represents the subject to another signifier" (Lacan 2005: 693) and the sign as what "represents something for someone" (Lacan 1998a: 207). This linguistic turn in psychoanalysis is based on the Saussurean idea of language as a closed differential system of linguistic signs. But while the Saussurean sign is composed of the signifier and the signified, Lacan's symbolic order is marked by the primacy of signifiers, which are defined only by their opposition to other signifiers. For Lacan, language is the system of signifiers. The subject of the unconscious appears as the effect of language. Language is its cause and thereby it is split already by the fact of entering the symbolic. On the other hand, according to Kristeva, while the symbolic refers to the underlying structures and laws of language and society, the semiotic refers to the layers of signification that are irreducible to those laws. The signifying process can be grasped only through the dialectical relation between the two modalities of the symbolic and semiotic. Thus, the idea of semiotic *chora* establishes a sphere that logically precedes the inscription of the symbolic and presupposes the subject of the semiotic as the subject-in-process, the one that always brings every structure into question. These commentators (Barzilai 1991, McAfee 2004, Sjöholm 2005) see in the semiotic *chora* the dominance of pre-Oedipal which introduces another aspect of subjectivity that couldn't be grasped from the perspective of Lacanian structuralism.

On the other hand, some authors seek to assimilate Kristeva's approach to the Lacanian one, acknowledging Lacan's influence on Kristeva's work (Elliott 2005, Balsam 2014). Indeed, throughout her work, Kristeva never abandoned the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father as the specific mechanism that characterizes the psychotic structure, nor did she neglect the structuring function of the Third, necessary to condense semiotic content into linguistic signs and to transform the mother into an object, an Other, and not an abject. Even when postulating the mediating role of the imaginary father in the process from dependence on the abjected mother to identification with the symbolic paternal law, as found in her later works, she acknowledges the importance of the loved father, which Lacan saw as crucial for the resolution of the Oedipus complex (Rae 2019).

Both readings can be valid for the structuralist period of Lacan's teaching. However, we argue that the complexity of their relationship becomes further nuanced in light of Lacan's later teachings, marked by the introduction of knots and a heightened emphasis on the *jouissance* and the real. Hence, it becomes imperative to scrutinize the relationship between Lacan's final teachings and Kristeva's contemporaneous works, transcending simplistic critiques or reductionist readings.

An often-overlooked aspect in discussions of their works is that Kristeva was familiar with Lacan's later elaborations. In her essay "Within the Microcosm of 'The Talking Cure'" Kristeva proceeds with her "critical reading of Lacan" (Kristeva 1983: 33) to suggest an analytical attentiveness to the discourse of borderline patients and the types of interpretation it elicits from the analyst.

According to her, Lacan's notion of *lalangue*, denoting the interplay of meaning and *jouissance*, the domain of equivocation, is seen as "a fundamental refinement into the relation between the unconscious and language previously elaborated" (Kristeva 1983: 34). However, it does not solve the problem of speaking being split into irreconcilable heterogeneity. In her view, *lalangue* integrates the realm of meaning into the field of psychoanalysis. Although meaning is never totalizable and is continually perforated by nonsense, it is made homogeneous with the realm of signification to the point of assimilating the irreducible Freudian dualism between the instinctual drive and affect. Her argument is summarized in the following citation: "No matter how impossible the real might be, once it is made homogeneous with *lalangue*, it finally becomes part of a topology with the imaginary and the symbolic, a part of that trinary hold from which nothing escapes, not even the 'hole', since it too is part of the structure" (Kristeva 1983: 35). Therefore, the topology, as the "formalization of discourse on the subject", whether "a symbolic or an imaginary tool" (Kristeva 1983: 36), is seen as unsuitable.

However, contrary to Kristeva's position, we argue that such criticisms stem from a number of key misreadings regarding Lacan's conception of *lalangue* and the status of topology. During this period of Kristeva's teaching, the symbolic is theorized through the relation to the other as object, as introduced by Melanie Klein. The symbolic is mediated through the effects of a relation to a primary object. It is through the interplay of primitive mechanisms as defined in the Kleinian paradigm that the semiotic continuously challenge (in the form of speech disturbances) or transgress (in the poetic language) the symbolic law. Therefore, Kristeva kept the container-contained dynamic as the basis through which drives are continually recreating the object. On the other hand, Lacan's later works move towards reconceptualizing the subject and departing from Euclidean geometry's spatial dichotomy interior-exterior.

