

Proposed thematic axis: Tearing of the Veil, Revelation, Emergence

Bernini: The Failed Unveiling

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Truth in psychoanalysis does not appear where discourse is coherent, transparent, or successful. It emerges at the point where speech falters—through lapsus, misunderstanding, and error. Truth does not precede the mistake; it takes shape within it. As Lacan formulates it with striking precision, “truth seizes error by the scruff of the neck in the mistake.”¹ Truth does not correct the error; it emerges from it.

Bernini’s *Truth Unveiled by Time*², conceived after the collapse of the bell towers of St Peter’s Basilica, provides an analogue of this logic. The project’s failure damaged the artist’s reputation and marked a turning point in his career. In response, he conceived an allegorical group: “a winged figure of Time hovering above a beautiful woman from whose nude body he lifts a mantle. She is truth; in her hand she holds an image of the Sun darting bright rays in all directions.”³ Yet the sculpture remained unfinished. The act that should reveal never reached completion.

The sculpture does not attempt to repair this failure, rather it responds to it. It stages a suspended unveiling. What appears is not a final disclosure, but something exposed without guarantee. Truth does not arrive once the veil is lifted; it appears where the unveiling fails to conclude.

Here time functions not as chronology but as retroaction - as logical time. Truth becomes legible only afterwards, emerging from what interrupts meaning rather than from what fulfils it. The unfinished element is thus essential: not an accident of execution but the condition of what is shown.

This gives a form to what psychoanalysis calls *mi-dire* — truth as half-said. Not a truth partially hidden, but structurally unable to be totalised in discourse. Jacques-Alain Miller put it as follows: In analysis, it is “not about saying what is”, but “about making truth out of what has been. Then there is that which was missing to make truth: traumas, that which made a hole [...] It is about bringing discourse to that which could not take its place within it.”⁴ Bernini’s sculpture materialises precisely such a hole. Truth does not repair the fracture; it inhabits it.

The work therefore does not demonstrate that time ultimately reveals truth. Rather, it shows that truth appears at the point where revelation cannot be completed — as what remains visible once the promise of full disclosure has failed.

¹ Lacan J., *The Seminar, Book I, Freud’s Papers on Technique*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, New York/London: Norton, 1991, p. 265.

² See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_Unveiled_by_Time_\(Bernini\)#/media/File:Museo_borghese_sala_del_gladiatore_g.l._bernini_verit%C3%A0_svelata_1645-52_02.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_Unveiled_by_Time_(Bernini)#/media/File:Museo_borghese_sala_del_gladiatore_g.l._bernini_verit%C3%A0_svelata_1645-52_02.JPG)

³ Norton R., *Bernini and Other Studies in the History of Art*, New York: Macmillan, 1914, p. 13.

⁴ Miller J.-A., “L’orientation lacanienne. Choses de finesse en psychanalyse”, teaching delivered under the auspices of the Department of Psychoanalysis at the University Paris 8, lesson of 18 March 2009, unpublished.