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The Analysis of the Real

Summary:

The notion of the Real in Lacan is often very confusing, joining together the most intuitive and the most elusive characteristics. The paper offers to untie the knot of the Real by comparing it to irrational numbers. Like the Real, irrational numbers defy traditional notions. They are many and appear everywhere. Indeed, without them there is no continuity at all, anywhere in the numerical axis. Yet, there are two strategies of approximating irrational numbers, one by infinite series of rational numbers and one by cutting the real continuum. These strategies represent the manner in which the Real is approximated by Symbolic and Imaginary means respectively. As with the irrational numbers – e.g., Pi and Ln – we can give names to the places that mark the Real. These are the objet petit 'a'. Their main characteristic is that, despite being clearly 'not it', they generate powerful affects, much like irrational numbers. Some consequences of the mathematical metaphor are illustrated in clinical vignettes.