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In his well-known studies on identity, Erikson (1968) defined identity as the individual’s “link” with the unique values of his/her people. Erikson’s definition of individual identity is consistent with the Freudian concept of the ego-ideal that Lacan (1961) has written as: I(O). It is also well known within psychoanalysis that parents transmit cultural values to their children in the form of the psychical agency that Freud called the ego-ideal. What connects the individual to social values is a social trait or link that has been implanted or transplanted into the heart of subjectivity. The relationship between the unary trait, the ego-ideal, and what Lacan calls the Name of the Father will be explored further on in this chapter.

Upper-case I, as the capital of identification, represents social ideals that are the source of ego identifications. O represents the social Other of society but as a complete and consistent whole with nothing lacking. This complete Other produces an incomplete or lacking subject ($) that can then be completed via identification with the Ideal. Social ideals are always linked to the individual via the ego-ideal. The individual can become an ideal ego via identification with social ideals. Within the ego-ideal, ruling ideas reflect the uniqueness of either/or and both/and the ego and the group or nation. The ego is to the individual what the nation concept is to the society, or the group.

The ruling idea or trait that points to the special quality or peculiarity of a nation, whether it be the Americans, the Russians, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Germans, the French, the English, the Muslims, or the Jews, always refers to some special or unique trait that Lacan also wrote as I(O). It is with this S1 or master signifier that the individual identifies. In this instance, one finds identity or similarity between the core of being of the individual and group values or between desire and the desire of the Other. What Lacan (1961) calls the unary trait represents both the individual and the totality of the group: I(O).

In Lacan’s mathe me, in my opinion, the “I” represents the individual or the ideal, the ideal of the individual and the individual ideal, whereas the “O” represents the group/society or the structure. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1987) has been quoted as once stating: “there is no such a thing as society.” For individualistic capitalism, the big Other does not exist. In some limited way this statement coincides with the barred Other (Ø) of the later Lacan.
A “Thatcherian” interpretation of the lack in the Other would argue that the bracket surrounding the O represents the absence of a society, despite the supposition of one, and that only individuals or ideals exist. However, the lack in the Other [Ø], points to the fact that although it is true that the Other does not exist, the subject does not either. The lack in the Other is the same as the absence of the subject within the Other. Although institutions don’t exist without subjects, there is no subject that can ultimately represent the institution.

In addition, this unary trait or I(O) also represents two forms of alienation: one symbolic and necessary, and another imaginary that needs to be surpassed and overcome. In imaginary alienation the desire of the subject is alienated in the desire of the Other often while thinking that desire is their own autonomous desire. In life, as in psychoanalytic treatment, the individual or the subject has to recuperate a singular relationship to desire or to what desire is independently from the Other. In addition, imaginary and symbolic alienation are often confused. Humanistic perspectives often believe that what I call symbolic alienation or the production of a divided or split subject is the product of a bad environment, a bad mother, or bad object relations. Lacanian theory would consider this an imaginary apprehension of a structural fact.

Moreover, not only is a structural feature misunderstood as a correctable environmental deficit but the ego or the individual is construed as naturally undivided. When the ego is construed as unified and as an independent center of initiative, what is overlooked is that what the individual refers to as his or her own initiative represents a conscious or unconscious identification with the desire of the Other. Since symbolic alienation in cultural or symbolic laws (incest prohibition, sexual difference, rules of grammar, murder prohibition) is inevitable and constitutive of subjectivity, humanism offers the false promise of a life or a culture without frustration. The emancipation from imaginary alienation or the beyond frustration proceeds from the possibility of recognizing the alienation of desire and the appropriation of desire out of the desire of the Other.

Erikson’s interest in identity can be considered an integral part of the “New World” ideal of independence from traditional Europe. At the same time, New World values are an outgrowth of modern European enlightenment values and the meaning of the individual emerging from the Renaissance. For example, both the value of reason and value of the individual are embedded within Freud’s modern theory of the ego. For Freud, the ego was the site or locus of modern reason within the individual. In the language of Habermas’ (1968) critical theory, the ego is the site of emancipatory cognitive interests and the possibility of social and personal change.

Thus, it is to ego identity that Erikson appealed in his study of youth and the rebellions of the 1960s that led to the hippie movement, feminism, the sexual revolution, and gay rights, to name only a few. The culture of the avant-garde and the beatniks that pre-dated the sixties also implied a rebellion against a conservative establishment. However, when social change is linked to a specific phase of development, such as adolescent rebellion, the question of ego identity acquires a
different meaning. In the search for autonomy and independence the ego rejects the values of tradition or the previous generation, yet these oppositions/repudiations/contradictions hide unconscious identifications with the perceived establishment. The ego rejects the traditional master, or the imaginary father, but only to become himself/herself the new face of the old master. Conventional parents produced unconventional children and unconventional children reproduce conventional children in the next generation (yuppies, for example). Capitalists bred socialists and socialists bred capitalists. Theists bred atheists, and atheists bred religious or spiritual children, “masculinists” became feminists, feminists became masculinists, and so on and so forth.

Lacan criticized the theme of ego autonomy because the ego only appears to emancipate itself from the unconscious. In actuality, the ego itself is an unconscious and ideological mental formation. In the United States, for example, there is more liberty and protection of individual rights, while at the same time the United States became the new face of the master or a new form of imperialism.

The illusions of the ego, similar to those of adolescence, include the dream of a society without frustration, renunciation, law, or repression (an unbarrred Other or O). The defenses of the ego live in ignorance of unconscious desire and unconscious repression or the mutual interpenetration of both.

Ego autonomy cannot be realized without subjective heteronomy. Neither the ego nor the Other are complete by themselves. Lacan proposes embracing the subjection of the subject without sugar coating it with humanistic dreams of happiness, liberty, or autonomy. On the other hand, psychoanalysis, as a project of modernity, also represents an alternative to traditional or pre-modern religious culture that propounds a subjection of the subject to the Law or the Other at the expense of desire, the drives, and the possibility of change and transformation of cultural or religious laws.

While rejecting the theme of ego autonomy, Lacan also rejects the subjection of desire to the desire of the Other. Under this subjection the subject wants to become or have the signifier of the Other’s lack/desire. In addition, the subject wants to give or take this signifier from the Other. Instead, the subject has to scrutinize his/her own identifications and the signifiers of his/her unconscious desire in order to make desire truly the subject’s own. The subject has to speak with his/her own words/voice rather than those of the Other. This appropriation of the Other is consistent with the tradition of Diegesis: the Platonic virtue of speaking in one’s own name.

The subject asks is this what I really want or was this what I wanted? Do I agree or disagree with the Other? If I agree then the question is one of choice and responsibility and no longer one of obedience or subjection. If I disagree then the subject has to take responsibility for authorship and aggressiveness. Finally, while affirming or denying/negating the Other, the subject has to take great care to not reproduce the conditions of unconscious repression that only perpetuate his/her neurosis or division. What we vehemently reject may be precisely what we are identified with,
and in time the subject may come to manifest the very characteristics that he/she rejected in the Other. When rejecting the master signifier of the Other, this denial represents an affirmation of the mastery of the ego that, in the end, represents the same ideal or identification.

Within the context of his study of youth and adolescence, Erikson drew a sharp distinction between identity and identification. For most adults the two terms of identity and identification would seem to be naturally related and interchangeable. Erikson observed, however, that for true identity development, the identifications of childhood and with parents had to be challenged and scrutinized. Erikson did his studies during the 1960s when the great social projects of modernity (of revolutionizing society via social theory, drug experimentation, changes in family structure and child-rearing practices, civil rights, feminism, etc.) still held sway over the minds of the new generations.

Today we are in the midst of a postmodern period characterized by, among other things, a loss of modern ideals and an experience of social anomic wherein youth are either lost in a vacuum of values and criminal behavior, teen pregnancy, failing in school and dropping out or are taken by the technocratic consumer society of late capitalism. The lack of economic access to consumer goods, which are otherwise fervently desired, leads to an increase in crime as a means to procure unnecessary objects of consumption. Crime can no longer be explained as a simple means of survival or as a means to satisfy basic needs for shelter, food, and clothing. The current late phase of capitalism has absorbed the ideals of modernity within the context of consumer society. Any modern or traditional cultural feature can be used to sell goods. Furthermore, the postmodern period is also characterized by a return of pre-modern traditional values in basically two ways: fundamentalism unaffected by or in complete rejection of modernity, or traditional values that are combined with modern values in various ways. Both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism are examples of the latter.