We begin this study by examining the particularities of the semiotic *chora*, which was introduced by Kristeva in *The Subject in the Process*, in 1972, further elaborated in numerous essays published during the following years. Subsequently, the primordial status of the object as the abject, introduced in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in 1980, is discussed. Furthermore, we scrutinize Lacan's paradigmatic shift in the 1970s, particularly regarding the evolving conception of *jouissance* and the concept of *lalangue*. Last, we argue that the Kristeva's critique doesn't take into account the double status of the realm of the real, evidenced in Lacan's last teaching.

By exploring the interaction between Lacan and Kristeva, this study aims to provide fresh insights into the ongoing debate. This debate revolves around authors who view the register of the real solely as the imminent antagonism of the symbolic, as discussed by scholars such as Žižek (2016) and Espinoza Lolas (2023). Conversely, other authors acknowledge the double status of the real: not only as the immanent antagonism of the symbolic but also as a realm beyond the symbolic (Miller 2012, Soler 2014).

1. What Is Lawless, but Still Subjected to the Regulation Process: Kristeva's Semiotic *Chora*

Starting from the early period of her work, Kristeva places the heterogeneity of the signifying process at the forefront. On one hand, this heterogeneity can be present as a transgression of the symbolic order, as seen in poetic language. On the other hand, it manifests itself as the irruption of prosodic elements that tend to decompose the stable meanings and stability of the signifier, as seen in the discourse of psychosis. Acknowledging this heterogeneity involves seeing a symbolic function as a product of dialectic between two separate modalities: the semiotic, emanating from instinctual drives and primary processes, and the symbolic, assimilable to secondary processes, predicative synthesis, and judgment. Language encompasses the inseparable interplay of these two modalities within the process of signification. As Kristeva states: "Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (Kristeva 1984: 24).

According to Kristeva, the child is born with drives. Following Freud, she defines these drives as "energetic but already semiotic charges, junctures of the psychic and the somatic" that "extract the body from its homogeneous shell and turn it into a space linked to the outside; they are the forces that mark out the *chora* in process" (Kristeva 1998: 164). Discrete energy quantities traverse the subject's body, still not posited as such, and throughout its development, these energies conform to the diverse limitations imposed on the body. In this manner, the drives give shape to the *chora*, "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (Kristeva 1984: 25). More precisely, the *chora* portrays a mobile and extremely provisional rhythmic articulation, which logically and genetically precedes spatiality and temporality and is analogous only to vocal and kinetic rhythm. Linguistics should therefore take speech practice as its object, "letting its boundaries be shifted by the advent of the semiotic rhythm that no system of linguistic communication has yet been able to assimilate" (Kristeva 1980: 24).

The notion of *chora*, although abandoned in her later teaching¹, stays the key concept for understanding her work on the relation between language and drives. The term is borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*, who defines it as "a space, which exists forever and is indestructible" (Plato 2008: 42). Kristeva uses it in a singular way to grasp the complexity of the "Freud's sign" (Kristeva 1983: 37), which is conceived as "a complicated concept built up from various impressions", "an intricate process of associations entered into by elements of visual, acoustic, and kinesthetic origins" (Freud 1953: 77). It is that heterogeneity, although the acoustic image will be privileged in later Freudian texts, that does not permit any reduction of "Freud's sign" to the Saussurean one.

1 Kristeva progressively abandoned the notion of semiotic *chora*, as she started to accentuate the central role that imaginary father plays in the constitution of the subjectivity. See: Kristeva (1987, 1988).

Although semiotic *chora* is deprived of unity and identity, although it is not yet a sign, nor a signifier, it is from the *chora* that all thetic positioning, representation and signification depend. Furthermore, even preceding the symbolic law, *chora* is not anarchic. Kristeva makes a distinction between a law and ordering, as a preceding mediation on the level of concrete operations: “its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering*, which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between sexes or family structure” (Kristeva 1984: 27). Its expression is channeled by expulsions, drive discharges and pre-Oedipal semiotic functions that orient the body to the mother. Dominated by the oral and anal drives, death drives, the semiotized body is a place of permanent scission. These impulses are both directed and structured around the mother’s body, so that it becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations. This ordering is than specific to every child, depending on its relation with the particular primary object.

