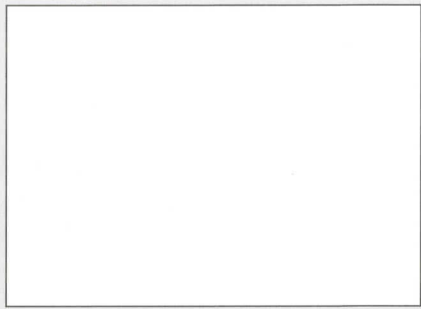


# ÉMILIE PARENDEAU

## Tautology

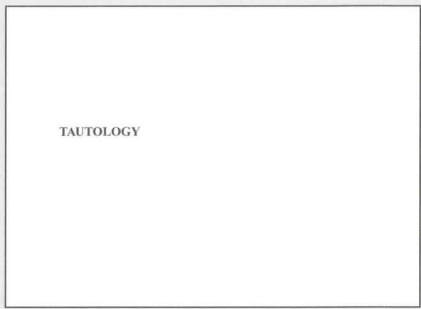
Translated by Alan Eglinton  
This conference-performance was held in French. In order to respect the meaning of the spoken text, the dictionary definitions and the quotations weren't taken from books in English but were translated literally.

. SLIDE 1  
(POWERPOINT)



. The audience enters the room.  
I sit down at the desk and show slide 2.

. SLIDE 2

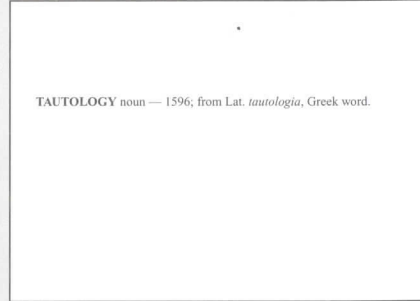


. I wait for complete silence and I begin.

**Hello.**  
**Before beginning this presentation, I'd like to reveal its structure to you:**  
**. in the first part, you will be given a few elements that will allow you to better understand what a tautology is,**  
**. then in the second part, we will see if it is or is not legitimate to use the word tautology concerning a series of works of the same name by Luciano Fabro.**

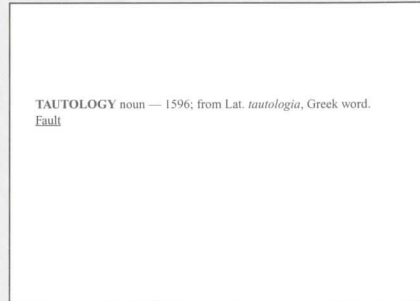
Just one thing... given the complexity of the subject I'm dealing with, I'd be grateful if you didn't interrupt me during my presentation...

. SLIDE 3



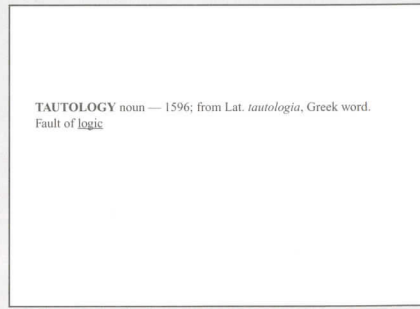
. I read slide 3.

. SLIDE 4



. I read slide 4 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "habitual failing, bad habit that one can't repress".

. SLIDE 5



. I read slide 5 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "way of reasoning, as it is actually practised, in accordance or not with the rules of formal logic".

. SLIDE 6

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition

. I read slide 6 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "a statement that expresses a relationship between one or several terms".

. SLIDE 7

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition of which the predicate

. I read slide 7 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "what is asserted in a statement concerning another term".

. SLIDE 8

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
than the subject.

. I read slide 8 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "word considered as the starting point of a statement that one defines in a logical and formal way".

. SLIDE 9

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
than the subject. *A tautology is a truism*

. I read slide 9 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "obvious truth".

