

IN DEFENSE OF RICŒUR'S HERMENEUTIC INTERPRETATION OF FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS

Man-to Tang*

Abstract: This paper re-examines the phenomenological-hermeneutical interpretation of psychoanalysis debate, presenting and defending Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation. Hermeneutical interpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis, particularly that of Freud's notion of the unconscious, is often taken to be bounded to linguistic representation without any direct access of self-knowledge. This paper argues, on the contrary, that there should be no presumption in favour of the phenomenological interpretation (or precisely Henry's interpretation), but that a careful study of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation suggests that it can avoid the criticisms and objections raised by its competitors. (1) I characterize Henry's phenomenological interpretation of Freud's unconscious to his criticism of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation of psychoanalysis, (2) I present a defence of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation in terms of two central arguments (the twofold language argument and non-reductionist argument), (3) I respond to a number of influential objections to Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation, and (4) I sketch a proposal to the reconciliation of phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Keywords: Paul Ricœur, Michel Henry, Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Freud's psychoanalysis

Introduction

Ricœur's hermeneutic interpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis is regarded by many philosophers as an old-fashioned view that can be easily discarded. Among its many weaknesses, it is said to be bound to a representation (for the presupposition of symbolism as the indispensable medium of self-knowledge), an inaccurate reading of Freud (for the destruction of Freud's project) and a plagiarism of Lacan's idea (for the similar emphasis of linguistic role in Freud's psychoanalysis). Despite these (and other) charges,

*PhD - Università Hong Kong.

I argue that Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is not at all in the sorry state that its many critics suppose. On the contrary, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is a robust and powerful explanatory framework for understanding Freud as well as reconciling phenomenology and hermeneutics. The interpretation has not yet received much attention by psychoanalytic readers for many years, attacking by several unsympathetic or even hostile readers. Clearly, a full defence of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation would require a detailed examination of a wide range of competing interpretation and all original texts written by Freud, something I cannot do here. What I propose instead is a defence how and why Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation can avoid the phenomenological challenge raised by Henry.

In section two, I argue for the orientation in how to think about the phenomenological-hermeneutical interpretation of psychoanalysis debate. The debate is not simply about whether a phenomenological interpretation or a hermeneutical interpretation is the best approach. Rather it should be understood in terms of the focal point of the disagreement between phenomenology and hermeneutics, namely, the representation character of the unconscious underlying the hermeneutical interpretation and the direct presentation of the unconscious underlying the phenomenological interpretation. In section three, I present two key clarifications of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation, focusing on two arguments against Henry's criticism: the twofold language argument and the non-reductionist argument. In section four, I respond to some influential objections to Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation, I argue that none of these objections are successfully undermine the philosophical significance of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation. Some of the objections misunderstand Ricœur's aim of re-reading Freud, while other ignore Ricœur's works with some unexamined prejudices. Last but not least, I conclude with some remarks on the symbolism behind Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation. Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology has long been expelled by orthodox phenomenological interpretation of Freud in the past. The intent of this paper is to convey why it is also likely to have a reconciliation between the two in the future.

Reorientating the phenomenological-hermeneutic interpretation of psychoanalysis debate

The contemporary phenomenological-hermeneutical interpretation of

psychoanalysis debate is related to the under thematized dialogues between Henry and Ricœur. The debate is exclusively concerned with questions about the project and the approach of Freud's psychoanalysis broadly construed (the methodology, the unconscious, the conscious, intentionality, and so on). Historically, similar concerns were addressed by scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Rudolf Bernet. From the perspective of a dialogue, however, arguing for a particular method is one thing and reconciling two approaches is another. In principle, Bernet argued for the phenomenological approach,

In my view, the best approach to this task is phenomenology and its “zigzag” movement between the description and conceptualization of phenomena, which it has elevated to the dignity of a philosophical method.¹

But even if Bernet offered several arguments for the phenomenological approach, is only the phenomenological approach the best philosophical method? How should we understand the phenomenological approach of psychoanalysis? Undeniably, Bernet also recognized the possibility of hermeneutical approach, but he remained open and uncertain if psychoanalysis is a hermeneutics of symptoms and delusions.² Derrida alternatively pointed out that the hermeneutical method cannot be dismissed because «a rule of hermeneutical method that still seems to me valid for the historian of philosophy as well as for the psychoanalyst»³. A rule of hermeneutical method is to dig deeper from the surface meaning to the hidden meaning by destabilizing the authority of canonical interpretation. It is not uncommon to hear that phenomenology and hermeneutics are two different approaches, and the two approaches are mutually exclusively from each other in relation to their interpretations of Freud's psychoanalysis. This can be traced back to Henry's negative comment to Ricœur's philosophical reading of Freud in *The Genealogy of Psychology*:

[Ricœur] is one of the few to deal philosophically with Freud, Ricœur operates on presuppositions radically different from ours: the symbolic universe is the indispensable medium for self-knowledge, which can

¹ Rudolf Bernet, *Force, Drive, Desire: A Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2020, p. 139.

