

## Study: Truth, Speech and Saying

Peggy Papada

To you I am thus the enigma of she who slips away as soon as she appears, you men who try so hard to hide me under the tawdry finery of your proprieties. [...] Where am I going, having passed into you? And where was I prior to that? Will I perhaps tell you someday? But so that you will find me where I am, I will teach you by what sign you can recognize me. Men, listen, I am telling you the secret. I, truth, speak

JACQUES LACAN, “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis”

### Truth as cause

In his early teaching, and following Freud, Lacan refers to truth as *cause*: There is something that I do not understand about myself – a symptom in the body, thoughts, a lapsus – an  $S_1$  which, nevertheless, means something, and I set out to decipher it, to try to make sense of it with an  $S_2$  which gives meaning to the  $S_1$  retroactively; truth finds its “algorithm” in the minimal relationship of the signifying chain,  $S_1$ - $S_2$ , and becomes the motor force of the analytic process.<sup>1</sup> Evidently the subject must speak through the articulation of signifiers that language, the signifying chain, unfolds. We thus notice already the articulation of truth with the structure of speech and language, which as Patricia Bosquin-Caroz writes in her presentation of the theme, remains constant in Lacan’s teaching.

### “I, truth, speak”

The truth Freud introduces us to, is one that speaks – “it [*ça*] speaks [...] where it suffers”<sup>2</sup> – through the symptom. Lacan will give a voice to truth with his famous prosopopoeia, in order to further emphasise the fact that *she* speaks: “Men, listen, I am telling you the secret. I, truth, speak.”<sup>3</sup> Freudian truth is revealed through the slips of the tongue and witticisms, the ‘non-thoughts’ and meaningless formations that irrupt in the subject’s discourse and interfere with the intended meaning. Far from the Cartesian truth that coincides with ‘I think’, another truth emerges from that Other scene of the unconscious, a place in which ‘I am where I am not thinking’. It is a truth that is evanescent, half-said, read between the lines, to be deciphered, and as such subversive. Thus, the more it wishes to establish an absolute position, the more it lies.

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<sup>1</sup> Dupont, L., “Fake vérité et hors-sens”, *Hebdo-Blog*, 25th March, 2025. Available online.

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, J., “The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis”, *Écrits, op.cit.*, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 340.

Truth is veiled in an enigma, “yet to be discovered”<sup>4</sup> that impels us to follow its path and in so doing, explore the unconscious. There cannot be psychoanalysis without the love for truth that Freud established. It is a truth that is found in the material of the unconscious, words, grounded in the fact that it speaks.

### **Truth in speech and saying**

“Whether it wishes to be an agent of healing, training, or sounding the depths”, Lacan tells us, “psychoanalysis has but one medium: the patient’s speech.”<sup>5</sup> When a patient addresses an analyst, he may be seeking the truth – or he might have already ascribed a truth value to the meaning he has given to his problem – but instead of being invited to speak the truth, he is asked to free associate; to say what goes through his mind, anything, without censorship, including what – even if he doesn’t know it – might be false. Because whether it is true or false is beside the point here; instead, what matters is to say. Referring to the beginning of the treatment and to getting the patient to apply the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis, Lacan puts it like this: “[it] consists in getting the patient to forget that it is merely a matter of words.”<sup>6</sup> What is at stake is speech, since it is through speech that the truth effects arising from the formations of the unconscious have a chance of occurring.<sup>7</sup>

We thus note that the status of truth in psychoanalysis is “the truth of a spoken word”<sup>8</sup>, thus very different from truth corresponding with objective reality and factual exactitude. It is a truth we arrive at through its creation in speech. When Lacan gives *her* a human voice, it does not say *I, truth, say the truth*, but that *I speak*.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, if what is said is on the side of meaning and saying on the side of the act, the faith is in the testimony, in the enunciation, in the way of saying, rather than in the meaning and truthfulness of what is said: something is heard behind what is said, that cannot be said; and it implies the existence of a body and the drive. We can then perhaps appreciate why with Lacan, in front of the real, the path of truth leads us to the devaluation of truth and meaning. The quality of truth inherent in speech provides a certain liberty to say one thing at one moment, and say something else later, or totally change our mind. It is “a truth of the moment, of the instant” implying eminent variability.<sup>10</sup> Each session has its truth; each sentence can have its truth. With Lacan we see how the analytic experience of truth as variable, allows us to locate the fundamental reference point of the unconscious not so much in the past and history, but in the wanting to be realised, in the actuality of speech and of the saying.

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<sup>4</sup> Dupont, L. “Je mens”, *Ornicar?* 60, 2025, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J., “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York: Norton, 2006, p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, J., “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principle of Its Power”, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York: Norton, 2006, p. 490.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, J.-A., “*Comment finissent les analyses : Paradoxes de la passe*”, Navarin: Paris, 2022, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Bosquin-Caroz, P., *Variety. Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis. Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme*. Available at <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ARGUMENT-NLS-CONGRESS-2026-PBC.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Un voyage aux îles”, *Ornicar?* 60, 2025, p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, J.-A., “L’orientation lacanienne: L’Être et l’Un”, teaching delivered under the auspices of the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris VIII, lesson of 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011, unpublished.

## **An act of saying**

But how do we move from the blah-blah of free association to an act of *saying* that has truth effects? Because not all sayings have the potency to acquire such a status, which is that of an event, according to Lacan. Here, the problem of the relationship between truth and jouissance, between the signifier and the body is at stake; “one cannot say the truth about jouissance.”<sup>11</sup>

At the heart of the analytic experience there is a real. This is the paradox the fundamental rule entails: despite our liberty to speak, saying it all is in fact, impossible. Lacan puts it like that: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is impossible, materially: words lack there.”<sup>12</sup> And he adds: “Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real”. To the extent that speech itself falters before what cannot be said, to the extent that it encounters a “there is no”, truth is related to the real by the impossible-to-say.<sup>13</sup> Hence the effort to return, circumscribe that point, try to say it better, approach a *saying well*.

There is no sexual relation implies that there is no relationship between  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , but that there is One,  $S_1$ , outside meaning, signifier all alone which points at jouissance. So as to include the real in the circuit, Lacan suggests a saying that would have the potency of an act would be “a saying that has no meaning.”<sup>14</sup> He points to equivocation, the means through which the analyst can make a hole in the said and empty the truth of its loaded meaning, so that something other than what was intentionally said can appear, namely, jouissance that is outside meaning, and yet is inscribed in the very flesh of the *parlêtre*.

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<sup>11</sup> Miller, J.-A., “Truth is coupled with meaning”, *The Lacanian Review* 2, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Lacan, J., *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. J. Copjec, trans. D.Hollier, R. Krauss, A. Michelson, Norton, New York /London, 1990 (translation modified), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, J.-A., *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, *op.cit.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>14</sup> Lacan, J., “The Lacanian phenomenon”, *The Lacanian Review* 9, 2020, p. 29.