The semiotic, as pre-thetic, precedes the posited subject with regard to the object, since Kristeva conceives that the thetic positions are initiated by the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex. The semiotic precedes the semantics, which is produced by the thetic, introducing the cut, the rupture, and a stability of any possible position - posited subject of the signifier as already absent, posited object as the lost object. Therefore, the thetic is thought of as a break that produces signification: “the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects” (Kristeva 1984: 43). We find the thetic phase of the signifying process at two points: the mirror stage and the discovery of castration (that is to say, the resolution of the Oedipal complex). Already in the mirror stage, the fragmented body finds itself unified in the representation. The first holophrastic elements occurring at that age testify to what will later become integrated as a signifier. Finally, castration pushes the process of separation even further by positing the subject as signifiable, always confronted by an other: *imago* (signified) and semiotic process (signifier). The perception of the lack marks the end of the dependence on the mother, confines *jouissance* to the genital, and transfers semiotic mobility onto the symbolic order. However, the traces of the semiotic always threaten the stability of the symbolic by the potential influx of the death drive and the tendency to breach primal repression. Although the semiotic *chora* is the precondition of the symbolic, Kristeva underlines the logical and chronological priority of the symbolic in any organization of the semiotic: “Neurotics and psychotics are defined as such by their relationship to what we are calling the thetic. We now see why, in treating them, psychoanalysis can only conceive of semiotic mobility as a disturbance of language and/or the order of the signifier” (Kristeva 1984: 50). By following the Kleinian way of thought, she argues that the pre-Oedipal stages are analytically unthinkable, and their functioning appears only in the complete, post-genital handling of language.

Kristeva opposes the idea of a static subject or a unary subject and instead proposes the subject in process as “functioning by way of reiteration of

the break and separation, as a multiplicity of expulsions, insuring its infinite renewal” (Kristeva 1998: 134). The dialectic between the two heterogeneous realms, semiotic and symbolic, is governed by the work of negativity, which is both “the cause and the organizing principle of the process” (Kristeva 1984: 110). Kristeva takes the concept of negativity from Hegel, but while for him it belongs to a contemplative theoretical system, she links it to the materiality of the Freudian theory of the drives. This negativity has a tendency to suppress thethetic position and is different from negation. While negation in judgment (“No”) articulates an opposition and is itself a symbolic function positing the unitary subject, negativity proposes a heteronomy, a repulsion that returns by attacking this “No”: the Name of the Father, the superego, language itself, and the primal repression that imposes it. The subject in process is multiplied, mobile, and a-filial.

The concept of negativity becomes equivalent to expulsion through reference to Freud’s text on *Negation*. According to Freud, the pleasure ego precedes the reality ego and the distinction between inside and outside: “the original pleasure ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to reject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego, and what is external are, to begin with, identical” (Freud 1953b: 237). Judgment is only made possible by the formation of the symbol of negation, which succeeds expulsion and introduces the possibility of repression. Freud organizes the opposition between affirmation and negation as a replication of introjection and expulsion, both derived from the same drive dynamics between Eros and the death drive. Kristeva invites us to leave the domain of the symbolic function, which already absorbs negativity within the predicate, and to consider the process of rejection that pulsates through the drives in the body, which is already caught within the network of nature and society. In her view, *Autoss-tossung* or *Ververfung*, which she links to concrete operations at the linguistic level, is a basic biological process of scission, separation, and division that always links the splitting body to family structure and nature. It is the space of the non-symbolized negativity, a pre-verbal function, and the precondition of the positing of the real object as external, but always only thinkable as inherent to any thesis. Expulsion establishes an outside, but one that is always in the process of being posited: “Expulsion reconstitutes real objects, or rather it is the creation of new objects; in this sense it re-invents the real and re-semiotizes it” (Kristeva 1998: 147). It is a separation that is not a lack but a discharge in accordance with the pleasure principle. At the same time, it has a constitutive function as a path towards positing the object as forever lost and thus signifiable, as well as towards the formation of the superego.

The symbolic function requires the repression of destructive anality, the anal phase preceding the separation of the ego from the id. This means that the symbolic function presupposes renunciation of the pleasure of expulsion and the suppression of anality. In the pleasure derived from expulsion, Kristeva sees the Kleinian assumption of the attack against the expelled object and all exterior objects, including parts of one’s own body and the mother’s body. The

cases of child schizophrenia show us the violence of rejection and anal pleasure when no mediation by Oedipal identification is possible. The return of rejection immobilizes the body and disturbs the symbolic chains, blocking the symbolic capacity and the acquisition of language (Klein 1930, Klein 1946). In adults, the return of anality breaks the linearity of the signifying chain. Kristeva will say that, using the Freudian term introduced in his *Project* (1953a), repeated and returned rejection opposes repression and reintroduces “free energy” into “bound energy”. But what is the nature of that strange primary object, not yet perceived as the other, neither posited nor still signifiable?

2. The *Abject*: The Primordial Status of the Primary Object

In order to grasp the mysterious nature of Kleinian primary object, Kristeva will introduce the concept of *abject*. That concept makes her approach more consistent and is paradigmatic for understanding her teaching.