² Ibidem.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Resistance: On Psychoanalysis*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1989, 74.

only be hermeneutics. In this way, the rights of intentional consciousness are saved. Affect itself has meaning only insofar as it is bound to a representation⁴.

According to Henry, there are two essential differences between his phenomenological interpretation and Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation. First, Ricœur presupposed that affect itself can only be symbolized and it cannot be directly known. But Henry rejects the symbolic universe as the indispensable medium. Therefore, Henry's phenomenological approach insists the direct access of intentional consciousness (or unconsciousness) without any medium. The first difference is closely related to the second, in Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation, self-knowledge is no longer self-knowledge but is bound to a representation, but it is not the same case in Henry's phenomenological interpretation.

To understand Henry's criticism, we have to see how he argued for the direct access of intentional consciousness (unconsciousness) without any representation. He began with a phenomenological interpretation of existential anxiety. Anxiety is the feeling of being, as life. It is «the feeling of Self»⁵. It is the feeling of not being able to escape oneself, where the self is essentially constituted by precisely that impossibility. Henry states that the phenomenological experience of that inability is anxiety. Anxiety "is unemployed libido". He elaborates that,

What is unemployed libido? It is repressed libido. But a repressed libido is not, for all that, excluded. It does not fall out of an experience. Quite the opposite,

and here the theory of repression of affects we have been defining is strikingly confirmed: repressed libido is libido whose self-experiencing is taken to the extreme, to the point of being unsupportable... So, anxiety, at the very heart of suffering and its increase, is nothing but the feeling of not being able to escape itself⁶.

Repression is posited as a process immanent to and identical with phenomenological life: The motive and purpose of repression is nothing else than the avoidance of displeasure or pain. In a large extent, repression hides

⁴ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993, p. 349.

⁵ Ivi, p. 312.

⁶ Ivi, pp. 312-313.

the anxiety. Nevertheless, repression itself is not an anxiety before a real external danger or an object. Repression does not indicate the feeling of anxiety (the feeling of the impossibility or inability to escape from anxiety) but signifies the existential anxiety as the existential state of someone who is repressed (the impossibility or inability of escaping from the feeling). This signification is the ontological necessity of a state that one must feel, and one must be affected. It is “the facticity of an agent”.⁷ If you are alive (life), then it is a necessity for you to “be” anxiety. In Henry’s phenomenological interpretation, Freud’s theory of repression is not about the psychological feeling but a philosophy of existence or a philosophy of life. A philosophy of existence or a philosophy of life discusses the notion of life. It has two important definitions:

- (1) It is the ultimate foundation of Being.⁸
- (2) It is being itself, the original hyperpower or the Archi-Body.⁹

According to Henry, life’s essence is a power of self-affection, self-showing, and self-appearance.

The self-affection shows the state of oneself without any specific act of conceptualization or objectification. The essence of the power is the sufficient and necessary condition for any modes of being, e.g., representing, knowing, hearing... all kinds of activities. As a result, any conceptualized or objectified representation is then derived from life. Life can present itself by and through itself. It does not need to be represent itself through a specific act of grasping, so he offered a phenomenological interpretation of Freud in a non-representation way. The essential question in Freudianism concerning the reciprocal transformation of consciousness into the conscious and vice versa now gets a completely different solution: from being possible, it becomes absolutely impossible.¹⁰

In Henry’s phenomenological approach, the unconscious reveals itself, and with it a glimpse of “the original meaning of the unconscious”. Henry draws resources from Husserl’s phenomenology of meaning that “the positing agent

⁷ Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, Nijhoff, The Hague 1973, pp. 645-666

⁸ Ivi, p. 41.

⁹ Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of Psychology*, cit., p. 325.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 294.

itself is precisely the power to posit meanings, a *Sinngebung*, a consciousness”¹¹. A consciousness as the positing agent is the “playground” or the field of meaning constitution. For example, the meaning of the word dog designates as its own ideality, because the noematic correlate of a signifying intentionality originally creates that meaning.

