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TRUTH IS COUPLED WITH MEANING

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As Lacan tells us in Seminar XVII, Ch. IV, “Truth, the sister of jouissance”, there is no truth without jouissance. And yet there is no last word, no “full” truth, when it comes to jouissance. Truth is coupled with meaning, and they form a trio with fiction. But analyses stumble upon a residue of jouissance that cannot be dealt with by truth.

TRUTH IS COUPLED WITH MEANING

Jacques-Alain Miller

I have stumbled on a problem – I call it a problem because I have stumbled on it – which is that of the relation I specified between truth and jouissance.

I was led to say that there is no truth of jouissance. I didn't say this without considering the consequences of such a statement – provided it is taken seriously – in the practice of analysis. One of the consequences in particular lies in the fact that the speech that is authorised and called for by the analytical discourse is what Lacan calls “the lying truth”, *the truth* (and this is my own way of putting it) *that lies about jouissance*. One cannot say the truth about jouissance. If one cannot say the whole truth, this is because there is a zone, a field, a register of existence, where truth does not apply, and this register is jouissance, i.e. that which gives satisfaction.

The Mystery of the Speaking Body

If we follow Lacan on this point, jouissance is what satisfies a body. Furthermore, *what is made to speak* in psychoanalysis is not a subject, it is

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Sex All Over The Place

not the pure subject of speech, but rather a body, that body which in *Seminar XX* (subsequently elaborating the consequences in his teaching) Lacan already calls *the speaking body*. Not the subject of speech, but the speaking body, which is what he qualifies as a mystery. For it is difficult to construct a matheme – the matheme being the opposite of *mystery* – difficult to give a logic to the speaking body.

What is at stake is the very status of the patient that addresses themselves to you, or that you are: it is not the same thing to listen to someone as subject of speech or as speaking body.

Truth and jouissance are two master signifiers that structure the analytical discourse in distinct manners. Truth is the master signifier of Lacan's teaching in its earlier phases. He says it to be distinct from exactitude. Truth is not a question of saying what is, it is not the adequacy of the word and the thing, according to the time-honoured definition. Truth depends on discourse.

What is at stake in analysis is to *make truth* out of what has happened. There are things that failed to become true, traumatism, that which makes a hole, which is what Lacan will later call *troumatisme*.¹ It is a question of bringing discourse to what could not take place in it, of saying what could not be said, or could only be said in an indirect way, between the lines. Analysis would then be the chance to rectify what had been said badly. To say [*dire*]. The solution would be to say. This notion of psychoanalysis has been popularised under the slogan *The Words to Say It*.

It is nonetheless the case that in practice, we are constantly confronted with that-which-cannot-be-said, and that Lacan's earlier teaching also took its bearings from the central question of the unsayable.

When developing his theory of desire, at the time of *Seminar VI* and his *écrit* entitled "The Direction of the Treatment...", Lacan underlined that *desire is inarticulable*, only to add that *it is articulated*: it is articulated in signifiers, without for all that giving up its last word. *The last word* is what remains, in the practice of psychoanalysis, forever tangled up in problems, that is, as an aporia. The last word is the basis of the appointment: "See you next time." And when the last word comes, when one stops, in whatever mode this happens, the last word remains in suspense, remains problematic. Hence this notion of granting an extension to those who think they have the last word. This extension of analysis is what Lacan called the Pass. It means: "Go on speaking!" To others, to two others and no longer to only one, so that they in turn go off to speak to a jury who will consider whether you have arrived at the last word in your case or not.

The inarticulable of desire, which Lacan aimed at right from the start, takes on another aspect when it is a question of this famous jouissance

1. [TN: 'Trou' is the French word for hole, so *troumatisme* is a pun on trauma being the encounter with a hole.]



Jacques-Alain Miller, Truth is Coupled with Meaning

outside meaning [*hors sens*]. It is, undoubtedly, another version, which shows the constancy of Lacan's preoccupation, the permanence of a structure of thought in its way of grasping what is at stake in the analytical experience. But the outside meaning of *jouissance* is a lot more intricate, if I may say, than the inarticulable of desire. These two formulas that I am juxtaposing, taken from the two extremes of Lacan's teaching, indicate that there is something about the end which demands to be thought of in another mode than the process by which this end was reached, and which remains on an edge [*bord*].