Erikson makes a sharp distinction between identification and identity because identity requires that identifications be challenged in some way. But identity cannot be acquired without some form of identification with ideas, ideals, and signifiers. What Erikson considers to be a dichotomy between identity and identification may simply be a conflict between identifications or ideals, or between the ego and the super-ego, or between the ego-dystonic super-ego and the ego-syntonic ego-ideal. What is true, however, is that identification with parents in the formation of what Freud called the super-ego and the ego-ideal is not exactly the same as identification with social educational values, although the two are also related. As Freud acutely observed, the super-ego is rooted in the id and is fueled by the ego’s own aggressiveness towards the parents. This is another way of saying that identification includes contradicted experience and needs to be understood via the logic of contradiction.

Erikson observed that identifications with parents do not lead to functioning personalities. However, he did not have at his disposal the concepts of linguistics for his formulations. What Lacan will call the unary trait does not amount to a
character trait as it is known in the field of psychology. As we shall see, Lacan’s unary trait is more of a trace or a stroke than a trait in the psychological or genetic sense of the term. A trace is a singularity, a state or an instance in time, in this moment and in the next, whereas a trait endures across time and constitutes a chain or a series. The question remains, however, how traces or traits, in the Lacanian sense, organize into traits as the functions of character or personality. How a character, in the sense of a letter, leads to character in the sense of personality. Perhaps the process is similar to how things transform into letters, letters into words, and words into sentences and rules of grammar. The rules of grammar would be the equivalent of a functioning personality structure. In this way, identifications with parents and with the law are mediated by language, desire, love, etc. Lacan observed that the paternal/parental metaphor is intrinsically bound up and intertwined with the acquisition and structure of language as well as vice versa.

It is impossible to have individual identity, in the modern sense of the word, without identification. Among other things, the concept of identification explains how social values are acquired by the individual and do not merely constitute an external locus of control that was more typical of the societies of the Middle Ages that fundamentalists want to return to. Social ideas are not simply norms that regulate the actions of individuals in the public sectors of society. Although the protection of privacy and private property is a modern ideal, the values of society reach deeply into the private recesses of the home and of the mind. This is what Freud had in mind with his concepts of the super-ego and the ego-ideal.

But what do we gain by following Lacan and thinking of identity in terms of language and the signifier, other than simply introducing a new theory, however elegant this may be? The signifier “values” refers to qualities and quantities of a system or group of ideas and representations – for example, the idea and value of education. Just like language, the latter begins at home and with the parents. A subject cannot emerge as a social individual without a name pointing to a time of birth and to a spatial location within a specific temporal dimension of language and culture. In other words, naming or nomination lies at the intersection of family life and language. Naming is the beginning of the acquisition of language.

For example, my name is Raul Moncayo and this name is a basic signifier of identity. If I am asked: “Who are you,” then this is one of the basic possible answers. I could also give a more complex answer: my name is Raul Leon Moncayo de Bremont. The second answer says even more about my background and the paternal and matrilineal lines of descent. Now, how did I get this name? The answer cannot be simplistically given in terms of genetic inheritance. A name is a cultural inheritance mediated by language. Moncayo is the name of my father and Raul was my father’s second name that was given to me by my father but not before my mother had accepted and recognized it and managed to give me her own brother’s and father’s name for a middle name.

The proper name is a unary trait for an individual that makes him/her different from the rest of the family and at the same time it is a same difference that is
shared with the rest of the family and all the other Moncayos in Latino-American and Spanish culture. I can feel unique by being the only Raul in my family, but at the same time it is a signifier of my status as a subject to my father and mother. They chose my name for me and I was named after my father, and therefore it is a cultural and linguistic trait that I inherited from him. For many years and particularly during my childhood, my name did not seem to me to be a signifier of my uniqueness; rather I experienced it as a signifier of my subjection to and (imaginary) castration by my father. I did not like either one of them (the subjection or the name).

Identity begins by being different. It is only with identification that identity can become identity. I needed to appropriate the name, find its meaning/signification, for it to become identity. In this sense one can say that there are degrees of identification. One can identify with the name in the sense that one answers to the name, but it is not identity in the sense of coinciding with desire or with the core of being. Identity can only be identity via identification, but identification is not yet identity. Identification can be voluntary or involuntary, chosen or compelled.

Before identification is chosen, or when the signifier chooses the subject, the subject exists within a battery of signifiers or a group of subjects (family) with similar characteristics. But the subject experiences this sameness or similarity as a difference or as a form of alienation. The uniqueness of the group or of the individual subject, as defined by the group, is experienced as a form of alienation rather than as what makes the subject different from all the others. The uniqueness of the subject’s wants and values that stand in contrast to those of the group, as Erikson puts it, represents a difference from the group that may have also pre-existed the subject. For example, very conservative parents may have suppressed a bohemian streak (or a freak uncle/aunt in the family) that then is covertly and unconsciously passed on to the children, despite the fact that it may represent an opposition to the overt and stated parental wishes for their children.

What differentiates me from my father is that his second name becomes my first name and that my second name is my maternal uncle’s name. It is this difference that makes me who I am at a certain level. As Lacan (1961) has pointed out, it is this “difference that makes character just as it makes value and the unit” (III: 10). The One is the Other in the sense that the one is one of the possible values available within the system/structure.

The proper name represents the unary trait as Other, whereas the patronymic (last name) is what is shared by all the values/subjects belonging to a particular class.

Finally, to name is to negate or to say that this name is not the other possible names that it could potentially be. The name also supplants the primacy of the relationship to things and images. The mind takes primacy over the body, the Name of the Father over the desire of the mother. The name circulates within society to a much greater degree than the images of the body. The former is the subject of the law, whereas the latter its object.
Lacan on identification: from Einheit to Einzigkeit, from one to zero, and from zero to One

In his seminar “On Identification” (Seminar IX, 1960–1), Lacan examined the question of identification from the point of view of the relationship between the subject and the signifier.

Let us say it right away, in a formula that all our future development will subsequently clarify: what I mean is that, for us analysts what we understand by identification – because that is what we encounter in identification – is a signifier-identification or signifying identification.

(Seminar IX, Session II: 1)

It is through identification that subjects can separate from loved parents and authorities, become independent, and arrive at their own decisions. The Greek word autonomy means “same law” and came to designate the capacity for self-government or independence under the law. Identity is equivalent to self, to identical, and to sameness.

I will begin by putting the accent on that which in identification, poses itself immediately as identical, as founded on the notion of the same, and even of the same to the same, with all the difficulties that this gives rise to.

(Session I: 3)

The signifier is the word that reproduces the law of the Other and of the Code. Subjects both separate and identify via speech. The signifier or the Other of language, which contains our identifications or our social identities, is not another subject but, rather, is, as Lacan argues following Aristotle,

A locus to which one strives ... to transfer the knowledge of the subject ...

The Other is the refuse dump of the representative representations of this supposition of knowledge, and this is what we call the unconscious in so far as the subject has lost himself in this supposition of knowledge.

(I: 10)

The Unconscious as a locus of unconscious knowledge is equivalent to Freud’s preconscious or unconscious in a descriptive sense. This concept is equivalent to that of a storehouse consciousness of humanity or to Jung’s collective unconscious except that archetypes are not primarily visual representations.

All the contents of the storehouse consciousness are marked by a unary trait that makes them different.

This is to introduce you to what constitutes the essence of the signifier and which it is not for nothing that I will illustrate best in its simplest form which
we have been designating for some time as the *einziger Zug* . . . Unary is not a neologism. It is used in set theory: the word unary instead of the word single (unique) . . . The letter is the support of the signifier.

(IV: 7)

The fact is that signifiers only manifest at first the presence of difference as such and nothing else. The first thing therefore that it implies is that the relationship of the sign to the things should be effaced . . . This is One as such, in so far as it marks pure difference.

(IV: 11)

The notion of pure difference is rooted in a distinction between relative and absolute differences. An example of relative difference is a unique letter in a group of letters. All letters share the same quality of being letters, yet they are all distinguished by a singular characteristic. In contrast to this, absolute difference is the absolute value that each unary element has in-itself independently from its relative value. This absolute value, or unary *trace*, is empty of signifying value and yet this emptiness of signifying value is also revealed in its uniqueness as a relative value.

What makes letters One is what makes them Other. But One has more than one meaning. “By reversing, as I might say, the polarity of this function of unity, by abandoning the unifying unity, the *Einheit*, for the distinctive unity, the *Einzigkeit*” (XI: 10). One represents a unit and every unit also represents the possibility that a unit could be zero since zero is the first unit. Letters as a unit or members of a class are all identical, and as a specific unit they are similar yet relatively different. They are one or a whole as Other in the sense of a totality of interdependent and differentiated elements. Letters are one in the sense of their relative particularity, but they are One in the sense of being empty in their own being without the value given by the structure. The fact that each One is empty without the structure is what allows each One to take their relative place within the structure. The Other of the Real or of emptiness is what undergirds the Other of the Symbolic interdependent structure.