Taking a dream content as another example, a dream content is produced by the unconscious tendency. There is neither meaning nor a signifying (meaning) consciousness in the process of producing dream content by an unconscious tendency, and «therefore there is no “meaning” in the linguistic sense»¹².

The being itself or the life itself has no word-meaning that is created by the specific art of pure thought as *Sinngebung*. Henry’s doctrine of being itself, life itself, the original hyperpower or the Archi-Body is an exceptional case of hermeneutic reading which cannot be understood and expressed through language. For him, «it is impossible to distance oneself from them, as affection as self-affection never stops»¹³. Linguistic articulation always involves distinction. For example, the basic English Grammar is S is P (Subject-Verb-Predicate). “I am happy” this linguistic expression differentiates ‘I’ and ‘happy’ and disrupts the self-affection and self-showing. Thus, when Freud declared that everything has meaning without “reducing the psychical to something expressible”, he opened the domain in which there is “no intentionality or meaning” instead¹⁴. Freud’s project of psychoanalysis is thus not based on any representation, but it radicalizes the psychical to non-expressible.

Only a radical phenomenology can recognize the essential dichotomy of the unconscious, as it takes its concrete accomplishment (non-expressible) into account. Moreover, only such a phenomenology takes its immediate feeling or affect into account, his phenomenological interpretation of Freud is then possible to allow the conscious and unconscious life constituting itself in and through itself. In contrast, hermeneutics is a thought of the mediation. To know what we are, they always take a detour: either our true being is mediately constituted, or our knowledge of it is mediate. Psychoanalysis was in complete agreement when it aims at catching our secret of being: «all these

¹¹ Ivi, p. 295.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ivi, p. 308.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 296.

indications are sacrificed to a hermeneutic reading»¹⁵.

Two key clarifications of Ricœur's hermeneutic interpretation

Phenomenologist like Henry may not accept representation and may instead opt for the direct access of intentional consciousness. But he must explain how the hidden meaning is uncovered through the description of symptoms. Bernet has clearly been aware of this “zigzag” movement between the description and conceptualization of phenomena. As Lacan, Ricœur and Bernet once noted, the zigzag movement allows psychoanalysis to distinguish itself from the empirical sciences¹⁶. Psychoanalysis, in this way, not only crystallizes psychical phenomena, but it also demystifies them. It pays attention to the meaning rather than the empirical description only. This distinction is significant, as the unconscious cannot be empirically observed. We cannot directly see or observe how the unconscious is given as a meaningful unity. The recognition of the unconscious as a meaningful unity is based upon the psychoanalytic technique, which involves the hermeneutic dialectics. Therefore, in Ricœur's view, Freud's project can be along with the line of hermeneutics that «the reality of the unconscious is constituted in and by hermeneutics in an epistemological and transcendental sense»¹⁷. But bear in mind, Ricœur does not limit himself to the investigation of the unconscious in the dimension of representation only.

The most convincing argument to clarify hermeneutical interpretation is what I called the twofold language argument. Ricœur distinguishes symbols and signs. Symbols have double meanings, where signs have a single meaning. Symbols can mean *bound to* or *bound by*. “Bound to” refers to its surface and literal meanings; whereas “bound by” refers to the hidden meanings ‘resides’ in the symbolic meanings. The latter is called “the revealing power of symbol”, which is opposite to signs. In contrast, signs merely signify what is posted in them, so they can be formalized and reduced to “an object of exchange”¹⁸. According to Ricœur, “the unconscious” is a symbol, hiding the meaning of one's own pre-reflective and pre-theoretical

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 325.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Norton & Company, New York 1978.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*. University Press, Yale 1970, p. 106.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 31.

living experience, because the symbolism of the unconscious “can always spring back to life”¹⁹. He further distinguished the twofold language of the unconscious:

- (1) The unconscious in the language of force and
- (2) The unconscious in the language of meaning.

Both refer to “the unconscious”, which are the conscious counterparts. Yet the unconscious in the language of force indicates the non-representable life and its essence. Conversely, the unconscious in the language of meaning refers to “representations” of life.²⁰ The former cannot be exhausted by any conceptualization or representation, so what is more, the former can only be appropriated by the latter.

