

## The Lullaby of Falsehood

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In the post-truth era, falsehoods disseminated through fake news are often treated as inaccuracies or distortions of reality. The term 'alternative fact', introduced in 2017 by a member of the US government, was used to justify statements described as falsehoods. When a journalist labelled her statement a falsehood, she replied that it was an 'alternative fact'.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, in 'alternative facts', what is at stake is not merely truth or lies. Rather than insisting on accuracy, the politician shifts the discussion by repeating the word 'fact' and invoking emotionally charged social issues. In response, the opposition turns to verification practices such as fact-checking. Yet the problem is not that we cannot recognize a lie, but that truth no longer interests us.

Lacanian psychoanalysis allows us to read falsehood differently: as a collective symptom of language. For Lacan, truth is inscribed in the articulation of the signifier. Falsehood, then, can be understood as a mode of enunciation characterized by bombast, open-ended meanings, slogans, and repetition. It is not merely a concealment of truth but a signifying operation inscribed in the locus of the Other. As Lacan notes, "the locus of the Other [...] is made for truth to be inscribed there; that is everything of that order, the false, even lies—which only exist on the foundation of truth."<sup>2</sup> Even when it contradicts truth, falsehood remains its bearer, as it marks a position of the subject within discourse. What emerges, then, is an affective oral speech, where master signifiers circulate unmoored from stable points of reference.

In the post-truth era, the subject invests in a signifier not because it is true or false, but because it produces jouissance. As Jacques-Alain Miller writes, "what doesn't lie is jouissance".<sup>3</sup> A lie can offer forms of jouissance that a neutral, justified signifier cannot compete with. Freud refers to the "libidinal structure of groups"<sup>4</sup> and the leader's power of "suggestion": "a conviction which is not based upon perception and reasoning but upon an

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<sup>1</sup> Interview available online in NBC News, link: <https://youtu.be/VSrEEDQgFc8>

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, New York/London: Norton, 1991, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, J.-A., "The Unconscious and the Speaking Body", *Scilicet 10*, 2016, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, S., "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVIII, London: Hogarth Press, pp. 102-103.

erotic tie”.<sup>5</sup> Fake news mobilizes indignation and affect, producing a collectively legitimised jouissance and a shared ground of identification. Additionally, the signifier functions here as a generator of jouissance at the level of enunciation itself -echoing in its pronunciation. Jouissance is found in the repetition and rhythmic closure of 'alternative facts', which produces a lulling effect. These are closed narratives that operate as ready-made stories, much like lullabies, suspending the subject's responsibility to doubt and to undergo the “test of truth”.<sup>6</sup> Instead, they lull us to sleep, hypnotized by the voice of discourse.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Miller J.-A., “Pass Bis”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks 17*, 2007, p. 100.