

The Game as a Semblant in *Life Is Beautiful*

Section: History, Myth and Fiction

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In the film *Life Is Beautiful*¹, set in a concentration camp during World War II, the protagonist Guido invents a game for his five-year-old son, Giosuè. Imprisonment is transformed into a competition with rules and a goal: whoever endures, follows the instructions, and collects enough points, will win a tank at the end. Hunger, threats, screams, and humiliations are absorbed into the language of the game, allowing the child to remain within life in a condition that exceeds all understanding.

Jacques Lacan teaches us *that truth cannot be fully spoken*² and that the Real cannot be symbolized. Within this impossibility, the father's invention constructs a form of discourse that enables the child to stand before what would otherwise be unbearable. Guido's game does not negate the horror; rather, it organizes it into a meaningful narrative with rules and purpose that the child can grasp, giving him a subjective position within chaos. The narrative covers the holes of the Real and gives meaning to what could not be said. Through this game, reality is overturned and what emerges is *the meaning we give to the events*.³

The final scene reveals how fiction operates. Guido, as he is captured and led to execution, passes in front of his son with a playful, almost comical step, remaining within the game until the last moment. The child stays hidden, seeing only blurred movements and shadows, without grasping their true significance. After the liberation, he sees the tank and believes he has won.

The film closes with the voice of the now adult Giosuè saying: "This is my story. This is the sacrifice my father made. This was his gift to me." Through this retrospective recognition, it becomes evident that life can be "beautiful" only through mediation. As

¹ Benigni, R. (Director). (1997). *La vita è bella* [Life is beautiful] [Film]. Melampo Cinematografica; Cecchi Gori Group

² 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.33.

³ Bosquin-Caroz, P. "VARIETY: Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis," *Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme 2026*, p.6. Available at : <https://nlscongress2026.amp-nls.org/en/presentation-of-the-congress-theme-2026/> ↑

Jacques-Alain Miller emphasizes, the challenge is not to overcome the Real but *to learn how to deal with it*⁴ - on the condition that love intercedes so that the Real becomes truth through the mediation of fiction.

⁴ Miller, J.-A., *L'expérience du réel dans la cure analytique*, (1998-1999), teaching delivered under the auspices of the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris 8, lesson of January 13, 1999, unpublished.