Based on the first clarification, the most convincing argument clarifying hermeneutical interpretation and defending from Henry’s criticism is the non-reductionist argument. As Ricœur noted explicitly, that “the language of force can never be overcome by the language of meaning”²¹. The unconscious has undergone “transformation (*Umsetzung*)” or “translation (*Uebersetzung*)” into something conscious²². Nevertheless, this transformation or translation does not replace or reduce the unconscious into the conscious, as the unconscious displaces itself through the process. Thus, it is not a “reduction to consciousness”, but a “reduction of consciousness”²³. In the replacement with the dialectic, there would only be relations of signifier to signified, which would be symbolized by S/s. In the displacement with the dialectic, a new signifier S’ replaces the former S, while the former S continues on as a latent signifier. Therefore, the symbolic form is S’/S x S/s. After the two dialectical moments, the same element S is at the same time both signifier and signified, a situation for which there is “no linguistic parallel”²⁴. This symbolic form offers the possibility of double interpretation, as it has the close element, namely the relations of signifier to signifier, on the one hand; it remains the open element, namely a latent signifier. The new signifier S’ as representation of the former signifier S does not comprehensively replace the former signifier S. The re-presentation is by means of as-if structure. S’ both “is” and “is not” S that S’ is similar to S, while S’ is different from S.

The process can never be reduced to consciousness because a system of

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 222.

²⁰ Id., *Hermeneutics and Human Science*, cit., p. 262.

²¹ Id., *Freud and Philosophy*, cit., p. 150.

²² Ivi, p. 134.

²³ Ivi, p. 122.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 404.

meaning is a linguistic system or a social system, which provides a contextual network of meaning. For example, In English linguistic system, the word “here” is meaningful if and only if it carries its significance through differentiating itself from other words like “there”, “that” and “this”. For another example, the word “being” is meaningful if and only if it carries its significance through differentiating itself from other words like “becoming”, “non-being” and “nothing”.²⁵ It would be helpful to investigate a detail account of the dialectics in living metaphors. The dialectics in living metaphors consist of three steps²⁶:

1. A predicative assimilation / an assimilation to symbolic-mythic meaning
2. Schematism/ re-enactment (producing a fictious image to the emerging meaning)
3. Symbolism/ sympathetic imagination (suspending or negating the fictious image into the referential field)

The first step of the predicate assimilation sets up the differences between two categories in a subject-predicate judgment. The predicate assimilation presupposes differences. For example, if I say, “this apple is a fruit”, then it is true that logically speaking, the extension of fruit includes an apple and the intension of an apple consists of a property, fruit. Nonetheless, it is also true that fruit is not identical to this apple. It means that this apple shares the similar description or logical intension of the meaning of fruit, but they are different. Fruit cannot exhaust the comprehensive meaning of this apple. This step aims at breaking the previous rules of categories. This step of rule-breaking does not mean that the two categories are completely separated from each other. Instead, it distances the relationship between an apple and the fruit to referring to this apple itself. Through the first step, something is created and invented by “breaking rules”²⁷. What does something refer to?

His answer is a fictious image. The invention of fictious image is under the second step, namely the process of schematism, which is a method for constructing images. Ricoeur gives a credit to the Kantian theory of schematism. In Kant’s transcendental philosophy, schematism is a method of giving an image to a concept. Schematism is a rule of producing images. A

²⁵ David Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolism Language and Philosophical Anthropology*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1971; Patrick Bourgeois, *Extension of Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1975; Alison S. Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, Continuum, York 2009.

²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1967, p. 3

²⁷Ivi, p-188.

fictious image is a “faded perception” A faded perception does not mean it disappears or absence forever, but it means a comprehensive understanding of the image is inaccessible. For example, when I reflect upon this perceived apple, a fictious of this perceived apple appears. However, the fictious image of an apple is an ideal entity, which is not exactly the same as the material real apple perceived previously. It is absurd to claim that the material real apple perceived is inside my mind or brain. It follows that «the image is an emerging meaning»²⁸. This image presents as a new ideal and meaningful invention after the breaking of the previous rules of categories. The third step is symbolism. This step intensifies the openness of the image, and further explains how the image is the renewal of the previous rules of categories. When we express the fictious image, the fictious image can be expressed by words, pictures, body gestures...etc. The means of expression are kinds of symbol. The symbol «is not really presented in pictorial, sound form, but is merely described»²⁹. The symbol leads us to think of something by a consideration of something like it, and this is what constitutes the symbolic mode of signifying. It is the very meaning of the symbol. The symbol is not a copy or replica of absence, as it has no model or already given original to which it could be referred. It is unreal or unreal. Symbol contains an internal duality that at the same time the difference between the two old categories is overcome. It has three essential features: (1) resists any linguistic, semantic, or logical transcription, (2) is unbounded in any objective concepts or categories of the understanding, but (3) it hesitates on the dividing line between subjective feeling and objective concepts. It is noteworthy that a symbol is not a sign, as a symbol cannot be exhaustively treated by conceptual language. It is the name denoting the primordial rootedness in Life. The essential role of the symbol is to contain an internal duality that at the same time the relation of opposition is overcome.