Letters and language also represent the effacing of the relationship to things via verbalization of things that are not present. This is the beginning of symbolization but also the beginning of a difference between words and images. Before the human distinction between presence or absence, images and words, reality was not known as either images or words. Things were just what they were, and as such they were known in pre-conceptual and instinctual actions or activity. Once images and words are known, words evoke images and images words, words are revealed as written images, and visual images become discreet signifying sounds.

I demonstrated, designated it for you the last time in the unary trait, in this function of the stroke as figure of the one in so far as it is only the distinctive trait, the trait precisely all the more distinctive in so far as there is effaced
from it almost everything which distinguishes it, except the fact of being a trait.

(V: 8)

The unary stroke or trace of a letter effaces from the letter the distinguishing characteristic of the thing and of what linked the letter to the thing. Letters transition from iconic signs that represented certain animals, for example, to letters where the iconic aspect has been effaced. The letter becomes a distinctive mark or a remarkable mark without distinction. What is remarkable about a distinctive mark is that it is a distinctive mark without distinction. The letter as a unary trace or as a single stroke is what unites letters by virtue of being empty of differentiating marks.

When Lacan speaks of the ideal of what I will call similarity (as distinguished from similitude), he refers to the effacing/eliminating of distinctive marks that differentiates things from one another. In contrast to similarity, a unary trace does not eliminate distinctions because it is a distinction albeit without distinction. This refers to what Lacan calls the paradox of radical otherness designated by the trace: it is a paradox because the relative value of uniqueness of a being other or different from b is sustained on the basis of a more radical difference that allows a to function as a in relationship to b. In my opinion, this radical difference is the function of a being not a and therefore being able to be a. A not being a does not mean that a should be effaced but, rather, that not a is the foundation of a or what is unary or One about a trace.

If \( a = a \) represents identity, \( a = -a \) (not-a) points to the fact that the signifier is different to itself. When Lacan defines a signifier as what represents a subject to another signifier, in this definition the subject is excluded/represented by the signifier. At the same time when the signifier is understood as different to itself, then the signifier is also excluded in the process of representation. Lacan says that the signified/meaning of a signifier is another signifier. In other words, a signifier \( S_1 \) is defined by another signifier \( S_2 \) and in this signifying process \( S_1 \) becomes excluded by \( S_2 \). By representing a signifier with another signifier, the first signifier is excluded. The principle of identity (\( a = a \)) is the same as the principle of non-contradiction, whereas the principle of contradiction is the same as the principle of non-identity (\( a = not-a \)).

The not-\( a \) that allows \( a \) to function as a different value from \( b \), or as differance, to use a term coined by Derrida (1982), is what the unary trace is built upon. “Not-\( a \)” points to what about an object or a subject is beyond imaginary resemblance or symbolic difference. In modern art, “not-\( a \)” is represented as similitude in contrast to resemblance (for example, Magritte’s painting “This is not a pipe” discussed in chapter 5). In the seminar “On Identification,” Lacan equates similitude and resemblance, but the two can also be differentiated. Similitude is Real and points to unbeing, whereas resemblance is symbolic and similarity is imaginary. Similitude is also related to Benjamin’s (1936) concept of aura as the quality of a modern painting or “its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” A painting’s place is represented by the evocation of non-identity.
Similarity and resemblance point to the figurative relationship between letters and the objects that they originally represented. At the same time, letters represent an erasure of the original relationship to the object. The letter is the death of the object. This is the negative function of the letter that then is preserved as pure erasure without an object. The negativity of the letter points to emptiness and senselessness as an absolute value.

The negativity of the letter erases the resemblance/relationship to the object and converts it into the similitude not between letters but between the letter and the paper or parchment on which the letter is written. It is the paper or the space between letters that makes a letter be a One in the Real. What Lacan (1971) calls Lituraterre can be understood as the erasure of the letter on the ground upon which the letter is written. On the ground/sand, the letter is a One (landmark) that is erased by a littoral or river of jouissance.

The unary trace sustains the relation between \( a \) and \( b \), but also makes both completely independent as not-\( a \) and not-\( b \), or zero.

According to Lacan, a trace is surrounded by a ring that then erases the trace, and gives birth to the signifier as a repetition of the same but different. There is a step or an action marked by the trace, then the vocalization/reading of the trace negates/erases the step/trace; this vocalization leads to writing on condition that one forgets that the vocalization originally referred to a step or action, and thus it gives rise to a new beginning of numbers and letters. So then we have 1 and 2, or \( a \) and \( b \), instead of trace and ring. An echo or an acoustic image is a ring or a round figure of sound.

The first proper name for Mr. Russell – I already alluded to it in my preceding seminars – is the “this,” celui-ci (this is the question). Here the demonstrative has passed to the rank of proper names. It is no less paradoxical that Mr. Russell coolly envisages the possibility of calling this same point John. (VI: 6)

Drawing a circle in the air would be an example of a traceless trace or of how a trace is erased by a circle, which then is itself erased or negated by being simply “this.” Then “this” may become a proper name or Jack and Jill.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \rightarrow \textcircled{1} \rightarrow \circ \quad \text{----------------} \quad \rightarrow \text{Signifier} \\
\textbf{Trace Ring Vocalization/this Name} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Having said this, if the trace is effaced the subject surrounds its place with a ring, something which thenceforward concerns him; the mapping out of the place where he found the trace, well then, here you have the birth of the signifier. This implies a whole process involving the return of the last phase onto the first, that there cannot be any articulation of a signifier without these three phases. Once the signifier is constituted, there are necessarily two others.
before. A signifier is a mark, a trace, a writing, but it cannot be read alone. Two signifiers is a bloomer, a cock and bull story. Three signifiers is the return of what is involved, namely of the first. It is when the pas (step) marked in the trace is transformed in the vocalization of whoever is reading it into pas (not) that this pas, on condition that one forgets that it means the step, can serve at first in what is called the phonetics of writing, to represent pas, and at the same time to transform the trace of pas eventually into the pas of the trace. (IX: 4)

Lacan puns on the French pas of step and pas of negation. The vocalization of the step erases the step (trace of pas is transformed into pas of the trace) and transforms the step or the action into made-up stories. The vocalization/writing of the step or S₁ cannot be read alone, it needs S₂ but S₂ transforms S₁ into a made-up story or narrative.

The letter represents a form of erasure that does not preserve a link to the object that was erased. The letter or S₁ now represents the void rather than an erased or effaced act/trace. Instead of the erased object of an iconic sign, or of a step or action, the blank paper or the sand on which the letter is written represents the void. The act or object now is transformed into writing with erasure and the act of erasure is not only preserved in the writing but also in the void represented by the blank slate of the paper. The pleasure/pain or jouissance that accompanied the erased act or object are now in the ink as the very substance of expression. It is the paper as void or the ink that makes letters be a symbolic One of the Real. It is ink and paper that links letters, the same way that letters link words.

The unary trace is a signifier without a signified, is an S₁ without an S₂, a pure signifier without a story: the unary signifier is a signifier of the void, rather than of a master, or is the signifier of a master of nothing. Here one can also differentiate between trait and trace. Lacan, or the translator, inadvertently switches from the unary trait to the unary trace.

Lacan speaks of unary traits and not simply of genetic or character traits, although unary traits may also be helpful in understanding character as a letter. But by linking the unary trait to I(O), and to the ego-ideal, therefore, the unary trait represents identification to a ruling imaginary master signifier. Hitler’s mustache could be an example of this. When Lacan begins speaking of a mark without distinction, he also begins to speak of a trace instead of a trait. Kristeva derived the term semiotic from the Greek word for trace or mark. However, for Lacan, the letter, as a trace, for example, supports the signifier and not simply represents a maternal challenge to the symbolic order of the father. Like identification, the concept of a unary trace both supports and challenges the symbolic order. It challenges the imaginary uses of the father and the master signifier, but
at the same time represents the groundless foundation of the name and the Symbolic in the empty void (Real).

$S_1$ can also be thought as a thought, whereas $S_1 - S_2$ is thinking or a story looking for a thinker (to use Bion’s words) to help the story be naught once more. The story that keeps everyone busy, or that does not stop from being spoken, is being passed on in search of a thinker that could decipher it back into being much to do about nothing. Thought is a naught that can be taught.

