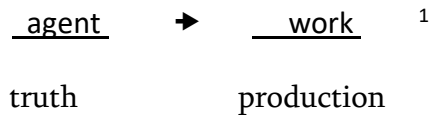


Lacan's Four Discourses and Truth

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In Seminar XVII, Lacan introduces four discourses – that of the Master, the University, the Hysteric, and the Analyst – all represented by a quadripode consisting of four fixed positions: agent, work, production, truth.



In the following year, at the beginning of his next Seminar, he designates the position of the agent as the position of a semblant, thereby linking semblant and truth to show that the two terms are not opposed. Truth is in solidarity with the semblant; it is “correlative”² to it. It is a paradox, since in common sense the semblant and truth are opposed.

Jacques-Alain Miller, in his 2008 Seminar, sheds light on another aspect of the four discourses, specifically on their claim to truth. As he points out: “Each discourse passes itself off as the truth. It is permeated by a claim to truth. Such a perspective displaces this claim toward imposture.” This lends a dimension of comedy, where “there are four here to say: I, the truth, speak.”³

Thus, he wonders, does the expression “passes itself off as the truth” refer, in each of the three discourses (Master, University, and Hysteric), to the element that occupies the position of truth?

He answers negatively, offering a different reading of Lacan. “It seems to me,” he says, “that it refers to the element that is located in the so-called position of the agent, and through which each discourse is defined.”

“In the discourse of the Master, what is inscribed there is the master signifier, which is put forward as truth – a universal truth intended to gather, to unite, and even to exclude.”

“In the discourse of the University, it is S2, knowledge, which supports this imposture of truth.”

“In the discourse of the Hysteric, it is the barred subject, which radiates as truth and proclaims the evangelical discourse: ‘I am the truth.’”⁴

In each discourse, the position of the agent tends to present itself as the truth, attempting to exclude or to repress the position of truth that is located at the lower left.

¹ Lacan J., *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, London/New York, Norton, 2007, p.169.

² Lacan J., *Le Séminaire, Livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, ed. J.-A. Miller, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 26.

³ Miller J.-A., «L'orientation lacanienne. Tout le monde est fou», lecture delivered at the Psychoanalysis Department of the University of Paris 8, lesson of 4 June 2008, unpublished.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Only the analytic discourse constitutes an exception. How does it differ? “The difference from the other three is that the term it places in the position of the agent –the object a– this term has no claim to truth, insofar as it is recognized in the analytic discourse as a semblant.”⁵

Consequently, truth itself is also a semblant. Hence, this particular discourse could say, as Jacques-Alain Miller underlines: I am varity.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*