Through the dialectic in living metaphors, we formulate a judgment with the symbolic function, “seeing as”. Ricoeur gives an example in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, Time is a beggar³⁰. If “beggar” means a person who asks for money to earn his living, and time means the temporal succession and becoming, then the two words “time” and “beggar” together do not make sense and ascribe objective validity. The two words “time” and “beggar” belongs to two different categories, namely something inanimate

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, p. 122.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 223.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 211.

and something animate, respectively. Thus, there is a clash of category. Yet if we treat “time is a beggar” as a metaphorical judgment, this metaphorical judgment precisely means “time is seen as a beggar”. “Seeing as” joins both the “is” and “is not” in the sense that “is” includes “is not”. It sounds absurd and paradoxical. However, Ricœur explains that it is a transgressed outcome of a dialectical moment in Life, «Seeing X as Y’ encompasses “X is not Y”»; seeing time as a beggar is, precisely, to know also that time is not a beggar. The borders of meaning are transgressed but not abolished»³¹.

As a result, Ricœur does not limit himself to the investigation of the unconscious in the dimension of representation. Representation can never replace the origin of representation the unconscious in the language of force can avoid reductionism in two ways. Firstly, it can avoid reducing the unconscious to an object of exchange. The unconscious in the language of force refers to the subjective feeling or affect, which can never be comprehensively objectified. Secondly, the unconscious in the language of force cannot be comprehensively represented, but it can be somehow known through the representation. Ricœur gives a credit to Husserl’s later works that what is felt or affected in the pre-reflective level is already a presumed unity of meaning, as the process of meaning-constitution is devoted to «the signifying aspects of ante-predicative function»³². There is presumed unity of meaning before any linguistic representation. At the pre-reflective level, the non-objectifying (subjective) feeling or affect has no name. It has its name only after the second moment of the dialectics. At the reflective level, the non-objectifying (subjective) feeling or affect has its name, “the unconscious”. The psychoanalytic technique as hermeneutics functions as a philosophical reflective interpretation, through which experience is given a linguistic representation. His hermeneutic reading, indeed, is bound to representation, but Ricœur’s reading is a double reading that the unconscious reappears the unconscious in the language of force *in* and *through* the unconscious in the language of meaning. The unconscious is thus «in relation to consciousness: it is simply the attribute of what has disappeared, but can reappear»³³.

His double reading is a detour to the research of the origin of meaning, like Bernet’s phenomenological approach. The detour discloses not only the meaning constitution in the linguistic representation but also the meaning-

³¹ Ivi, p. 253.

³² Ivi, p. 251.

³³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, cit., p. 118.

constitution through the linguistic representation. Hence the detour is «more and more a “return from logic to the ante-predicative”, to the primordial evidence of the world»³⁴. It is important to clarify what is the nature of the representation in Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation, in which linguistic representation is not taken for granted. He investigates the limit of linguistic representation through the hermeneutical moments in a living metaphor, and thereby he explicates that «the reference of linguistic order back to the structure of experience (which comes to language in the assertion) constitutes, in my view, the most important phenomenological presupposition of hermeneutics³⁵». Language, word, and name are the reference of linguistic order back to one’s own experience. Ricœur would agree that no representation can exhaust the affects, the life and the existence themselves. It follows that his hermeneutics is called “critical hermeneutics” or “hermeneutic phenomenology”.

Objections: Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation is unfaithful to Freud

When readers agree that Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation can defend itself from Henry’s criticism, some may find other objections. In this section, we look at some of the potential and influential objections to Ricœur’s interpretation. The objections we will consider are all general in scope (rather than objections that focus on specific notions or doctrines). Since my aim is to address the root causes that lead many philosophers to neglect Ricœur’s hermeneutic interpretation as a coherent and convincing framework for understanding Freud’s psychoanalysis, these general objections demand a response.