. SLIDE 10

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
than the subject. *A tautology is a truism (lapalissade)*.

. I read slide 10 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "affirmation of which the very formal obviousness is laughable".

. SLIDE 11

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
than the subject. *A tautology is a truism (lapalissade)*.  
Repetition

. I read slide 11 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "fact of being said or expressed several times".

. SLIDE 12

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
 Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
 a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
 than the subject. *A tautology is a truism (lapalissade).*  
Useless repetition

. I read slide 12 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "which isn't useful, doesn't serve any purpose".

. SLIDE 13

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
 Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
 a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
 than the subject. *A tautology is a truism (lapalissade).*  
 Useless repetition of the same idea but in another form  
 (**pleonasm**).

. I read slide 13 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "term or expression that only adds a repetition to what's just been said".

. SLIDE 14

**TAUTOLOGY** noun — 1596; from Lat. *tautologia*, Greek word.  
 Fault of logic consisting of presenting as having different meaning,  
 a proposition of which the predicate says nothing more  
 than the subject. *A tautology is a truism (lapalissade).*  
 Useless repetition of the same idea but in another form  
 (**pleonasm, redundancy**).

. I read slide 14 and I play a sound recording; a voice says, "1. way of expressing oneself in which one says the same thing several times in various forms and aspects 2. nature of something that provides information already given in another form 3. increase of the number of words in a message without a correlative increase in the quantity of information".

**The opposite of redundancy is concision.**

. SLIDE 15

**Well, as you can see, defining tautology whilst avoiding being redundant and remaining concise is a task for experts.**

**An expert is a "person chosen for his knowledge, whose responsibility it is to make precise observations on a determined subject".**

**Therefore, I now suggest that we listen to a debate amongst experts on the definition of tautology.**

. I play a sound recording; one can hear a conversation.

Hélène:

Tautology from the Greek ταυτολογία, ταυτό the same, and λογία, to say: "which says the same thing again". Stylistic device that serves to reinforce the expression of a thought.

Example: 100% of the winners tried their luck.

Sab:

Are a tautology and a litotes completely equivalent?

Hélène:

No, they're not exactly the same thing Sab. Litotes comes from the Greek λιτότης, simplicity, without affectation. This term refers to a rhetorical figure that consists of saying less in order to imply much more than what was said.

Pixel:

Maybe you were thinking of pleonasm?

Hélène:

Tautology and pleonasm are synonyms.

Max-Azerty:

I don't agree.

A pleonasm is a redundancy that doesn't help in understanding. Example: a universal panacea, an ingrown toe nail in the flesh, etc.

A tautology is the definition of something by itself. Example: war is war.

As for a litotes, it consists of saying less to imply more. Example: be gone, I don't hate you at all or it's not bad; it's what the English call an understatement.

Liliane:

To explain that a tautology is a pleonasm is a tautology itself.

Alceste:

"Nothing's more similar to the identical than what is like the same thing".

"If France wasn't what it was, in other words France, all the French would be foreigners". (Pierre Dac, *Pensées*)

Maurice:

Hélène wrote:

Tautology from the Greek ταυτολογία, ταυτό, the same, and λογία, to say: "which says the same thing again". Stylistic device that serves to reinforce the expression of a thought.

Example: 100% of the winners tried their luck.

This is not a tautology: this involves two different ideas, one of which can be deduced from the other; they were able to win only after having tried their luck, but many others tried their luck without having won.

Glossophile:

I still see a tautology in it and even one of La Palice's truisms: all the winners had a winning ticket.

You could just as well say: 100 % of the losers weren't lucky. But that type of slogan would be counter-productive for the French National Lottery!

Hélène:

I understood this example the same way as Glossophile, so I don't have much to add.

Alceste:

Let's resort to the theory of sets. If A is the set of those who tried their luck, and B the set of those who won, then B is the sub-set of A and is not equal to A. Therefore, the sentence "100% of the winners tried their luck" isn't a tautology (it seems more like an obvious statement).