The abjection is the precondition for the child to exit the symbiotic bond with his mother and develop his own ego. Therefore, it is the precondition for narcissism. The *abject* is not an object, since it lacks the static, conceptual clarity of objectivity. On the other hand, even though it lies quite close, it cannot be assimilated. It is defined as “the twisted braid of affects and thoughts” that do not have “properly speaking, a definable object” (Kristeva 1982: 1). The *abject* is not an object facing the I, which can be named or imagined. Being opposed to the I is its only quality of the object. Contrary to an object, it “is radically excluded and draws me to the place where meaning collapses”. Without a sign for it, it appeals to a discharge, a convulsion. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object: “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (Kristeva 1982: 2). But also, “the abject would ... be the object of primal repression” (Kristeva 1982: 12). What causes abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982: 4). For Kristeva, the unconscious is dependent on the dialectic of negativity. We should think of abjection as the first attempt at separation before we can make use of any symbolic signification.

After defining the main concepts of her conceptual apparatus, we can now turn to the question of language acquisition. On the one side, Kristeva starts from the assumptions of the theory of object relations. More precisely, she evokes the work of Hanna Segal who sees the “symbolic equations” (concrete thoughts of schizophrenics) characteristic for the paranoid-schizoid position, preceding the words as the repairers, the object perceived as total and the differentiated from the ego, characteristic for the depressive position (Segal 1952). There is something (“symbolic equations”) that precedes the signifier. On the other hand, she criticizes the Segal explanation, which postulates from the beginning the existence of an ego and an object. For Kristeva, everything indicates a fusional dyad with the mother, where differentiation is problematic and the ego is entirely unstable. What will be the object is an *abject*, and the ego can

perceive only void, emptiness and injury. Such an ego produces the infantile echolalia to try to feel the hole. The “good enough mother” (term introduced by Kohut, but which Kristeva use to grasp the process in question) hears this “void” and directs it towards the father – that is to say towards the Symbol, the Third. It is only by the structuring function of the Third that those fragmented elements will become condensed into signs and mother will become an object, an Other, and not an abject (Kristeva 1983). Kristeva reintroduces the process in structural approach, claiming that the subject is not reducible to the signifier, but is also a subject in process.

In the same period, Lacan underwent a paradigmatic shift in his understanding of the concept of *jouissance*. This led him to abandon the notion of the primacy of the symbolic realm and to redefine the relationship between language and the drives. In the next section of this study, we will delve into this paradigmatic change, which laid the groundwork for the concept of *lalangue*.

3. From *Jouissance* as Language to Language as *Jouissance*

Despite its central importance in Lacanian theory, the concept of *jouissance* remains inherently elusive, undergoing multiple reinterpretations throughout Lacan’s teachings. For the purposes of this study, we emphasize the difference in understanding this concept between Lacan’s structuralist phase and his views during the seventies.

During the fifties, Lacan theorized the symbolic order in its autonomy, independent of all reference to the body. He was trying to establish its laws taking the inspiration from the structural linguistics. The drives are structured in terms of language. They are capable of metonymy and metaphor and linked to the demand (Lacan 2017b: 129–234). The *jouissance* linked to the question of desire is a mortified *jouissance*. It is the *jouissance* that has already passed to the signifier. In the upper part of the famous graph of desire, we have a trajectory from *jouissance* to castration, that achieves its significantisation (Lacan 2017b: 371–382, Lacan 2018: 3–42). Therefore, the drive is reduced to a signifying chain. The signifier annuls *jouissance*, which returns in the form of signified desire.

The only contact with the living body at that time of Lacan’s elaboration is a fantasy, since it puts together the imaginary *a* and the signifying structure, while the barred subject refers merely to a signifying function (Lacan 2018: 357–374).

In the sixties, Lacan conceptualize *jouissance* as the real. In his seminar *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, the *jouissance* is linked to the *das Ding*, what is outside of symbolic and imaginary realm (Lacan 1997: 43–70). The *jouissance* is radically separated from the signifier and the image. This moment of his teaching puts an emphasis on a profound disjunction between the signifier and image and the real *jouissance*. Here, the opposition between the desire and *das Ding* reflects the opposition between the pleasure and *jouissance*.

In the following years, Lacan will think the relation between the signifier and that which is beyond the symbolization in terms of object *a*, as the mediation between *das Ding* and the Other. Firstly, the object *a* appears as the real

object, produced by the separation (Lacan 1998a: 216–229), to find itself fully articulated in terms of *surplus-jouissance*, during the seminar on discourses as the social bonds (Lacan 2006b).

We can argue, although such a claim is necessarily a schematized simplification, that Lacan's teaching moved from the autonomy of symbolic and dialectics of symbolic and imaginary realm, during the fifties, towards the dialectics between the symbolic and the real during the sixties. Starting from the seventies, the new use of topology of knots introduced a radical cut. The three realms of symbolic, imaginary, and real are no longer perceived as hierarchically organized but as entirely equivalent. Also, the new conception of the relation between *jouissance* and the language is introduced.