Psychoanalytic readers often suppose that any philosophical reading of Freud somehow distorts the original project of Freud, we should not take it seriously. Laplanche appealed to the historical development of Freud’s psychoanalysis to argue that psychoanalysis is “anti-hermeneutical methodology”³⁶. The analytical method is not in any sense a translation, a comprehension, or a reading. But rather, the method is better understood as “de-translation” in which no presupposition for re-translation is assumed. The symbolic method was only developed in the later editions of the

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, cit., p. 12.

³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Science*, cit., p. 118.

³⁶ Jean Laplanche, *Psychoanalysis as Anti-hermeneutics. Radical Philosophy*, vol. 79 (1996), p. 6.

Traumdeutung. More importantly, according to Freud, the symbolic method and associative method are opposite instead of mutually supporting with each other. Unlike Ricœur's interpretation, Freud, in the 1900 edition, found that when symbolism speaks, associations are silent.³⁷ Taking a "man with a hatchet" as an example, a man who had been seriously ill for a year reported that when he was between eleven and thirteen he had repeatedly dreamt that a man with a hatchet was pursuing him; he tried to run away, but seemed to be paralyzed and could not move from the spot³⁸. This is read as a typical scenario of castration, but Freud deliberately avoids using the notion of castration because "castration" should be silent when the dream is governed by symbolism. In other words, Freud avoids the use of associative method when the symbolic method functions in the analytic method.

While this objection is widely assumed to be correct, it conceals the contribution of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation in a philosophical treading of Freud. Given that the dispute between phenomenological interpretation and hermeneutical interpretation is fundamentally about the methodological consideration that the unconscious can be originally and primordially given on the one hand; and it can be represented in the symbolic medium, on the other hand. Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation demonstrates how it can work without falling into the problem of representation and that of distortion. Since coherence and explanatory power serve as the essential criterion for the philosophical reading of Freud, some "revisions" or at least modifications are inevitably unavoidable. The case for Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is clearly built upon the deconstruction of psychoanalysis that tells in favor of the first-personal description based the phenomenological approach and the second-personal interpretation based on the hermeneutical approach. In this way, the vindication of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is nothing other than the vindication of the analytic method in Freud's psychoanalysis. Therefore Macherey radically argued that Ricœur did not pretend to supplement Freud, but the understanding of Freud is to understand Ricœur himself³⁹.

Methodologically speaking, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation particularly illuminate what are not yet thematized in Freud's psychoanalysis,

³⁷ Ivi, p. 8.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and The Unconscious*, Harper & Row Publisher, NY 1958, p. 584.

³⁹ Pierre Macherey, *Une approche phénoménologique de la psychanalyse? Ricoeur lecteur de Freud. La Philosophie au Sens Large*, 11 juin 2010; accessed on 13 April 2021, 1:55 pm (HKT), <https://philolarge.hypotheses.org/595> 16

namely a set of concerns about consciousness, self-consciousness, and intersubjectivity that Freudianism does not adequately illuminate. Even though Bernstein has so much sympathy to Ricœur's interpretation, he did not think Ricœur has achieved his aim to explain how the dialectic between the conscious and the unconscious is to be developed⁴⁰. The doctrine of "transformation" or "translation", in my view, contributes to Ricœur's aim. Ricœur's doctrine of "transformation" or "translation" is faithful to Freud outline of transference which serves as a unique and productive contribution to a critical-practical understanding. Now it is undeniable that Ricœur built a bridge for the symbolic method and the associative method in his doctrine of "transformation" or "translation". For example, a man with a hatchet gave his symbolic description in the dream, the psychoanalyst can give clues for the patient to associate with the hidden meaning curtailed behind the symbolism. As I suggested above, by tightly linking the symbolism to the association, Freud's analytic method may be more coherent as a systematic whole. Similarly, the intertwining of the conscious and the unconscious may also be illuminated owing to the meaning-constitution that are inseparable and irreducible to each other. Consideration of the methodological contribution would not dissolve the destruction of Freud's psychoanalysis in Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation, but such a destruction is a stepping-stone for the deconstruction of Freud's psychoanalysis.

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Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is a copy of Lacan's interpretation

When Ricœur published *An Essay on Freud* in 1965. He was greatly attacked by Lacanians that he plagiarized Lacan's idea, or at least, he made no credit to Lacan's interpretation. Elisabeth Roudinesco's formulation in her biography of Lacan that «we know that the publication of this book injured the master: Ricœur, in fact, devoted an entire book to Freud and his disciples regardless of Lacan's teaching, which he had attended the seminary five years»⁴¹. Besides, André Schlemmer shared the same accusation to Ricœur. Many scholars took it for granted that Lacan must be the founder who thematized the role of language in the symbolism of Freud's psychoanalysis.