When it stops. How can we conceptualise this? Does it stop because it succeeds, because the aim is attained? Or through fatigue, because one is worn out, or weary? Or because something has changed, and one has access to something new?

Revelation

Truth is the philosophical name of something that has been grasped in the psychoanalytical experience by those minds who have nothing philosophical about them; the English, who in their own language, and for want of a better word, let's borrow it from them, call it *insight*. This is something that one can see. If I wanted to translate this word into French and in relation to psychoanalysis, I would say *revelation*. One is not in analysis until one has had at least one revelation. This is the most natural word we have in French to designate the subject's relation to a truth he accesses in a moment of seeing: the word "sight" in English designates a view, in the sense of a panorama.

I do not mean the Revelation – with a capital letter – as employed in the religious discourse, in which there is only one – *The Revelation of the Truth*. This is a story that is not about to stop being told. Its consequences continue to unfold, going as far as to forbid us to use contraceptives. This Pope blows my mind. He has such a talent for saying what should not be said that it becomes sublime. Generating scandal is one of the functions of the revelation of truth, but in this case it is more scandal in the style of Gaston Lagaffe.² I am a little disappointed because I celebrated his elevation to this high status with my friend Philippe Sollers. I remember how we congratulated each other on that day. "Ah, he is going to be great, the *Panzerkardinal!*" as we called him. We believed that everything was going to be sorted in the most impeccable, carefully measured fashion. After the previous, slightly eccentric Polish Pope, the German guy would put everything in its place. These were my own prejudices, which could also be considered ethno-racist. All things considered, they are inappropriate. The disorder in which Germany conducted the Second World War is absolutely incredible. If you take

2. [TN: *Gaston* is a gag comic-strip whose character causes gaffes, hence his last name.]



Sex All Over The Place

a closer look at what they did, they were crackpots. Hitler had no discipline of living; an insomniac, he would go to bed at six in the morning after chatting the night away with his secretaries. He would get up around one or two in the afternoon, but demanded that no regiment move without his authorisation. No wonder all this turned out badly for them. And now we have a Bavarian who appears to be completely bohemian, who doesn't appear to have given any thought to the matter. Undoubtedly he is obsessed with the Revealed Truth, to which he refers at every opportunity. Once the Truth has been revealed, the talent of the Catholic Church has been to always know how to adapt it to circumstances, a talent that the current Pope does not seem to have. The reason I'm telling you all this is because I have just received an email from *Le Point* asking me if I'd be interested in giving my views about the Pope. I have not replied yet, but clearly I am worked up about it, and I'm going to get back to them saying that the problem is that Benedict XVI is Benedict-Blunder [*La Gaffe*].

To come back to the term "revelation" (which seems to me to be the most adequate translation for the word *insight* and for the experience that it refers to), it certainly has religious overtones. But let's go beyond this. In a very eloquent manner, it designates a hidden truth that is unveiled. This is the notion contained in the term *alêtheia* (punctuated by Heidegger in Greek philosophy, especially in the work of Aristotle), a term that designates the truth as something that becomes un-covered, we could say, un-forgotten; in other words a truth whose native status is one of veiling. The truth as such is hidden and can only be accessed by a lifting of the veil.

This resonates with what takes place in an analysis. An analysis is punctuated – it could be presented in this way – by a succession of revelations. Even a position of scepticism is adopted, a methodical position of non-dupery – *the one who will not be deceived* – even for those who do without the theoretical constructions, we note a certain evidence of phenomena of revelation in analysis, which are experienced as such. They are even expected as such – when they are not produced, the subject is in want of revelation. This is a given. Psychoanalysis could be reconstructed arguing that the concept of repression is called for, demanded, summoned by the experience of revelation. If there is revelation, there must previously have been something like a repression – one didn't want to say something, confess something, recognise something...

One can argue whether this is something subconscious or unconscious. This was never a question that interested me, if I may say. It is like in *Knock*³: *Does it scratch or does it tickle?* These arguments can be endless. I don't think Lacan ever gave much weight to this distinction between the *sub-* and the *un-*conscious.

3. [TN: *Knock*, a satire on medicine, is a play by Jules Romains.]