This phenomenon is equivalent to how the imaginary aspect of the Name of the Father in Lacan functions as a stop-gap of the lack within the symbolic order. The gap in the order appears to be closed by the worthiness of a name. But the symbolic aspect of the Name of the Father emerges out of the Real of the unary trace. In this I disagree with Lacan that the unary trace is the same as the I(O) that represents the ego-ideal. I argue that the unary trait may be the same as I(O), or the imaginary aspect of the Name of the Father, but the unary trace refers to a link between the Symbolic and the Real or to how Lacan views the name as emerging from “This.” The latter is what the name surrounds, for example in the paradigmatic Biblical name: “I am Who (This) this I am.”

The narcissism of small differences, associated with the unary trait (rather than the unary trace), is used to engage in hair splitting or disagreeing for disagreement sake in order to make small distinctions (with distinction) and establish territorial allegiances and claim ownerships of various kinds. The unary trait may be used to oppose for the sake of opposition, or for purposes of sectarianism, on the basis of a very small margin of difference. For example, each theorist may build a new theory out of a small group of ideas, instead of illuminating aspects of great ideas and using this as a platform from which to generate beneficent and generous transformations of the symbolic structure.

This is the difference between making a name for oneself, or building the imaginary aspect of the Name of the Father, and using the absolute difference of the name to manifest permutations and evolutions within the symbolic/psychic structure.

These differences allude to the difference between unary trait and trace. The insignia of the ego-ideal, and the medals of honor of the Other are traits, while the unary trace represents subjective destitution, the headless subject, and the void itself.

The distinction without distinction is the nameless name or the unary trace as the signifier of the void. A trait that can be taught is not the naught of thought. The naught of thought is a unary trace. Lacan’s matheme $I(O)$ is a unary trait or $S_1 - S_2$, whereas a unary trace is better represented by an $S_1 - S_0$ relationship.

Lacan says that the totality of a circle can be reduced to any point of the circle. Any point along the line of the circumference of a circle represents a vanishing point, a micro-circle, or the place where the circle can be folded back on itself. This folding or vanishing point for a totality or a whole structure is the unary trace. This is the point where the subject becomes a no subject and the no subject becomes a subject.
Russell’s paradox

In his seminar “On Identification,” Lacan (1960–1) takes a great detour from the topic of identification in psychoanalysis to examine Russell’s paradox in philosophy and mathematics. I believe that the logic of this detour, rather than being circumstantial and purely “intellectualoid” in nature, represents Lacan’s attempt to account for the structure of oppositions and contradictions ingrained or built into the structure of identification and development.

Negation or difference is built into the structure of identification, and identification is built into the structure of self–other oppositions, at the same time that negation/opposition and identification as sameness can be differentiated from each other. Far from being solely pathological or breeding psychopathology, negation and opposition constitute an integral part of a normal process of identification. Identity is a form of non-identity, and non-identity is a form of identity. The clinical and social problem remains, however, of how to differentiate the healthy from the pathological versions of both identity and non-identity. In the postmodern world it has become abundantly clear that identity does not simply correspond to health and non-identity to pathology. Under modernity, assimilation to a single form of national, cultural, and linguistic identity was considered necessary for health, but in a postcolonial world, biculturalism or cultural diversity has become the normative ideal.

Erikson differentiated identity from identification by arguing that identity requires that identification with others be more than a simple reproduction or imitation of the other. Identification has to become the subject’s own identity. Identification requires that the subject both affirm and negate the Other and the subject in very precise and distinct ways.

Freud (1937), for example, wrote that generosity and kind-heartedness were qualities associated with the alleged harmony of the ego, whereas miserliness and hostility were quantities of the id. In the developed character, the strength of the ego prevails over the strength of the id, or quantitative factors become qualitative. This refers to the question of identification involved in the formation of the ego-ideal. According to Freud, the ideal qualities of generosity and kindness are formed by identification with what is opposite to the tendencies/quantities of miserliness and hostility that have been abandoned. A child identifies with the generosity and kindness he/she is shown by his/her parents. However, such generosity and kindness may have been there all along since Freud grants that at the beginning the ego and the id evolve out of a single matrix. The actions of parents strengthen certain traits and weaken others.

The duality between self and Other also exists within the self and within the Other. If the child represents the id or desire and the parent represents the law, the law also exists within the child and so does desire within the parent or Other. It is as if the opposite qualities within the child required the relative reinforcement from the same qualities in the parent via the process of identification. At the same time, however, opposite qualities are also preserved in the Other or the Unconscious of both self and other.
Independence is achieved via identification with a parent, but the identification is the affirmation of a contrary wish or desire to that which is being negated/repressed via the identification. The identification resolves the opposition between parent and child but also the opposition between contrary feelings held by the child towards the parent. Instead of homosexual love, or hate, for example, there will be a love for ideals or ideas. In the case of homosexuality, the same could be said for heterosexual love. The ideals substitute for the parent, but also for the censored love and hate felt towards the parent of the same or opposite sex. In fact, identification is a way in which the opposite tendencies and opinions are repressed. Sameness evokes difference at the same time that difference is preserved in sameness.

A common example of this is how imitation can be used for purposes of rebellion and ridicule rather than conformity. The hostility or defiance that is opposite to identification love can be safely revealed through mimicry and imitation. What is usually concealed via identification is revealed via a performance of the same identification.

In this instance, identification fails since imitation remains other-centered whereas the autonomy of the ego is revealed in performing identification in the form of an imitation. True autonomy is revealed via heteronomy, whereas heteronomy, or the will/desire of the Other, is transmitted by the subject advancing or positing identification as his/her own choice/principle or transcendent presupposition. When the subject deliberates or thinks, in that space where subjects believe they are exercising their freedom as subjects (of association and expression), it is precisely the place where the efficiency of the heteronomous structure is being transmitted and reproduced.

In the case of an ego-identification, the ego is represented by identification as if the identity provided by the identification was of his/her own making. In contrast to this, when the question of identification is examined from the point of view of the relationship between the subject and the signifier, the subject becomes replaced by the agency of the letter and the signifier rather than by the figure of the ego or of a social master. Although in speech words may be those of the subject or the Other, the subject does not own the signifier any more than the signifier owns the subject qua nothing.

Lacan points out that Russell’s paradox begins with a question:

This set of all the sets which do not include themselves, does it include itself or does it not include itself? In one case or another it’s going to collapse into contradiction. Because if, as it might appear, it includes itself, we find ourselves in contradiction with the start which said that it was a question of sets that did not include themselves. On the other hand, if it does not include itself, how can we except it precisely from what is given by this definition, namely that it does not include itself.

(IX: 9)

According to Cantor’s set theory, a set is simply a collection of elements of some kind. Set theory is related to the concept of identification because the latter
involves the activity of recognizing and identifying an object as belonging to a specific group, class, or set.

The elements contained in a group, class, or set may be other sets, and a set may even contain itself. For example, the set of mathematical ideas is itself a mathematical idea, so it contains itself. A set of non-mathematical ideas would not contain itself. The set would be a mathematical idea but not its content. Here there is no apparent contradiction: A is A or a set is a mathematical idea and B is B or the content of a set is not a mathematical idea. For example, individual human beings, plants, things, etc., would not be mathematical ideas. Contradiction for formal logic only appears at the next meta-level of the set of all sets.

Russell considered a set X defined by the fact that X does not contain itself, and the set Y of all sets X that do not contain themselves. Russell then asked if Y contains itself? If it does, then since all sets contained in Y are sets that by definition do not contain themselves, Y cannot contain itself. If, on the other hand, Y does not contain itself, then it satisfies the definition for inclusion in Y, and so it does contain itself. Either way we arrive at a contradiction. No matter how we approach the question, the result is self-contradictory.

For psychoanalytic purposes, Russell’s paradox can be applied to the division of the subject. An example of this would be North American comedian Groucho Marx’s famous statement that “I don’t care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members.” But what if hypothetically he joined every club that wouldn’t have him? If he joined then he wouldn’t be a member, and if he wouldn’t be a member then he would join: if yes, then no; if no, then yes.

Exclusive clubs are supposed to convey upon its members a trait of distinction or uniqueness. Marx’s statement is absurd unless we have an understanding of the division of the subject into conscious and unconscious dimensions, or at least where the division or the defense itself is unconscious. The division itself is predicated on contradiction. You can only be on one side or the other, so long as the other side is temporarily excluded.

On the one hand, Groucho Marx sees himself as superior or unique (in reference to the group); on the other hand, he sees himself as inferior or as lacking the trait of distinction or uniqueness represented by the group or that represents the group. On one side of the fence of defense, he is superior to the other or the group, while on the Other he is inferior, or at least an ordinary commoner. The contradictory statement rests on a supposed distinction between the superior and inferior status of self and other, the individual and the group. But as soon as the comparison between self and other, individual and group, is reduced or self-referenced to a division within/between a conscious and a temporal or temporarily unconscious subject, then the contradiction and the appearance of absurdity disappears.