Of course, we could also say "100% of the losers tried their luck" (something that the French National Lottery carefully refrains from doing). This set is B's complementary in A, and it contains many more elements than B.

As for the set of non-losers, it's composed of the union of the small set B (those who won) and of a very large set C, distinct from A (and from B), and which corresponds to those who didn't play.

It's quite clear, isn't it?

To come back to the tautology, the Gradus (Bernard Dupriez) quotes this definition from the Robert dictionary: "fault of logic consisting of presenting as having meaning, a proposition, the predicate of which says nothing more than the theme". Its antonym is the antilogy. The Gradus gives examples of tautologies, namely:

"Children are children and our two twins weren't exceptions to this universal rule." (Joyce, *Ulysse*)

"Ah! Me too, I was young in my youth." (A. Mailliet, *La Sagouine*)

I bought it where it can be bought (blunt refusal to answer a question).

and of antilogies:

"Even if it's true, it's false." (H. Michaux, *Tranches de savoir*)

"It's vague enough to be clear, isn't it?" (B. Vian, *En avant la zizique...*)

As for the pleonasm, it's 1. a "profusion of terms, reinforcing an expression" (ex: I saw it with my own eyes); 2. a "redundancy, use of useless words" (ex: "in vain, the saddest old age overcomes me with it's weighty weight" [Duval, *Joseph*]).

If a pleonasm is "a repetition of an idea in two words in the same part of a sentence", a perissology is a "misleading pleonasm", a redundancy, a "reduplication of an idea in two sentences or in two parts of a sentence", and a battology, "an excessive and unfounded

redundancy". "Only a pleonasm and a redundancy are considered as stylistic devices; a perissology and a battology are imperfections and can only be used as such (in ironic or humorous texts)".

Therefore, let's avoid perissologies without being caught out by battologies. We'll only feel all the better for it.

#### Hélène:

Here we're only talking about the set of winners and not about the losers. If we take the set of the losers, again we won't be taking the example of all the players but only of those who have lost. When we say "100% of the winners tried their luck", the reasoning applies to this set of players since they are the ones we are considering for the example.

#### Glossophile:

I agree with Hélène: when we talk about 100 % of the winners, the only set concerned here is the winners. So the slogan affirms that those who won didn't lose, to which I might add that those who lost didn't win — and that the real winners are those who didn't bet, incidentally...

I'd like to submit the limpid definition of the Hachette dictionary to you:

Tautology: redundant nature of a proposition of which the predicate states information already contained in the subject. Relationship of identity formally established between identical elements:  $A = A$ .

#### Alceste:

*Je disagrée*, if I can allow myself an Anglicism.

The examples from the Gradus as well as Hachette's definition fully prove there must be an relationship of identity among the elements:

children are children; I was young in my youth; I bought it where it can be bought

There's nothing like this in "100% of the winners tried their luck", in which "to win" and "to try one's luck" have no identity relationship. Besides, one can perfectly imagine winning something without having tried one's luck (sometimes, some companies automatically award you a prize by randomly taking your address in an address database). So the information isn't, a priori, already within the subject.

The slogan in question doesn't in any way mean "those who lost didn't win", it simply says that the set of winners is included in the set of those who played, which only corresponds to the way the rules work in this game.

(B is included in A) and not (B equals A).

The Hachette specifically states that formally identical elements are involved, which corresponds to the examples from the Gradus. In reality, between "winning" and "trying one's luck", there is identity neither in meaning nor in form.

It would be different if you said, for example, "When I was little, I wasn't big". Here there would be identity in the meaning, but not in the form.

PS: on the same theme, it's interesting to compare the Russian and French definitions of the verb "fishing":

- *Qu'est-ce que tu fais ? - Je pêche.* ("What are you doing? I'm fishing.", activity = I'm trying to catch a fish)

- *Qu'est-ce que tu as pêché ? J'ai pêché un poisson.* ("What have you caught? I've caught a fish.", result = I caught a fish)

One can see here that trying one's luck and winning aren't the same things.