Jacques-Alain Miller, Truth is Coupled with Meaning

The Shimmering of Knowledge

There is a mode which is that of *knowing-without-knowing*, knowing without recognising this knowledge. Lacan preferred the word “unknown”, *the unknown that knows...* It is unknown and yet one can nevertheless suppose that it is known in some way, the subject supposed to know. In psychoanalysis, at every moment – obviously in some more than in others – one can catch a glimpse of the shimmering varieties of knowledge. Knowledge is not *clear-cut*, to use an English expression, it is not transparent.

A logician, a philosopher of logic, who gained some notoriety in the 1960-70s, wrote a book entitled *Belief and Knowledge*.⁴ I remember being struck by Lacan saying in his Seminar: “*Hintikka believes that there is a strict difference between believing and knowing. But I don't see it that way.*” It was all the more striking for me as he had given me the book to read, apparently to save him from having to read it himself. I thus gave him a little lecture on Hintikka's theory, his symbols and formulas. On the one hand, I was a little disappointed that the only thing Lacan had drawn from my lesson was this, which seemed a bit slight in comparison with the mathematical edifice Hintikka had tried to build upon it. On the other hand, his passing remark had quite an impact on the young philosopher I then was. A philosopher? Well, let's say I had been educated within the philosophical framework, in which there is a stark difference between believing and knowing. We learn from Plato that there is a great difference between *doxa* (opinion) and *episteme* (science), that it is a matter of passing from *doxa* to *episteme*, even if there are domains where it's harder to get away from the *doxa*. We learn this from Kant, who prided himself on having limited knowledge in order to make room for belief. There are plenty of artefacts that are based on a strict difference between these two registers. Well, this passing remark was a beginning. I am not exaggerating its effect when I say it was one of the landmarks that gradually helped me detach myself, as it were, from the philosophical vision of the world or of thought.

Knowledge retains around it a shimmering cloud where to various degrees, knowing and not-wanting-to-know are conjugated. It oscillates, tips back and forth, until, at certain moments, it delivers a flash of revelation. We know but we forget; we know but we don't pay attention; we know but we put it to one side; we know but we keep postponing; we know but there are so many things that can happen; we know but we might be wrong... *Yes I know, but still* – as Lacan said when he used an expression

4. Cf. Lacan, J., “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines. Yale University, Kanzer Seminar, 24 November 1975”, *Scilicet*, No. 6/7, Seuil, Paris, 1976, p. 12. Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief: an introduction to the logic of the two notions*, published in 1962 in the USA.





Sex All Over The Place

that he had heard one of his students use. In relation to the absence of knowledge, there is this indistinct zone of shimmering, against which, at times, the phenomenon of revelation stands out.

In analysis, it happens that such a revelation becomes unforgettable, or that the analyst is there to represent the memory of the revelation. It can be slight, it can turn on something small, and yet it can stand as a monument for a subject.

The interpretation of the analyst, such as I understand it, must be thought of in relation to revelation. It is an aid to revelation. It can be an auxiliary revelation. But the interpretation is achieved only if, in a direct or deferred manner, it leads to a revelation for the analysand. The interpretation should not be ventured like that, simply to see; it must be ventured as playing a part in relation to the contingent revelation it could produce in the analysand, that is to say, the fall or the tearing of the veil that it may bring about.

Ménage à trois

The word “truth”, in analysis, calls for the word “veil” – as an obstacle. Without getting too far away from the immediate experience, it could be said that the one who speaks in analysis lives in a reality, but sometimes it appears that there is another reality, which this subject experiences, as a rule, as separated by a veil. In the same way that the truth becomes plural because there is a sequence of truths in analysis, not all of which necessarily cohere, belying one another, so too reality becomes redoubled. This is how I justify that to the term “reality” is added that of the real, in order to designate the other reality that comes to disrupt the telling of reality, this other reality which emerges in bits and pieces, in spare parts.