The set X could be composed of individuals with self-consciousness who are bothered or are unhappy with a characteristic or trait of their personality. At the same time, the set X does not include itself, because those same individual members of the set are not bothered by the same characteristic that they reported
being bothered by. Those individuals, who have self-consciousness at the same 
time, in the same place, and in the same respect, do not have self-consciousness. 

An analysand complained that productive use of her time at work was compro-
mised by what she called random walks around her office. When the analyst 
focused on her difficulty with focused attention and asked whether she was 
bothered by hearing back from the analyst that she had a problem with attention, 
she denied being bothered by the question but then shifted to saying that she did 
not regard random walks as a problem and that staying in one task is a linear non-
creative use of time. In contrast to this, random walks around the office are indeed 
a very positive and creative deed.

This analysand could report her own shortcoming or problem, but if she heard 
her own message about her flaw back from the analyst or the figure that represents 
the law (in her mind and the social laws that regulate the profession), then her 
response was to deny it. The defensive shifting between these two sides of her self 
is something that is unconscious, although the two sides of her division are not.

In the case of my patient, the paradox amounts to the wish or to the saying that 
things exist that do not exist. By the same token the denial that something does not 
exist implies the possibility that it could. In this example, the force of both desire 
and a defense against desire mediates the attribute or judgment of existence or 
inexistence.

Russell’s own response to the paradox was his theory of types. Recognizing 
that self-reference lies at the heart of the paradox, Russell’s basic idea was that 
paradox and self-contradiction can be avoided by arranging all statements into a 
hierarchy. The lowest level refers to the individual case. The next level refers to 
sets of individuals or groups that, psychoanalytically speaking, can also be consid-
ered the other of the self. The next level is the set of groups that is equivalent to 
the other of society. Finally, the group and the society are self-referenced back 
into the self via the Lacanian concept of the Other as the unconscious or the law 
within the self. In the formal logic proposed by Russell, you avoid contradiction 
by splitting/dividing the two sides of the contradiction into the different levels, 
types, or dimensions. A particular statement applies only to the same level or type.

However, by following the continental European and Asian tradition of 
dialectical logic, psychoanalysis can arrive at a different articulation of the 
principle of identity and non-identity, affirmation and denial, contradiction and 
non-contradiction.

Russell’s work, and those of others that followed, can be considered attempts 
to rescue formal logic and the empiricist principle of non-contradiction or non-
self-contradiction from the paradoxes posed by contradiction. According to the 
principle of non-contradiction, scientific disciplines should be both consistent 
(free of contradiction), and complete (powerful enough to prove the truth, or 
falsity, of all relevant statements). However, these attempts suffered severe 
blows when Kurt Gödel proved the incompleteness of all formal systems, and 
when Paul Cohen showed that in formal systems, the truth or falsity of some 
important mathematical theorems was simply undecidable. According to Gödel,
undecidable propositions could only be possibly proven by appealing to arguments outside the particular system or perspective in question (Irvine, 2009).

**Negative dialectics**

Contrary to formal logic, the law of dialectical logic is that everything is mediated and therefore everything is itself and at the same time not itself. A is non-A because A is B. A is B and B is A because both exist only as difference. A is A or not B and at the same time A is B because the meaning of both terms depends on the differences between them. To claim for two different things that they are the same, at the same moment, is contradiction.

The law of dialectical logic is contradiction. This, however, is not destructive; on the contrary, opposites are interdependent and constitute relationships among distinct terms within a structure. The structure is not only different from its contradictory moments, but also more than them. The structure is a Third in which opposites are in a systematic relation with each other.

But the whole is not unity but *unicity* or *unariness* in the form of emptiness. The Other is lacking, holy or of the nature of a hole, empty or conspicuously absent. The Other is lacking because for the Other, the Other of the Other is simply the self. The self is the Other negated. But the true self is the Self that includes the Other and its own negation or the negation of the ego by the Other. To include the Other, the self has to get past the reified ego and the reified or imaginary Other.

Conversely, the same thing could be revealed by saying that the self is lacking and that everything is Other. In this case the Other is a One that includes self and other. To include the self the Other has to get past the reification of both self and other. The same principle or One can be revealed as either self or other. The One is either completely self or completely other. The same principle can be revealed in either side of the contradiction and in contradiction or non-contradiction.

The Law of Non-Contradiction forms a standard part of traditional, formal, Aristotelian logic. It states that a proposition and its negation cannot both be true of the same thing, at the same time, in the same respect. For many scientists this is a fundamental law of logic and a necessary principle of rational thought. If this is correct, dialectical thought must be rejected on purely logical grounds, for it quite explicitly violates this law.

According to dialectical thought, propositions need not be either true or false because other values are possible. In them, therefore, the traditional Law of the Excluded Middle does not hold. It is possible to develop systems in which the Law of Non-Contradiction is not valid.

It is logically possible to make valid statements that are contradictory in form. However, dialectical reason goes much further than this. It claims that not only are such statements possible but, for certain purposes, they are essential. For concrete things are necessarily in relation to other things, which are essentially changeable; and, according to dialectic, for a correct understanding of these
features of things, it is ultimately necessary to recognize their contradictory nature and use contradictory forms of expression to describe them.

For purposes of the reader's convenience, and for the sake of my argument, I will review the identity principle in logic, although this can be easily found in any logic textbook. In the classical example, I will replace Socrates with Jesus, not because of any imagined hierarchy or preference for one over the other, but simply because the mortality or death of Jesus lends itself better to the dialectic of the presumed non-mortality or immortality of the imaginary body.

The Law of the Excluded Middle goes as follows,

If $P$ is the proposition:

$\text{Jesus is mortal or dead}
$

then the Law of the Excluded Middle holds that the logical disjunction:

$\text{Either Jesus is mortal/dead or Jesus is not mortal and is alive or immortal}
$

is true by virtue of its form alone. The “middle” position, that Jesus is neither mortal nor immortal, is excluded by formal logic, and therefore either the first possibility ($\text{Jesus is mortal}$) or its negation ($\text{Jesus is not mortal}$) must be true.

The law is also known as the law (or principle) of the excluded third. Another name for this law is “there is no third (possibility)”.

From a psychoanalytic perspective the unconscious is the third (consciousness and its object, or self and other, being the first and second) that is excluded from the conscious, thereby dividing the psyche and the subject. Instrumental technocratic reason that establishes criteria of objective validity and performance by its very definition represses aspects of experience that are essential for human activity and well-being. Either this or that, true or false, excludes the possibility of a structural relation between true and false, reality and illusion or fiction. In the formal either/or logic, the either does not include the or (even if it is not mentioned), nor vice versa.

The Lacanian Symbolic is the third: Jesus is both dead and alive, and so are human beings. Jesus' body is mortal, yet his body can be seen or perceived in images and visions, and his mind is immortal or at least will live for a long period of time or for as long as the text of the Gospels survives. Alternatively, he is neither mortal nor immortal. Not mortal because his body/mind lives, and not immortal because he died. Mind and body, life and death, are neither one nor two: from this perspective, and as applied to the theory of drives, both monism and dualism would be incorrect or at least partial perspectives.

Human beings are alive, yet their consistency and completeness is imaginary or dream-like. Life processes are completely permeated by death processes, at both the physical and mental levels: birth and death cannot be separated and in fact could be re-named with the neologism birdeath. At the bodily level, cells are
dying and new cells are being born on an on-going basis. At the mental level, although brain cells or neurons don’t die, in one form or another, death is always present as an event horizon.

In the case of another analysand, who experienced the death of the father at an early age, her life became permeated by an imminent sense of doom. Although she reports not being that affected by the father’s death at the time of his passing, her relationship to her father became transformed into a life-and-death struggle within herself. At some point she no longer knew whether she was alive or dead: although she was alive, she felt dead inside.

**Knowledge and types of rationality**

Turning to the law of contradiction proper, it is important to note that in Europe there are two “types” of logic, one founded on the law of contradiction, the other founded on the neglect of the law of contradiction. One is a dual form of knowledge, the other non-dual. Usually a distinction is made between an empiricist tradition and a hermeneutic or at least non-empiricist tradition, and between a logic for the natural sciences and a logic for the social sciences, but at this time I will consider the more narrow distinction between a law of contradiction and a law of non-contradiction.