In his seminar XX, Lacan begins with the fact of *jouissance*, while the very concepts of language and the Other are now seen as derivative. They are derivative comparing to *lalangue*, defined as the speech before its grammatical and lexicographical order. The speech primarily serves for *jouissance*, and not communication.

The whole last teaching of Lacan rests on the fundamental non-rapport between the *jouissance* and the Other. There is no rapport between the two, but “there's such a thing as One (*Y a d' l'Un*)” (Lacan 1998: 5). It is the One of the *jouissance* of the living body. Being at the same time the speaking body (*parlêtre*), the body enjoys itself by the act of speaking.

By making the living body the place of the *jouissance*, Lacan orients his theory towards the realm of the real. This guided him to revise some of the major concepts of the previous periods of his teaching. We proceed by exploring some of these important revisions.

4. What in Signifying Materiality Precedes the Signifier: Lacan's Notion of *Lalangue*

Searching to surpass his own definition of the unconscious as a mere effect of the language, Lacan will be guided to substitute his concept of the subject of the unconscious by the concept of *parlêtre*. The introduction of knots and a new doctrine of the autonomy of the letter facilitated this paradigmatic shift by emphasizing the *jouissance* of speech. Therefore, we will proceed by elucidating the interconnection between three pivotal concepts in this phase of Lacan's teachings: *parlêtre*, letter, and *lalangue*.

Once named by Lacan in 1971, on the occasion of a slip of tongue, Lacan underlines that “*lalangue* has nothing to do with the dictionary, whatever kind of dictionary it is” (Lacan 2017a: 12). *Lalangue* precedes Saussurian sign - the structure, the Other of language - and opens up questions about the One of *jouissance* and its drives: “Language without doubt is made of *lalangue*. It is knowledge's harebrained lucubration about *lalangue*” (Lacan 1998: 139). The idea that language is firstly made for enjoying, and not for communicating, Lacan will express in following way: “I think...therefore it enjoys” (Lacan 2021: 8). The structure of language is secondary comparing to that enjoyment.

Lalangue illustrates the *jouissance* of speech, the libidinous aspect of language, a mode of drive gratification that has nothing to do with the message speech conveys, but with the act of enunciation itself (Vanheule 2016: 152–154). The moment a person speaks, signifying articulation drains *jouissance* from the body. As Lacan puts it in his seminar *Les non-dupes errent*: “It is from *lalangue* that proceeds what I will not hesitate to call the animation of the *jouissance* of the body. If the body in its motor skills is animated, it comes from a privileged *jouissance*, distinct from that of the body.” It is the word that Lacan chooses to make it as much as possible close to “lallation” or “bubbling”, stipulating that “it is no coincidence at all that, whatever language it is that one receives the first imprint of, words are equivocal” (Lacan 1985: 14). He refuses to attribute to mere chance the fact that *ne* (not) is pronounced the same as the word *nœud* (knot), that the word *pas* (not) sounds the same as the word *un pas* (a step). It is the way in which language has been spoken and also heard, in its particularity, that something subsequently emerges in the formations of the unconscious. It is in the *moterialism* – the neologism made from the word *mot* (word) – the materiality of the words, that the unconscious takes hold. That sonorous element is the only one that is consonant with the unconscious, and it only appears in the mother tongue since only the mother tongue was articulated in the first place as babbling (Lacan 2022).

The same year that *lalangue* was introduced, Lacan established a clear distinction between the letter and the signifier: “the letter is the signifier that there is no Other” (Lacan 2006a: 108). If the letter is the signifier that there is no Other, it is because it brings the Other to its logical inconsistency. The Other of language serves to mask the fact of the inexistence of the sexual relation. On the level of the letter, nothing implies the existence of the Other as the necessary effect.

That difference becomes more explicit in the text *Lituraterre*. The neologism that we find in the title comes from the equivocation between the Latin words *littera* and *litura*. But it also refers to the Joycean equivocation which makes the movement from the letter to the litter (Lacan 2013c). This text aims to demonstrate the relation between the letter and *jouissance*. The letter becomes litter, waste, as it loses the relation to any possible meaning. The effect of the *jouissance* of the letter wipes out all the meanings at stake. The letter becomes the effect of what is detached from the domain of the signifier.