This is the limit of the theory that has been elaborated in psychoanalysis in the past decade, exploiting certain inflections of Lacan’s earlier teaching, and which basks in the glory of narratology. Truth is linked to what I am telling, to what I tell of myself and deliver to the Other, the analyst. There is a narration – and Lacan, without using this term, said it better than anyone in “The Function and Field of Speech and Language”. But what counts is not only that this narration should be able to take charge of what remains as a hole in the reality of the subject, and thus make sense of his traumas, of his indelible images, of his monumental scenes, or of his gaps, by filling them in, by putting them in a series, by re-establishing a continuity, in telling a *hystory* (with a “y” to indicate the fact that this story is told *for an other*, that it is woven in a “relationship of intersubjectivity”, in inverted commas). What is important is that in this very narration, holes manifest themselves, stumbling blocks that are so



Jacques-Alain Miller, Truth is Coupled with Meaning

many signs of another truth, of another meaning, which struggle to be conjugated in the fiction of a narration. This is why these elements that emerge and disrupt the narrative cycle are given the *value of the real* rather than the *value of truth and of meaning*.

Truth is coupled with *meaning*, and the two of them make a trio with *fiction*.

Lacan's later teaching consists in the realisation that the symbolic order – which in his earlier teaching was the motor and the structure of the analytic experience, and of what Freud called the psyche – belongs to the register of fiction.

In other words, the signifier is a semblant. This marks the step that is taken when one passes from a notion where the symbolic and the imaginary are opposed, a notion which grants paramount value to the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic (as Lacan does in his first six Seminars, where he devotes himself to detaching the Freudian terms from the imaginary register in order to give them a place in the symbolic order) – the first phase, then – to, on the contrary, including the imaginary in the symbolic, which is equivalent to the term “semblant”.

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{S} \ // \ \text{I} \\ \text{I} \ \longrightarrow \ \text{S} \end{array} \quad \left| \quad (\text{S} \ \diamond \ \text{I}) \ \equiv \ \mathbf{\text{semblant}}\right.$$

This is obviously a simplification. On the left, you have different levels and a hierarchy. One goes from the imaginary to the symbolic, from the imaginary, which would be the register of the ego, to the register of the subject, which would be the register of the symbolic, and one explains that the major Freudian concepts only find their truth in the symbolic.

But from the moment when Lacan introduces the category of the real in his *Seminar VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, the moment he tries to complete his theory of desire by taking *jouissance* into account, he is led to put the symbolic and the imaginary on the same side. This will allow him to say, for example, that the phallus is an *imaginary signifier*. In relation to the category of the real, when it is reintroduced into the analytical field, the difference between the symbolic and the imaginary appears inessential.

Truth is an abstract category. The only thing that counts, in fact, that which gives rise to problems, which gives rise to the *problem* I indicated to start with, is the truth about the real. While the imaginary allows itself to be reabsorbed in the symbolic, the real is repulsed by the symbolic. There is something other than truth. Revelation does not resolve everything, it does not resolve all the knots and problems of life. Not everything is truth, not everything is meaning.

And yet, when one sets about it, it seems that sense can be made out of everything. One opposes, mediates, overcomes, sublimates, links, and it all

Sex All Over The Place

makes sense. When one applies oneself, all the facts seem to yield to the omnipotence of meaning. The result varies according to the subject's temperament. Some make melancholy sense of everything, especially of their successes. Some make optimistic sense of everything, including when they fail the most, considering that "it's just as well, it shows me where I went wrong." Are they good-natured? Others complain because they have achieved everything they wanted: "And what now? What's left?"

Observing the various ways in which meaning is created, I understand that the philosophy to be derived from this is that everyone ascribes the meaning they want to whatever happens to them. This gives the impression of an extraordinary plasticity of meaning. Everything depends on the manner in which people grasp what happens. One can isolate in each subject a mode of making sense of things. One could call this their fantasy. Some might say that because they were very much loved by their mother, they give a positive meaning to everything that happens to them, and that when their mother was not *good enough* they give everything a negative meaning. If you want to present things this way, it is valid and it just about holds water. Psychoanalysis builds upon this power of meaning. Often when I am asked for advice on a case, what do I say after all, based on the few elements they bring me? I say – putting it as well as I can, to put on a show – something along the lines of: "Let us trust in the Psychoanalytical Goddess. Let us trust in the engine of meaning. Let us trust that at the end of the day the disasters that a subject may encounter in their life will be alleviated by the tale they will manage to construct, the meaning that they will manage to give to them."

And yet, despite this power of meaning, not everything is meaning.