#### Hélène:

Your reasoning isn't better.

"When I was little, I wasn't big". But there are small children who are tall, and adults who are small.

"I bought it where it can be bought". If you want to play on words, you can buy something where it can't be bought because you can secretly buy something from someone who's not a proper seller...

#### Alceste:

Hélène wrote:

Your reasoning isn't better.

"When I was little, I wasn't big". But there are small children who are tall, and adults who are small.

This sentence is generally used in a humorous way. It plays on both meanings of the word little: 1/ of small height, 2/ who hasn't yet reached their adult height. Definition of "little", Larousse for beginners: which isn't big; small garden. Very young: this child is still little.

Hélène wrote:

"I bought it where it can be bought". If you want to play on words, you can buy something where it can't be bought because you can secretly buy something from someone who's not a proper seller...

Even if one buys something secretly, even on the black market, it was still bought "where it can be bought" (the preliminary question being: "where did you buy it?"). Therefore, the answer is a tautology. We didn't say "where it's supposed to be bought", "where it's usually bought" or "officially".

#### Hélène:

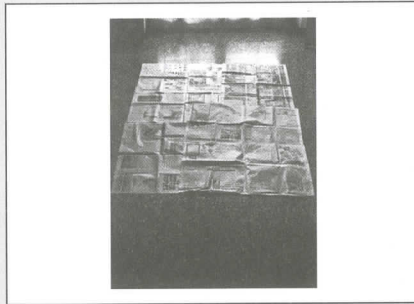
There's a problem in reasoning: either you consider the whole or you only consider a part. To come back to "100% of the winners tried their luck", we're considering a part. The same goes for buying, big, small, etc. We take into account the reasoning according to the part considered by the sentence and not the whole.

Well, to sum up this debate among experts, so that we can base ourselves on a common definition of tautology – which will be useful for the rest of the lecture, let us say that tautology may be defined by the formula:  $A=A$ , while specifying that we are looking at a tautology when there is a relationship of identity between two elements both in form and in content.

All right, let's proceed to the question of the legitimacy of using the word "tautology" as regards a series of works of the same name by Luciano Fabro. Let's take three works from this series as examples.

First example, the piece entitled "Floor, Tautology" made in 1967.

. SLIDE 16



Fabro tells us, quote, "I chose tiling without pretension, in quite a simple gallery, like an apartment, which could evoke familiar situations to the viewer. I washed it well, I made it shine and finally, I covered it with newspapers."

Then he tells us, quote: "Actually, the piece isn't there. It's in the pairing with the commentary and with the explanations: the text explains that the way of appreciating, the reading of the work can only (I'm not saying essentially but only) be understood through the making itself: to be able to enjoy \* the piece (sorry for the expression), one has to do the washing and then covering up. The piece is made up of the work carried out for it".

\* [In the French text, "jouir": 1. To enjoy, to get pleasure out of; 2. (sexually) To come]

If "the piece is made up of the work carried out for it", in other words "the act of washing", covering up the floor indeed has the effect of protecting the work that's been done. As a matter of fact, it allows to preciously keep the floor clean for a while to avoid it getting dirty.

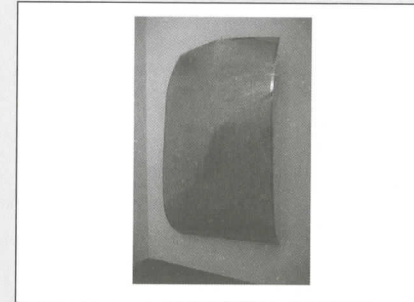
However, covering up the floor also has the effect of hiding the floor and therefore of hiding the work that's been carried out: nobody can see that the floor is clean.