The idea of the signifier as an articulation of differential elements, a connection of elements that might be isolated, is replaced by the imprecision of form and the inconsistency of signifying materiality. This is why the letter is situated as a border (*littoral*) (Lacan 2013c: 32) between two heterogeneous registers. The letter is as much at the service of knowledge as it is at the service of *jouissance*, hence its status as a border. It is situated beyond its symbolic function. Therefore, the real emerges as a dimension impermeable to the effects of signification. The structure of language is now considered as having no hold on *jouissance*. In this perspective, the letter designates the isolated element that is precipitated from language. Contrary to the definition of the signifier that

implies this oppositional relationship, the letter appears as a signifier that is not articulated to another signifier, but to *jouissance* itself. The letter thus becomes an effect of the symbolic in the body. It is the symbolic unit that marks the body as a support of *jouissance*, hence its specificity of being both symbolic and real. Being non-interpretable, it challenges the idea of the unconscious structured as a language.

That guides leads Lacan to redefine the concept of the symptom. The symptom is no longer conceived as something that has a meaning that should be deciphered (S1-S2). Rather, it is a *jouissance* provided by the reiteration of a letter, without ever relating to the other signifier (S1-a): “An opaque *jouissance* that excludes meaning” (Lacan 2001: 570). Here, the notion of the subject of the unconscious is no longer sufficient. Instead of the symptom as the hidden meaning, the new definition demonstrates the relation between the letter and the symptom. The signifying chain is then reduced to a swarm of S1, which produces an enigmatic effect at the level of the signified. Therefore, Lacan could say that Joyce abolishes the symbol, that Joyce “cancelled his subscription to the unconscious” (Lacan 2016: 144). The symptom as the S1-a introduces the pure *jouissance* of the master signifier. It is the unconscious detached from the relation to the subject supposed to know, “the unconscious being real” (Lacan 2001: 571).

The definition of the unconscious as real leads Lacan to replace the term unconscious with that of *parlêtre*. This notion implies the body of the speaking being, the body as affected by the unconscious. This is what allows him to affirm that the real “is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” (Lacan 1998: 131). But what is that mystery of the speaking body? It seems that the mystery resides precisely in the effect of *jouissance* of the signifier as the letter, which stays enigmatic and indecipherable. It is in function of this opacity that Lacan replaces the term language with that of *lalangue*. With his concept of *lalangue*, he reduces language to the dimension of equivocation, where meaning always remains uncertain. Language is now defined by its capacity to produce equivocations, and no more thought in terms of structure. It is not a structure synchronically ordered. There are no previously discernable elements in *lalangue*. This is why it is presented as essentially diachronic, always leaving a space for invention: “The One incarnated in *lalangue* is something that remains indeterminate between the phoneme, the word, the sentence and even the whole of thought” (Lacan 1998: 143). Lacan underlines that structure is secondary to what we hear at the diachronic level. *Lalangue* is the realm of the One.

The language as a structure can be completely reduced to the negative relations between the linguistic signs, which are defined only by their opposition to other signs, with their sensorial and phonetic qualities reduced to the formalities. In contrast, *lalangue* is positive and affirmative, but it is also punctual, as no homophonic word is related to another. It manifests itself in separate word plays, and there is no possibility of thinking the network of homophonous pairs. While language is constituted as a whole and expressed by grammatical

rules, *lalangue* always opens up to the unlimited infinity of homophony. The signifier is therefore a linguistic construction that supposes annulation of the sound material, where all of homophonies are produced (Miller 2021a). A point of the insertion of language requires the repression of homophonous repetition of phonemes.

As *lalangue* participates as a whole, language needs an element that doesn't belong to it – the exception being the very requirement of the thetic position. Miller uses Cantor's distinction between "inconsistent multiplicity", and "determined multiplicity" (Cantor 1955). The "determined multiplicity" makes it possible to think of all its elements as existing simultaneously, functioning as a single object, a unit. That is a consistent multiplicity, a whole. The second kind does not allow this gathering. The hypothesis of a simultaneous existence of all its elements leads to a contradiction. This is an absolutely infinite or inconsistent multiplicity, fundamental in the theory of *lalangue*. The inconsistent multiplicity already has its credentials at the edge of the set theory, which can only be built on the condition of evacuating it (Miller 2021b). It is only at the level of discourse that language is ordered in terms of structure. The unconscious structured as language represents itself is an effect of discourse. For Lacan, discourse is one of the apparatuses of *jouissance*, while *lalangue* precedes any idea of discourse.

The language is *lalangue* caught up in the discourse of the master (Miller 2021b). It has the same structure as the discourse of the master, and this made possible Lacan's classical formulation of the unconscious structured like a language. It is by the process of mastering *lalangue* that it emerges, and the master signifier provides the only consistence that the subject has. Therefore, *lalangue* is the state before the master signifier enters the game. It is the heterogeneity without the reference since it lacks the element apart. It is the polysemy of equivocations and provokes effects through the ambiguity of each word, spawning traces on the enjoying body.