Amboceptor

It is already as a residue that the notion of the real imposes itself, a residue of the operations of semblance. This residue is the matrix on the basis of which meaning is given. It can be called the fantasy. But if we reduce what is involved to its root, if we subtract everything which, in the fantasy, is of the register of the semblant, that is to say, the scenario and the scene, which I spoke about last time, what is left is a mode of *jouissance*. The mode of *jouissance* is the name of the fantasy once it has been stripped of the scenario and the scene.

The mode of *jouissance* cannot be reduced to meaning. Lacan obviously tried to do so at one time, in saying *jouis-sens*, enjoy-meant. I did a lot of work on this, because it took my fancy. Ah! Why did I go and retrieve this *jouis-sens*? Why did it appeal so much, to myself and to other people? Because it is a new version of the function of fantasy: it is an amboceptor. It is an amboceptor between truth and *jouissance*, between language and



Jacques-Alain Miller, Truth is Coupled with Meaning

jouissance, something that connects the two sides. Moreover, from a descriptive point of view it says something. There is a jouissance in saying certain words, certain phrases, or a discourse. There is condensation. Words are charged, affectively as is said, which is to say libidinally, there is a charge of jouissance. In saying *mode of jouissance*, one undoes, one tries to undo, the knot between jouissance and meaning, which is secondary, which does not saturate everything that is at stake in jouissance.

Lacan could say “interpretation aims at the cause of desire”.⁵ He even wrote this once. I took this as a reference because it showed the amount of progress that had been made since the beginning of Lacan’s teaching, when interpretation was indexed on the signifier. What does it mean to aim at the cause of desire? How is that achieved in interpretation? How does one aim at the object *a* cause of desire?

Lacan concluded his sixth Seminar, *Desire and its Interpretation*, with the following proposition: that *desire is its interpretation*. One could not go any further in reducing interpretation to the signifier and making desire into a signified. This is how Lacan started. Given his point of departure, he began by making the Freudian libido into desire, and then that desire into a signified, the signified of a signifying chain called “demand”.

In a second moment, he realised that Freudian libido could not be reduced to desire, and in order to translate “libido”, he added a second term, that of jouissance. He then imagined making of object *a* – which he said was his invention – the amboceptor linking, mediating, or functioning as a middle term between truth and jouissance, between the symbolic order and the real. This is why he spent so many years working on this. This is the crux of the fantasy. It was in object *a* that he concentrated the paradox of the amboception of truth and jouissance.

Disrupting the Defences

The idea was to interpret by aiming at the cause of desire, that is to say, at the fantasy; to interpret desire by aiming at the fantasy, to interpret desire as signified by aiming at the matrix that generates meaning, not stopping at the effect but aiming at the cause; all of this entailed the notion that by aiming at the cause of desire one would manage to overcome the obstacle, to lift the veil.

Lacan always thought in this way and this is how he taught us to think. The analytical experience appears to demand it: there is an obstacle, something that puts up a screen, that has to be crossed, that has to be overcome – this is what Lacan called the fantasy, which had to be traversed, or the cause of desire, which had to be made to drop.

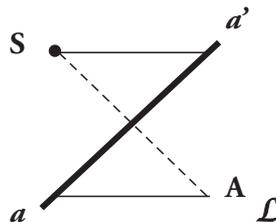
5. Lacan, J., “L’étourdit”, *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 473.





Sex All Over The Place

This notion was present as early as in his second Seminar, where he opposed the ego and the subject, with the schema he was so happy with he called it “Schema L” – as in Lacan. This schema led from the subject to the Other, distinguishing an imaginary interposition $a - a'$ (depending on the schemas, a and a' are placed on one side or the other). There was thus a screen that had to be traversed: the imaginary was the veil of the symbolic.



In various forms and configurations, at different moments of the teaching, and of course with some advances, this structure of veiling/unveiling, obstacle/overcoming, was clearly always present in Lacan’s thought, and he taught us to decipher the analytical experience in terms of these data. These were different ways of reflecting on what Freud could mean by the lifting of repression. The lifting of repression in order to discover what? Another truth.

This is also valid for defence, which is supposed to be an obstacle prior to repression. Repression is lifted, and goes on being lifted... Revelations follow one another, until we stop getting anywhere, nothing changes, which is when one says: “it’s defence”. Defence is prior to repression because it’s more primitive, it is not constituted in the signifier. One does not therefore speak of lifting the defence, but rather of, we must look for another word, *disrupting* the defences. In other words, one must try to insinuate oneself at this point in such a way that here we find, not another truth, but the real.