So we may conclude that in "Floor, Tautology", there is indeed identity in content, covering the floor to protect the work carried out, but not identity in form, covering up the floor having the effect of making the work carried out invisible.

Therefore, "Floor, Tautology", 1967, is not a tautology.

Second example, the piece entitled "8mm Perforation, Tautology" made in 1967.

. SLIDE 17

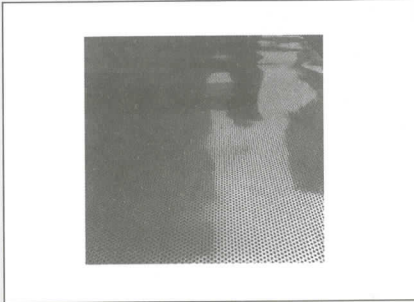


In the catalogue published on the occasion of the Luciano Fabro exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, you can read the following about "8mm Perforation, Tautology": "this work consists of a sheet of stainless steel 198cm long and 100cm wide, perforated industrially, in the centre of which the artist has made a new perforation of 8mm in diameter. This perforation is similar to all of the others."

Here, when you read "this perforation is similar to all of the others", you must understand that the perforation made by the artist is of the same type as those made industrially, in other words that all of the perforations are perforations of the same shape; in this sense, all of the perforations are similar.

However, the fact that the artist made a perforation of a slightly bigger diameter compared to the perforations made industrially, in other words, the fact that he made one of the industrial perforations bigger by his own perforation, has the effect of making this perforation visible

. SLIDE 18



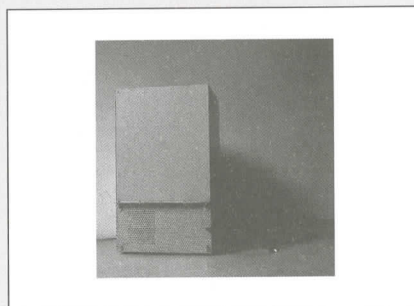
and therefore of distinguishing it from the other perforations; in this sense, the perforation made by the artist isn't similar to those made industrially.

So we may conclude that in "8mm Perforation, Tautology", there is indeed identity in content - all the perforations are of the same type, but not identity in form, the artist's perforation is distinguished from the perforations made industrially because of its diameter, which is bigger than the diameter of the perforations made industrially.

Therefore, "8mm Perforation, Tautology", 1967, is not a tautology.

Third and last example, the work entitled "Object with a Device to Make it Lighter, Tautology" made in 1968.

. SLIDE 19



In the catalogue published on the occasion of the Luciano Fabro show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, you can read the following words about "Object with a Device to Make it Lighter, Tautology": "this piece consists of a metal box 51cm high, 29cm large and 27cm deep.

On one of its sides, there's a little perforated window through which you can see a fan. This fan works thanks to an electric cable that comes out of the box and is connected to a source of energy."

The title of this piece indicates that this object is provided with a device to make it lighter. The text tells us that this device is a fan. Indeed, by blowing out air, the fan is a device that makes the object lighter.

However, to obtain this result, in other words, blowing out air to make the object lighter, the fan has to be put into the object. In other words, putting in a device that weighs x times the weight of the air that it's supposed to be blowing out.

So we may conclude that in "Object with a Device to Make it Lighter, Tautology», there is indeed identity in content, between blowing out air and reducing the weight, but not identity in form, the fan representing a much greater weight than the air that it's supposed to be blowing out, in other words much heavier than the obtained reduction.

Therefore, "Object with a Device to Make it Lighter, Tautology», 1968, is not a tautology.

. SLIDE 20



Well, in the light of this demonstration, which was based on three works from the series that Luciano Fabro called "Tautologies", we have been provided with the necessary elements to prove that these pieces - although they contain the word in their titles - are not tautologies. Thus, we may conclude that the use of the term "tautology" is not legitimate in the case of these three pieces.

All right, as there are no objections, questions or comments, it's time for me to thank you for your attention.

Thank you.