Hegel inherited from Kant a distinction between Understanding and Reason. Understanding is definite and holds firmly to the differences between objects and phenomena, but Reason is negative and dialectical. According to Reason there are no differences between affirmation and negation, but for Understanding this difference is all-important. All objects, or concepts, are viewed by Understanding non-dialectically and by Reason dialectically.

But which one is the law of contradiction? The law of non-contradiction is the law that forbids different things to be one thing. It creates distinction and opposition and at the same time singles out one thing in the form of an analytical judgment. For formal logic, non-contradiction is the ultimate test of reality and truth.

In contrast to this, the law of contradiction allows opposite or distinct things to be one thing or One. By allowing contradiction or duality, the law of contradiction paradoxically eliminates contradiction. There is no contradiction between saying that there is no object, and that only the subject exists, and saying the opposite: that there is no subject, and that only the object exists. Therefore, the law of contradiction can be seen as the law of non-contradiction or non-duality, and the law of non-contradiction is the law of contradiction and duality.

In Kant’s system, Reality (the Thing-in-Itself) is divorced not only from Logic but also from experience. In Hegel’s system they become confounded. As Zizek (1989) has pointed out, in Kant the thing-in-itself remains as a positive entity albeit outside the bounds of time and space, and of the categories of logic and language. However, that which exceeds the grasp of thought and perception makes genuine or new Real experience possible. The Real points
to the double meaning of the term experience. Experience can refer to the already known and to the past and the future (defined by the past), or it can refer to something in the here and now that exceeds the already known and formulated.

In the Hegelian and Lacanian interpretation, the Symbolic (logic and language) and the Real (the thing-in-itself) mutually determine each other. Language generates the conditions for the indefinable or a beyond language, at the same time that the Real, as a pure negativity, circumscribes what is possible or impossible within language. The thing-in-itself is a no-thing rather than a thing. “It” indicates a void within the Symbolic that is a plenum within the Real but that lies beyond (not without) any definition or formulation. This interpretation of Lacanian ideas is consistent with the philosophy of science of Gaston Bachelard (1940).

The truly scientific philosophy is for Bachelard a “philosophy of no” (1940) which refuses to be confirmed within any given doctrine and which therefore promotes an openness that is in keeping with the open and unfinished quality of scientific progress itself.

(Macey, 2000: 26)

The Real manifesting as a void within the Symbolic generates a perpetual movement and transformation within the Symbolic, but without ever becoming a final idea or synthesis as seen in the common interpretation of the Hegelian system. In this sense, the Real or the thing-in-itself functions within the power of negation at work within the Symbolic. In addition, the power of negation can also be redoubled as seen in the negation of the negation characteristic of dialectical logic.

I propose that the negation of the negation can have at least three different meanings. In formal logic the antithesis or the null hypothesis, as the negation of the thesis, could lead to a vindication of the original thesis. The antithesis, or the fallibility of the thesis, results in either the thesis or the antithesis being proven wrong. Negation is used as a tool for proving/probing the truth or falseness of a proposition. In dialectical logic negation is used as a process or as existing at different levels of logical organization.

At the first level of negation, A is not B and B is not A, and neither term includes one another. At the second level of a dialectical negation of the negation, A is B or not not B and B is A or not not A. Finally, at the third and final level of negative dialectics, the negation of the negation leads to non-identity or emptiness between and within both thesis and antithesis. A is neither A nor B and B is neither B nor A.

According to Adorno (1966) the aim of negative dialectics is to rid dialectics of the intention of achieving, gaining, or accumulating a positive idea by way of negation. Positivism, empiricism, and materialism attempt to achieve something positive by negating the subject but end up turning the object into a fetish,
nonetheless. Conversely, idealism attempts the opposite objective by negating the object and turning the subject into an object instead. When emptiness is considered the final fruit of the dialectical process, since emptiness itself is devoid of idea or concept, it precisely accords with the task proposed by Adorno’s negative dialectics.

Contradiction is inherent to thought or reason. Concepts and ideas never match up with the object or the subject because as soon as identification takes place, whether at the level of the object or of the subject, an opposite idea also arises along with it. As a Zen saying goes, “If you set up a target, you invite an arrow.” Identity as an idea is necessarily untrue or different. Thus, with the negative dialectics of emptiness you always end up empty handed and without a fixed standpoint or target. Every concept or idea, or identification, brings with it a compulsive identification. To halt such a compulsion, in negative dialectics, the direction of conceptuality is turned towards non-identity or non-identification.

Non-identity and non-identification are not an essence in the traditional Western sense. In the West essence constitutes the first principles, the idea behind the thing. In dialectical materialism and critical theory, the essence constitutes the critical reason that debunks and articulates the reality behind the appearances. Within existentialism, Sartre argued that existence precedes the essence for two reasons: first, because he reduced the essence to an idea or a definition of existence which takes place after the fact. Second, because he does not conceive of the possibility that nothingness could be the essence, which nonetheless it is not. The idea does not occur to him, because the existentialist void is a dualistic and non-symbolic void of sheer absence without presence.

A different and almost Mahayana Buddhist notion of the void can be found in Lacan’s concept of ex-sistence. When we appear on the scene, when we are born, when we turn up, we are outside of or no longer sistence. Sistence is the unborn and unrealized aspect of being or of the subject that disappears with manifest being or with birth. Sistence does in fact refer to the essence of existence except that the word essence does not capture it. Sistence came before existence and yet at the same time constitutes what being or existence means beyond itself. The subject is born and manifests with the word or the signifier. Yet the unborn aspect of the subject or what the subject is within the Real disappears when the signifier represents the birth of the subject. The unborn subject of the Real goes under the signifier and remains non-identical with it. Better even, the unborn is revealed with the fact of the signifier not being identical to itself. The unborn immortal life manifests as the aspect of the signifier that is not identical to itself.

The unborn Being/unbeing and/or the subject of the Real are neither comprehensible in concepts nor demonstrable through sensory experience. As Adorno (1966) writes, “In lieu of any critical authority for Being we get a reiteration of the mere name” (p. 71).

Emptiness as the final fruit of the dialectical process, the something beyond contradiction, is not an idea or a concept but simply a word used for heuristic
purposes. Emptiness, like Derrida’s *differance*, is permanently under erasure. Reason corrects itself in its logical and critical course and progression. Critical reason is finally the critique of reason itself whether formal, dialectical, instrumental, or critical. The foundation of logic and truth in emptiness is what establishes both in the first place and what prevents that any idea or ideology becomes fixed and totalitarian. Potential emptiness cannot be formalized. As Adorno put it, nonidentity is the secret telos of identification.

Within psychoanalysis, halting the compulsion of ego-identifications and using negative dialectics to turn the psyche towards nonidentity or nonidentification is equivalent to a critique of ego-ideals and identifications.

If someone says I am English, then this connotes both a national identity and a linguistic identity. In addition, a race may also be implied in this identity. From this it follows that if you live in England and you are from India and speak Hindi, then certainly the first group may not consider you to be English. This would also be confirmed by skin color. The facts that you live in England and are from India and speak Hindi signify that you are not English and that you lack the trait that defines the English. In this example, and in England, Indian signifies not English or the negation of English. This is particularly the case if large groups of Hindus are living in England.

According to formal logic, and the principle of non-contradiction, the propositions English and not English, or identity (unary trait) and the negation of identity, have very particular psycho-social-political ramifications. On the other hand, if the principle of contradiction is allowed and appreciated, then not-English does not necessarily contradict the principle of being English. In fact, it may make someone even more English because not-English may be consistent, for example, with core English values of gentleness/civilization and a cosmopolitan or universal education. So if English identity can over-include not-being English, in a narrow sense, then the principle of non-identity allows a subject to be English and Indian, or not-English, and, therefore, English in its true sense. Non-identity, or the emptiness of Englishness, allows for true identity and not-identity at the same time but without synthesizing either one of them.

Dialectical negation of the negation is not some grand positive idea, synthesis, or project, but is contained within or is immanent to the negative or to emptiness itself. Zizek’s reading of negative dialectics follows Adorno’s interpretation of Hegel. However, I also disagree with Zizek with respect to the idea of the negative or of emptiness. For Zizek, as for Western thought in general, emptiness or nothingness is a form of absence or lack. The Eastern Buddhist notion of emptiness coincides with the notion of a lack when it defines emptiness in terms of the impermanence of all things. The notion of loss, and therefore of lack, presupposes the basic idea and reality of change. But emptiness is a presence that is not an idea or a thing, although it can also appear as *das Ding* (the thing as seen from the perspective of no-thing).

Primarily, emptiness is a form of *jouissance* or a level of experience that Lacan (1972–3) said we know nothing of. Emptiness of the thing-in-itself is a
third form of *jouissance* that is constructive rather than inconvenient or destructive. Please refer to my prior work for the definition of *jouissance* (Moncayo, 2008).