When Freud and the post-Freudians spoke of defence and the need to analyse the defences, they had the idea that one had to go beyond the lying truth, that there was something beyond the semblants of the signifier, that interpreting repression was not sufficient and that a function of another order was at stake, one that concerned the relation of the subject to jouissance – a certain relation of refusal, of rejection, of “obstaclisation” in relation to jouissance. This is what I’m going to develop now, the master signifier of jouissance.

The Master Signifier of Jouissance

How are things ordered when jouissance becomes the starting point rather than the final destination? One cannot simply start from jouissance. There is a dialectic. The starting point is the analytical experience as we have received it. We start from the experience of speech and, at a certain



point, we stumble over residues and remainders. It is necessarily in a second moment that *jouissance* can be made into the master signifier of the end.

This has consequences. The patient is no longer conceptualised as a subject, but rather as a *parlêtre*, a speaking being. *Parlêtre* signifies that there is a being because there is speech (there may be other beings too but they don't know anything about it because they don't speak) and that this being holds together on account of having a body. The subject of speech is thought of in relation to the signifier. The speaking being, although a subject who speaks and is spoken, is defined in relation to a body. Lacan refrained from giving a letter to this body, he did not make a *mathème* of it, he abandoned his *mathèmes* for the knots – which might be like *mathèmes* but in a completely different configuration.

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§ ◇ Corps [Body]

If one makes of *jouissance* a master signifier, then the notion of an obstacle disappears, as well as those of a passage beyond, of transgression, or of traversal. It is no longer a question of the *jouissance* that can be located beyond pleasure, which Lacan had translated with the expression *surplus jouissance* (*plus-de-jouir*). What he called *surplus jouissance* is the beyond of the pleasure principle. Many of Lacan's innovations derive from a profound reflection on Freud's terminology. *Surplus jouissance* is the beyond of the pleasure principle, and is also the *Lustgewinn* (a term used by Freud in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*). It is the gain of pleasure enhanced by what lies beyond. You could say that *surplus jouissance* is the creative translation of this.

Making *jouissance* into a master signifier is also to neglect the opposition (which still applies, of course) between sexual *jouissance*, the *jouissance* that stems from the relationship with another sexuated being, and autistic *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the body proper.

It is a *jouissance* that encompasses, that functions, that is grasped, conditioned, produced by a way of functioning, by an apparatus that Lacan named the *sinthome*, in relation to which what is of the order of the symbolic and the imaginary together appears as belonging to the order of the *semblant*. The *sinthome* functions. It is not susceptible of being lifted or being traversed. There is no appropriate word in Lacan so I'm tempted to make use of an English word – the *sinthome* is susceptible to *insight*, to a *re-engineering*,⁶ to a reconfiguration.

6. English in the original.



Sex All Over The Place

It would thus be a matter of obtaining a reconfiguration – where one could no longer say that *jouissance* takes on a meaning, at least not necessarily – but rather a *re-engineering* that would allow one to go from discomfort to satisfaction, the satisfaction of the speaking being in question. Not that of the analyst, obviously. Lacan says somewhere that interpretation gives satisfaction to the analyst, who feels clever in having seen something that the other hadn't. Here we are speaking of an interpretation that would satisfy the analysand – which is more complicated. An interpretation informed by the fact that the real can only lie, according to what Lacan writes in *Television*. To quote him: “that real which [is] capable only of lying to the partner”.⁷ I re-engineer him at this point. He doesn't say that the real can only lie to the subject.

In a certain way, when the real emerges under the guise of anxiety, it does not deceive, we are not in the order of the semblant. Articulations of signifiers can always deceive, in fact they always do. The real that can be demonstrated (from which Lacan took support for years) is not the real that is at stake here.

What is at stake is a real that cannot be demonstrated, but which is experienced as what does not deceive. Paradoxically, this is how it escapes truth, precisely because it does not deceive. For truth is open to the reordering of the semblant, whereas the real, to the extent that it does not deceive, is closed to the semblant.

Translated by Nicolas Boileau and Roger Litten

7. Lacan, J., “Television”, *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, transl. D. Hollier, R. Krauss & A. Michelson, Norton, New York, 1990, p. 10.