⁴⁰ Richard Bernstein, Ricœur's Freud, "Ricœur Studies", vol. 4, n. 1 (2013), p. 138.

⁴¹ E. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, Paris, Fayard, 1993, p. 423.

As for Lacan being the “default founder” in any philosophical reading of Freud, Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation seems to be nothing new and original.

However, several scholars try to defend Ricœur from the historical fact and the comparison between the two philosophical readings.

Thanks to Fonds Ricœur, the manuscript of Ricœur’s Bonneval lecture, given on 2 November 1960 demonstrates that Ricœur was correct and honest in saying that his own interpretation is prior of his contact with Lacan. Some may still argue that Ricœur did attend Lacan’s seminar, and most probably, Ricœur’s interpretation can already be found in Lacan’s seminar. This accusation is thought to exhibit a kind of theoretical laziness in that it merely postulates a contingent and potential effect as a necessary and real fact. Rather than carefully comparing and explaining the similarities and differences between the two, the charge is just that by standing in opposition any hermeneutical (philosophical) reading other than Lacan, Ricœur is thought to be a plagiarist.

Karl Simms made a substantial contribution to a detailed analysis of the confrontation between Ricœur and Lacan, especially, his chapter 3 and 4 on their interpretation of the unconscious⁴². This paper is greatly inspired by his work. However, due to the interest and scope, Simms did not discuss or even mention Henry’s criticism.

Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation is outdated

The accusation of theoretical laziness displays an unfamiliarity of Ricœur’s hermeneutical interpretation and Lacan’s interpretation. One of the very differences between Ricœur’s interpretation and Lacan’s interpretation is that Lacan put too much emphasis on language and ignore the desired subject who ontologically grounds the project of psychoanalysis⁴³. Busacchi made a substantial contribution to the difference. For Lacan, the unconscious is not individual because it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse. For Ricœur, the

⁴² Karl Simms, *Ricoeur and Lacan*, Continuum, York 2007, pp. 33-68.

⁴³ Fabien Lamouche, *Herméneutique et psychanalyse. Ricoeur lecteur de Freud*, “ESPRIT”, March 2006, accessed on 10 April 2021, 10:55 pm (HKT), <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/fabien-lamouche/hermeneutique-et-psychanalyse-ricoeur-lecteur-de-freud-13283>.

unconscious has two dimensions, namely, the unconscious in the dimension of life and the unconscious in the linguistic dimension. The unconscious refers to the individual life and has transindividual meaning. Moreover, as we noted earlier, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is critical hermeneutics or phenomenological hermeneutics. It is influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, especially his intentional analysis, which had not too much affected Lacan's interpretation. These are surely required a comparative study that can be specified in more detail because both undoubtedly have several similar accounts. Perhaps Lacan's influence played a much more significant role in Ricœur's interpretation of Freud and in his philosophical use of psychoanalysis than had a contingent effect of some temporal factual and provisional causes⁴⁴.

Even in philosophical discourses of Freud, Ricœur's interpretation of Freud receives less attention, comparing to Lacan's interpretation. For instance, in *Reading Freud: Psychoanalysis through Philosophy* edited by Jon Mills, Lacan was mentioned more than ten times by several scholars in their main paragraph, whereas Ricœur was mentioned 1 time in the preface. Worse still, *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* and *The Analytic Freud: Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* did not even mention Ricœur. Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation seems to be outdated.

Still, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation brings some important lessons to us in both theoretical and methodological perspectives. From the methodological perspective, phenomenology and hermeneutics are not mutually exclusive but reconcilable. Henry emphasized that the language of meaning cannot exhaust the meaning of force or the non-objectifying feeling or affect, e.g., suffering. Suffering reveals itself and affects itself in a passive dimension when they are enduring. Ricœur recognized and appreciated Henry's attempts that «only the work of Michel Henry do we find this phenomenology practiced»⁴⁵. However, Ricœur disagreed that the account of revelation or affect cannot get rid of the system of meaning and language. As he stated, «phenomenology does give an understanding of psychoanalysis, but only through approximation and by way of diminishing differences» because phenomenology is a reflexive discipline, but psychoanalysis is not⁴⁶. The phenomenological method operates the

⁴⁴ Vinićo Busacchi, *Lacan's Epistemic Role in Ricœur's Re-Reading of Freud*, "Ricœur Studies", vol. 7, n. 1 (2016), pp. 56-71.