Ultimately, the logic of contradiction leads to the negation of the negation and to the experience of emptiness. But as aforementioned, emptiness cannot be separated from *das Ding* or the unary trace as the zero included within the One and the One included within the zero. I will return to this further on.

**The Real as the symbolic effectiveness of a vanishing point instant**

In reference to a knowing of *das Ding*, we must consider whether the possibility exists of knowing through the senses without the senses, understanding, or reason. Is the pure form of the negative, or the experience of *das Ding* as the no-thing, the same as what could be called *sensibilia* prior to the capture of the senses and their objects via perceptual understanding? Is this what the no-thing or A not being either A or B refers to? I am differentiating between the senses before and after perception (language, cognition, logic, etc).

In animals and non-human species, there is an instinctual knowing prior to language, understanding, and reason. An example of this would be the auspicious rooster that, in the dark of the night, interacts with light and time, without confusion, and knows when to crow to announce the coming of the dawn and the sun. This knowing is manifested in the form of energetic intensities and preconceptual actions and sounds that involve the senses but not perception, language, understanding, or reason. The object does not exist as a presupposition for a linguistic subject.

Is emptiness or the quality of A not being A or B the same as what Magritte called the mystery and that is represented in the famous painting of a pipe that he called “This is not a pipe”? Is the object anything beyond its designation and negation within language?

In Magritte’s painting rather than simply being a pipe, the pipe is not a pipe, but the pipe is also the not not pipe. This is not a pipe means everything else it could be other than a pipe, in other words the quality of being not-pipe. The pipe includes the non-pipe or everything else. At the same time, the pipe is the non-pipe negated or the not non-pipe, or, in other words, the pipe is absolutely “this” and only “this.” The pipe as an affirmation is the negation negated. Everything that went into the production of the pipe or the not-pipe is negated in order to give birth to the pipe as a single event. “This” is also related to Benjamin’s (1936) concept of “aura” as the quality of a modern painting in terms of “its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (p. 125).

But what is the difference between the first and last or third pipe? The first is the naïve reality assumed and imagined to be a pipe, and this corresponds to the identity principle of formal logic. The pipe is A and not B, or C, etc. The second pipe is the non-pipe, meaning all the causes that went into the production
of the event pipe as such. The pipe or A is not A, and it is B, C, etc. But the third pipe is the negation of the negation or the absolute difference of the things-in-themselves where the Real appears as the efficiency of a point instant. With the excluded or empty third, the efficiency of the whole or totality appears as evanescence, wherein the totality of causes or the structure disappears and only the event remains as a flashing into the phenomenal world. The universal whole is a fiction that both exists and does not exist. The whole is a fiction because it is emptied out by an event. In relationship to an event, the whole becomes a hole. At the same time, the whole exists both within the hole and within the event.

The event has no inherent nature, because it is produced by a series of causes that have now disappeared, and only appear as “this,” or as the One that includes the third as emptiness. Only “this One is,” sensibilia, the unary trace, or the aesthetic moment, takes place in a single moment or a single point of reality and not via perception or representation. It is the knowing of the non-definable. It is a moment of non-understanding and beyond reason. At the same time it is simply an object or a subject as das Ding or the no-thing, the Spirit as a bone, as Hegel and Bodhidharma would have it.

In a famous story of transmission of the Zen teaching, Bodhidharma, the Indian ancestor who brought the Zen teaching to China, asked his four disciples to say something to demonstrate their understanding. When the fourth disciple remained silent, Bodhidharma responded: “You have my marrow.” Das Ding, or the unary trace as it refers to identity, represents the absolute difference of the things-in-themselves, or their lack of inherent nature. The pipe, or any event, being what it is, also lacks the third, or the series of causes that produced it. But rather than as cause, the third now appears as emptiness, as the absent unconscious that is grounding this particular consciousness of an event or event-consciousness. Something is perceived from the perspective of infinity or of the unconscious, both as the unknown in the sense of the unknowable or indefinable, and the unknown in the sense of the totality of causes that remain invisible or that have now disappeared. The event does not simply appear out of nowhere, although it does appear this way, nor does the totality totally disappear, since the totality is also present in the event. An event neither appears nor disappears. The event is not only arising just now and at the same time has never happened before. It is therefore neither before nor after anything, or it includes its own before and after.

The unary trace is composed of a piece of sensibilia, has links to the Real of the body (the marrow, for example), and is organized by dialectical logic: it is something and not something, or Symbolic and Real, at the same time. In addition, the One of a trace in the Real can be differentiated from synthetic unity or judgments constructed by dialectical logic. The structure of dialectical polarities in language (signifier and signified) is a universal, whereas speech or the speaking being, including silence, is always something unary, the concrete abstract, an S1 or unary trace.
The unary trace is a traceless trace that manifests in a real present moment and not as a conceived chain of moments or representations in time. Unary trace is a representation of a single subject/object in this moment.

By the same token, the Real can be defined as the effectiveness of a point instant: the point of reality where existence becomes the same as non-existence and the subject as metaphor in speech becomes the same as the subject qua nothing.

Each thing is present in one place and is completely unrelated not only to another similar thing but also to the same thing in the next moment, let alone in another place. But the difference between A is A (A=A) or A is not B (meaning that A has a unique set of causes and conditions that are different from B’s), and A is not A (A≠A) or not B, etc., is the same difference than between imaginary oneness and the unary One that includes zero. Imaginary oneness is self-created and has a unique set of constructed causes (the ego representations or whatever the ego thinks is special about him/her), whereas in the unary One the cause as such is absent or lacking and this marks the thing with the mark of the no-thing, the markless mark, or the distinction of no-distinction. Zero as the place-holder for the excluded third makes each thing independent from one another.

This distinction between Imaginary and Real independence of things/phenomena can also be applied to thought. Discrimination on the basis of non-discrimination, or thinking on the basis of not thinking, signifies that the constructed conceptual world can be built upon a Real foundation not of objects but of the things in themselves, which is the same as saying nothing or emptiness. A form of thought built on no-thought or thoughts in search of a non-thinker.

The law of identity, which is the same as the law of non-contradiction (the law that forbids contradiction), is the law of a constructed separation or duality between this against that, self versus other, and truth over falseness. The law (of non-contradiction) erects a wall of separation that excludes the middle third between extremes. This wall is similar (although not identical) to what separates conscious and allowed experience from the repressed unconscious. The wall dictates or prescribes how and the way people are supposed to think about what is permissible and acceptable in reality. But the difference with the Freudian model and what comes closer to Lacan’s notion of the Möbius strip, and to Bion’s notion of reversible perspectives, is that either side of the extremes can be repressed. Consciousness can be repressed as much as the unconscious, and consciousness can be unconscious and the unconscious conscious.

The law of non-identity or of contradiction allows for multiple identities and contradictions, for middle areas between extremes, and for extremes to mutually determine each other. In the case of natural phenomena, such as light and dark, the extremes never exist without the middle areas between light and dark. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the law of contradiction is the real law, whereas the law of non-contradiction (either light or dark with the middle excluded) is the constructed or artificial one. At the same time, although the presence or absence of light conditions the presence or absence of darkness, and there are middle areas between the two, in emptiness, darkness and light are entirely independent from
each other. In the presence of darkness, the absence/presence of the sun is erased and replaced by emptiness. In the presence of light, the absence/presence of darkness is erased and replaced by emptiness. The effectiveness of darkness has cancelled itself out in the phenomenon known as light. The night has become light and the light night. The light does not repress darkness since in the light there is also darkness, and in the darkness light. But we don’t call light darkness, and in darkness light does not interfere.

The instance of the subject: the continuity and evanescence of the unary trace

Today it has become trendy to speak of the death of the ego or of the subject. This theme became a key feature of postmodernism and of poststructuralism. In a similar way, Lacan became the standard bearer of a critique of ego psychology and of a battle cry to return to Freud, although the trend towards ego psychology had begun with Freud himself. In addition, the influence of the Buddhist doctrine of no-self on postmodern culture has been significant and pervasive.

But without the ego, what gives unity and stability to the experience of the subject? Freud (1919) regarded the ego as the agency that unified the various agencies and experiences of the subject.

In actual fact, indeed, the neurotic patient presents us with a torn mind divided by resistances. As we analyze it and remove the resistances, it grows together; the greater unity which we call his ego fits into itself all the instinctual impulses which before had been split off and held apart from it.

