

## Hunting Truth

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The phrase "I, truth, speak" was uttered by Jacques Lacan on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1955 in his lecture at the Vienna Neuropsychiatric Clinic on the occasion of Sigmund Freud's centenary.<sup>1</sup> In Seminar X, Lacan draws on this speech at the end of one of his lectures, when invoking the myth of Diana: "...there's Diana's hunt which, at the time I chose, that of Freud's centenary, I said was the way of the Freudian quest."<sup>2</sup>

But what is the relation between "Diana's hunt" and "the Freudian quest"?

In Ovid's myth, Diana, the Roman goddess of hunting and nature, is bathing with her nymphs in a spring in a grotto in the middle of a forest, her weapons and clothes laid aside, when Actaeon, the grandson of Cadmus, founder and king of Thebes, appears. When he encounters the naked goddess, she splashes him with spring water and proclaims furiously: "Now you may tell everyone that you saw me without my clothes, if you are still able to speak!" She then transforms Actaeon into a deer. The moment Actaeon sees his antlers in the water, he flees the grotto: "He wanted to say 'I am cursed!' – but no voice issued forth! ... only his former consciousness remained". Actaeon is then hunted down in the forest by his own dogs, who no longer recognize him and ultimately tear him apart.

While for Ovid, it had been "fate" that led Actaeon to "wander" into the grotto, for Lacan the myth is about Actaeon's desire that pushes him towards the truth that Diana embodies: "For in these undertakings, truth proves to be complex in its essence, humble in its offices and foreign to reality, refractory to the choice of sex, akin to death and, on the whole, rather inhuman, Diana perhaps..."<sup>3</sup> By equating the goddess with truth, Lacan also follows in Freud's footsteps: "But now the truth in Freud's mouth takes the said bull [*bête*] by the horns: 'To you I am thus the enigma of she who slips away as soon as she appears ...'."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan J., "The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis", *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge, Polity, 2014, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J., "The Freudian Thing", *op.cit.*, p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> Lacan, J., "The Freudian Thing", *op.cit.*, p. 340.

In February 2024, in his homage to Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller, reminds us that on the quest to truth, there can be no tracks to follow: “Truth is the only thing that has not yet been written. The only thing that still needs to be invented because it lies in the future.”<sup>5</sup>

For Lacan, invoking Diana as a figure of truth was a way of reminding psychoanalysts, that they should remain faithful to Freud by continuing the hunt “after his death.”<sup>6</sup> But be careful, because, as Lacan states: “Truth is the sister of jouissance” and, both work as Miller points out, “against the algorithms of the body and one might say, against the interests of life.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Miller, J.-A., « Lacan au présent », Théâtre de la Ville, Paris. Min. 1:19:12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbDZO8kQ5GE&t=4968s>

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety, op.cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, J.-A., « La vie et la vérité », *Préliminaire 11*, 1999, p. 170.