Lalangue is thus the relation between the body and the speech, singular for each speaking being. It is the state before the distinction of the signifier and the signified: sonorous element, noise, scream, pure musicality. The signifier, considered as a letter outside the register of meaning, determines the singular mode of *jouissance* unique for each *parlêtre*, in the form of coinciding between the two heterogenous registers, forming the irreducible *sinthome*: S1-a.

Finally, if Lacan is guided to introduce the knots in the psychoanalytic theory, it is precisely in order to take account of the extreme heterogeneity of the three constitutive dimensions of the human existence. Three realms, the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are not anymore conceived in dialectical terms, but articulated in the logic of triplicity: "The three cercles of Borromean knot are, as cercles equivalent to one another. They are constituted by something that is reproduced in all three of them" (Lacan 2016: 38). The equivalence between the three circles implies that the One is not articulated to the Other in the knot. This is why the consistency of the knot does not make the system. The consistency of the knot is only guaranteed by the act of nomination. This

is why the key concept of Lacan's classical teaching – Name of the Father – is finally replaced by the Father of the Name, the naming father.

It is the letter as S1 that makes the hole in the real and makes the idea of the knotting possible. The S1 is what makes the hole in the real, “language eats into the real” (Lacan 2016: 21), and only the hole makes any knotting possible. Starting from the fourth element, the act of nomination, the *dire*, the strict equivalence between the three elements is finally interrupted.

In order to address Kristeva's critique of topology as a trinity hold from which nothing escapes and which makes the impossible real homogeneous with *lalangue* (Kristeva 1983: 35), we have to approach the double status of the realm of the real, such as it is present in the last teaching of Lacan.

5. The Double Status of Real: Beyond Hegelian Dialectics

At the outset of his teaching, Lacan conceived the real as what is colloquially known as reality. However, during the sixties, the real took on another dimension. It became the kernel that cannot be designated by the signifier, neither represented by the image. As mentioned earlier, initially, it manifests as *das Ding*, then as the object petit *a*, and finally as *surplus-jouissance*.

It is true that during that period, characterized by the dialectic between the symbolic and the real, the real appears as “an impasse of formalization”, that does not stop not being written (Lacan 1998: 85). From the same period is the formula of the real as impossible (Lacan 2023), which, appearing as a paradox, as both a product and a rejection of the symbolic—upon which it depends—continuously eludes the signifying machinery.

We argue that starting from the assumption of the equivalence of three registers and the abandonment of dialectics in favor of the logic of triplicity, the double status of the real can be discerned. On one hand, Lacan keeps the idea of the real as object *a*, that takes part in the *sinthome* (S1-*a*) and produce the knotting. On the other hand, the realm of real *ex-sists* in relation to the realms of symbolic and imaginary (Lacan 2016: 25). It exists outside the symbolic and the imaginary. Encountering a limit of formalization within the symbolic is entirely different from encountering the real outside of the symbolic. The real outside of the symbolic pertains more to the realm of the living body, about which we can know nothing. In his seminar *Sinthome*, Lacan employs the series of terms to qualify that aspect of the real: it is the real “without law”, “without order”, “the real that doesn't tie to anything” (Lacan 2016). Finally, the following year, Lacan introduces the new conception of the real as „impossible to bear” (Lacan 1977: 7).

The real as impossible to bear represents another status of the real that cannot be reduced to the impasse of formalization. It separates itself from any logical or mathematical writing. The notion of bearing, at the core of impossible formalization, evokes the idea of carrying, of weight, of suffering and of managing one's body.

When Kristeva argues that Lacan's topology makes the real „a part of trinity hole from which nothing escapes, not even a 'hole', since it too is part of the structure” (Kristeva 1983: 35), she doesn't recognize the status of the real as impossible to bear. For her, the real is reducible to the impasse of formalization, since she relies on Hegelian dialectics, to explain the subject as the dialectic between the two realms, semiotic and symbolic, governed by the work of negativity. Consequently, she is compelled to employ a whole series of binary oppositions such as subject-primary object, container-contained, interior-exterior.

On the other side, Lacan gradually abandons dialectics and replaces mathematical logic with topology of knots. The new logic enables him to think the three realms in their autonomy, but also within the context of the knotting function. Lastly, it is noteworthy that Lacan clarifies that the real on the side of the living being remains unattainable. We can only grasp “odds and ends of the real” (Lacan 2016: 104), since we are only able to reach it through the semblance of object *a*.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we examined in which way two French psychoanalysts, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan, seek to overcome the constraints imposed by the structuralist framework and to take into account the heterogeneity of the Freudian sign, induced by the irruption of the drives in the signifying process.