⁴⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, cit., p. 328.

⁴⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, cit., p. 390.

displacement of reflection, but both hermeneutics and psychoanalysis operate an archeological excavation. In this way, phenomenology itself can never reach the hidden meaning of surface appearance. Ricœur took repression as an example, «repression is a real exclusion which a phenomenology of the implicit or co-intended can never reach»⁴⁷. Numerous repressed memories are constituted and become “traumas” only after the event through assigning a name with an explanation to them. The attempt to reformulate psychoanalysis “in terms of phenomenology, have failed” if hermeneutics is dismissed⁴⁸. Psychoanalysis requires an account or narration, so «all truth claims of psychoanalysis are ultimately summed up in the narrative structure of psychoanalysis facts»⁴⁹. Returning to the account of suffering, Ricœur pointed out that,

we must go further and take into account more deeply concealed forms of suffering: the incapacity to tell a story, the refusal to recount, the insistence of the untellable...which can be made meaningful through the strategy of employment⁵⁰.

Since suffering is «the after-the-event phenomenon (*Nachträglichkeit*) Ricœur»⁵¹,

the meaning of suffering is hidden behind. The hidden meaning can be constituted only through the selection of a subject’s experience into a story or narrative. It is because the partial explanatory segments of this or that fragment of behaviour are integrated in a narrative structure, rather than just certain isolated events. With a narrative structure, fragment of behaviour become capable of forming meaningful sequences and ordered connections⁵².

In this way, we can this uncover the deeply concealed forms of suffering.

Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology can reconcile both phenomenology and hermeneutics. Psychoanalysis and hermeneutics move forward phenomenology with linguistic articulation, so that phenomenology can have

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 392.

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Science*, cit., p. 417.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 268.

⁵⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, cit., p. 320.

⁵¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Science*, cit., p. 254.

⁵² Ivi, p. 253.

a theory of expression and interpretation of its constitutional moment. Hermeneutics offers an analysis of the system of meaning and language. Consequently, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is necessary to provide a theory of constitution and interpretation for both phenomenology and psychoanalysis. The phenomenological reading of psychoanalysis and the hermeneutic reading of psychoanalysis can then be reconciled.

Conclusion

I have argued that Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation offers a highly promising framework for the translation of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. It can defend itself from Henry's criticism, as illustrated by the two key clarifications, namely, the twofold language argument and the non-reductionist argument that contributes to an inference to the best explanation in favour of Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation. I have also seen that the objections that are basically thought to impugn Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation distorting Freud, stealing Lacan's idea and obsolete, and that, given the refutation that Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation is an original deconstruction of Freud without abandoning the lesson of phenomenology, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation regarding its philosophical contribution is highly valid in reconciling phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Eoin Carney has remarked that Ricœur's hermeneutical readings of Freud works with, and through, the pre-given material found in analysand's concrete life history and self-understanding. It does not aim to nullify or demythologize the unconscious, but rather to situate it on a more appropriate plane of understanding, through which they become unmasked. For example, psychoanalytic technique remains distinctive from practical concerns with meaning, but is fundamentally bound to the symbolic, lived experience of the psychoanalytic procedure of investigation⁵³. As Carney pointed out, Ricœur's hermeneutical interpretation shows how the dialectics of the unconscious through the linguistic representation is possible. There are three important procedures here that go a detour way toward explaining the hidden meaning: (1) desymbolization, (2) demythotization and (3) resymbolization. The detour of a rediscovery processes two moments of dialectics: understanding and explanation. Phenomenology is a regressive understanding of the

⁵³ Eoin Carney, *Technique and Understanding: Paul Ricoeur on Freud and the Analytic Experience*, "Ricoeur Studies", vol. 7, n. 1 (2016), p. 98.

meaning, which consists of (1) and (2). Hermeneutics is a study of progressive explanation of the meaning, which consists of (3). Thus, psychoanalysis is not phenomenology. Instead, it is a paradigm of hermeneutics in virtue of the explanatory force linked to the “reconstruction” of the “primitive sense”. In other words, «”to understand” what of the symptom, it is necessary to “explain” its why»⁵⁴. It just may be unavoidable to have hermeneutical moment in a phenomenological interpretation of Freud’s psychoanalysis.

⁵⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Science*, cit., p. 85.