The *semiotic chora* is the central concept for apprehending Kristeva's approach from the seventies. However, her attempt to assimilate the dynamic aspect in Lacan's structuralist theory guided to some logical impasses. On the one hand, she keeps the idea of the symbolic order organized around the privileged signifier – the Name of the Father. On the other hand, she presupposes the pre-Oedipal dynamic presented in terms of Kleinian object relations theory. The articulation between those two registers is based on the dialectical terms. For example, in her discussion on borderline patients, she argues that the interpretation should be based on countertransference, but that the countertransference shouldn't be thought in the imaginary dynamic of the mother-child relation. The analyst directs the fragmented speech of the analysand toward the structuring function of the Third (father, psychoanalyst, etc.) (Kristeva 1983). Although the notion of *semiotic chora* stays very important for taking into account the prosodical elements of the speech, we could argue that Kristeva, by emphasizing the structuring function of the symbolic Third, stays more loyal to Lacanian classical theory than Lacan himself was at that moment.

During the seventies, Lacan pushes to the point of collapse his own concepts of language, of the speech as the communication, of the big Other, the phallus and Name of the Father. All of them appear to be a mere semblance in regard to the real. In the place of those terms that commemorate the existence of transcendental structure, we find the pragmatic approach, beyond any idea of normativity. That change is followed by the elaboration of the new concepts,

more appropriate to grasp the question of inherent heterogeneity – the letter, *lalangue* and *parlêtre*. Finally, the introduction of the knots will enable him to think the extreme singularity of the *sinthome* which defines the mode of *jouissance* for every *parlêtre*.

In this perspective, language is above all an apparatus of *jouissance* (Lacan 1998). Reality is approached by the apparatuses of *jouissance*. The concept of apparatus replaces that of structure since it allows the coexistence of two heterogeneous elements - the signifier and the *jouissance*. Language is no longer conceived from its purpose of communication, but of *jouissance*. Therefore, it is no longer a question of the Other as the place of the message, but of the One of *lalangue* that find its echo only in the body of the speaking being.

The new support of the subject becomes the knot between three constitutive dimensions, materialized by the function of the hole. It is the letter, the signifier One, that exclude the meaning, that makes the knotting possible. Lacan tries to set up categories that can support each other in the approach of the real. The new writing of the symptom (S1-*a*) allows him to articulate the language to the *jouissance* of the body. The symptom is redefined as an event of the body (Lacan 2001a) insofar as it designates the trace of the traumatic encounter between the signifier and the body. Lacan supports the theory that this encounter produces an eruption of *jouissance* that is repeated in the symptom. The symptom is therefore the reiteration of this first event that marks the body. However, there is no possibility of letter without *lalangue*. If *lalangue* can precipitate itself into the letter, it is insofar as the function of the symptom allows the operation of writing in the real.

Viewed from this perspective, Kristeva's critic on Lacan's topological approach, expressed in the essay "In the Microcosm of the Talking Cure" becomes unsustainable for several reasons: neither the real is made homogenous with *lalangue*, neither the topology can be thought in terms of structure or symbolic or imaginary tool. Finally, the subject of the unconscious disappears completely from Lacanian theory, since the term *parlêtre* testifies that the being is always secondary to the One of existence, and can be found only in the semblances of the language as a structure.

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Srđan Đurđević

Heterogenost Frojdovog znaka: Kristevina semiotička hora i Lakanov pojam jezika

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad analizira interakciju između pristupa Julije Kristeve i Žaka Lakana tokom 1970-ih. Nastojeći da prevaziđu ograničenja svojstvena strukturalističkom okviru, oba autora uvode nove koncepte koji mogu objasniti heterogenost frojdovskog znaka. Prethodne studije koje su ispitivale odnos između ova dva autora uglavnom su se fokusirale na Kristevinu kritiku lakanovske strukturalističke teorije tokom 1950-ih. Sa ovog stanovišta, semiotička hora suštinski dovodi u pitanje lakanovske koncepte. Međutim, važno je napomenuti da je Kristeva bila upoznata sa kasnijim Lakanovim učenjem, posebno sa pojmom jezika. Njena kritika proizilazi iz pogrešnog tumačenja određenih ključnih koncepata koje je Lakan formulisao tokom 1970-ih. Štaviše, dok će Lakan napustiti dijalektički odnos u korist logike trostrukosti, Kristeva nastavlja da se bavi pojmom heterogenosti kroz prizmu hegelijanske dijalektike.

Ključne reči: semiotička hora, jezik, Kristeva, Lakan, Hegel, Ime Oca, sinthome, dijalektika, slovo, topologija