(p. 161)

In the quote above, Freud conceived of the ego as a principle of unity within the psyche. Because of defenses, and the division of the psyche, the drives have become partial, and developed competing interests and desires. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, and Freud’s second theory of drives, it is the Life drive or Eros that strives towards greater unities, not the ego: “It grows together” (1919, p. 161). Lacan’s definition of the aim of analysis follows the same idea: “Where It was the subject must come into existence” (p. 45). The ego “fitting in” the drives is the principle of mastery and of taming the animal or the Id instead of converging with its nature or “It nature.” Ego unity is imaginary and represents the unity of Fascism and what Lacan (1969) calls the master’s discourse. Symbolic unity is the unity of the Symbolic order and the signifier, not of the ego.

For Lacan, the signifier/subject, as a signifier of desire, helps regulate jouissance and is itself regulated by transformations within jouissance. There is the One of the signifier and then there is the One of jouissance or of the Real as a plenum. They both converge under the letter that Lacan calls $S_1$. $S_1–S_0$ would be another way of writing the relationship between an ordering symbolic element and the experience of the Real.
Roland Barthes (1984) and Lacan spoke of the subject and Saussure’s signifier in similar terms. The subject of the sentence holds together both language and subject alike. The subject is a metaphor (not an entity) that is constantly changing (through metonymy) while remaining stable at the same time. Because the subject is the subject of a sentence, the signifying subject is under perpetual flux, while the name of the subject functions as an anchoring point for this perpetual motion within language. The Name stands still as a unary trace within language.

It is the quality or modality of jouissance that also helps bind the subject together. The subject of jouissance is the Lacanian subject of the Real, which is empty of definitions within language. As soon as one tries to define the agency of a Real subject within language, an empirical ego becomes reified or falsely constructed. Freud (1919) points to this when he refers to “the greater unity which we call his ego . . .” (p. 161).

Strictly speaking, the ego is simply a name (“which we call”) within language that points to something (the greater unity) beyond language. What Lacan calls the One in the Real beyond language incorporates “into itself all the drives which before had been split off and held apart from it.”

The subject as a Real and Symbolic unary traceless trace is not susceptible to reification. The unary trace is simply an instance, not in the sense of agency, but in the sense of a vanishing point instant. There are two important unary traces for the subject: the specular image of the body, and the name or names of the subject; one is linked to the ideal ego and the other to the ego-ideal. Both of these unary traces locate the subject within imaginary and cultural-linguistic-symbolic coordinates and provide continuity across time and space. A name has the distinctive function of pointing to identity, and language has the function of providing speaking beings with an individual and group identity. Through language, John Smith or Juan Perez can identify themselves as belonging to a particular cultural group. John and Juan identify with language to the same extent that language represents them or the signifier represents the subject (John) for another signifier (Spanish Juan).

The law of identity (of non-contradiction) is the law of the constancy of our cognitions that functions on the basis of naming and nomination within language. The name or the signifier gives the subject duration in time and location. But the signifier or a name of the subject does not require the reification of an ego agency in order to explain the order of the subject or subjective experience. It is only in the Imaginary or the imagined nature that the ego becomes reified as an agency. The ego becomes the cause of his/her own experience instead of the subject being caused by language and various forms of jouissance or energetic intensities.

It is the image of the body, or the body as object, and the name of the body, or the body as subject, that actually provide the continuity in experience that is usually attributed to the ego. Both allow me to say today that I am the same person I was yesterday. Strictly speaking, the ideal ego and the ego-ideal are unary traces or instances and moments rather than substantial entities. They are unary traces, rather than permanent entities, because the image disappears once the body is no longer in front of the clear mirror or the mirror of the mind, and the

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name, like speech, vanishes once it has been uttered. Both causes, although they persist throughout the person’s life, and stand in for the subject, are themselves constantly being replaced by the void of inherent or substantial identity.

Without the constancy provided by the unary trace, neither cognition nor intelligible speech or purposive action becomes possible. Re-cognition with regards to identity requires formal uncontradicted experience: I am me, not you, I am John, not Juan, and I am this (Anglo-American) not that (Latino-American). But when the unary trace of the subject becomes covered over by the project of becoming someone or something in the Imaginary, then the actual subject becomes an entity known as the ego. The ego becomes an object of the drive and of the desire of the Other. In this sense, one can speak of the imaginary unity of the ego being the same as the unity of the (sexual) drive.

In the project of becoming the object cause of the Other’s desire, the past becomes the future and the future the past or future anterior. Yet the “I” of yesterday is not the same as the “me” of today. Both are instances of instantaneous and evanescent being in the present moment that is not wholly determined by past experience.

In this instance, instantaneous being falls on the side of contradicted experience. The I of yesterday can be in contradiction with the me of today. I am the same person, still Raul, but I am a changed man, and therefore not the same person. The me of today or now is a different Raul.

I am both the same person (a) and not the same person (b). The ego is $a - b$, the same person without the “not being the same person.” The subject is “not being the same person” and because of this the subject is able to inhabit the same name or constant metaphor ($b + a$).

The reason I have constancy and identity, and yet can be a changed person at the same time, is because there is no trace of constancy and identity. The law of identity is really a law of constructed identity because the law only exists in our head and not in the things themselves.

Today I am a changed person, not the same person that I was to others in the past, but it still feels like me. This is because the not I is still me in an absolute sense. I am me instead of those others that defined me in the past because I am “naught”, the one that was not those others in the past (how I defined myself in contrast to others). The past one that I was and the past others are naught. I am still the one that was no one then and still is no one today.

Because I am still no one today, I can be the One and the name that I am but in a new way in this moment at this time and place. I allow myself, and reality allows me to contradict myself, to be constant in time, yet also different. The not me, or the naught that is me, allows me to contradict myself while remaining same in the void of absolute difference. Identity is the constructed relative identity, the cock and bull story, over time and in terms of $S_1 - S_2$ (signifier/signified). Das Ding is absolute difference (the no-thing) whereas the Real is the efficiency of the vanishing point of the structure. To conclude this section, I offer a diagram representing the theory advanced thus far.
The ego in Freud’s theory

As I have argued elsewhere (Moncayo, 2008), the relationship to the environment or to objects is initially primarily narcissistic but narcissistic as distinct from egoistic. Egoism is given by identification with the fantasy object of the other. Following Freud, I have called the latter relative primary narcissism (Moncayo, 2008). During the transition from absolute primary narcissism to relative primary narcissism, the Nirvana principle is also transformed into the pleasure principle. What was a principle of quiescence or of energy in a bound or condensed state (Nirvana principle) becomes a principle of excitation and of defenses against excitation (pleasure principle). Relative primary narcissism is inaugurated by the relationship to the partial object and is ruled by the pleasure principle that organizes both drives and defenses against the drives. At the stage of hallucinatory wish fulfillment, defenses are no more than the tendencies to avoid unpleasure.

Eventually, and after the establishment of the specular image or ideal ego (secondary narcissism), the ego’s identification with the father, or the figure of the law, leads to the establishment of the super-ego and the ego-ideal. Both the ideal

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ego and the ego-ideal become more elaborate forms of both pleasure/desire and defenses against pleasure/desire.

But the basic point is that the rational ego, which is governed by the reality principle rather than the pleasure principle, requires the prior formation of the super-ego and the ego-ideal.

Just like the super-ego was formed through a type of ego identification and involved a modification within narcissism, the so-called rational reality ego presupposes the prior establishment of the ego-ideal. The ego before the super-ego and the ego after the super-ego are not the same ego.

So why does Freud (1914, 1923) speak of the super-ego as a grade or differentiation within the ego, instead of vice versa: the rational ego as an outcome of the development of the ego-ideal? Certainly the adult or mature ego depends on the identifications that concern the ego-ideal, with the qualification that these identifications have become ego-syntonic rather than ego-dystonic (as in the case of the super-ego). Once the ego identifies with social ideals, then the ego is transformed accordingly and these ideas are perceived as emanating from the ego itself. I have argued that the proper name and the patronymic are the first models for this process. Nomination as a paternal metaphor anchors the social form of language for a particular individual rather than simply as the subject of a sentence. Other than the name, the subject as an individual is identical to the subject of a sentence.

The proper name as an identification is recognized as emanating from the ego itself, yet it is the outcome of differentiations/modifications that have already occurred within the ego. The ego-ideal is a differentiation within the ideal ego (not the rational ego), although at the same time the ego-ideal is not a separate agency within the ego. The function of paying attention, for example, is hardly separate from the ideal of paying attention. In addition, the rational ego is also differentiated and evolved under the influence of the ego-ideal. So is there really a difference between the two once the ego-ideal is established? Is there really justification for continuing to speak about the two as being distinct agencies or two separate things?

The identifications that comprise the ego-ideal precipitate differentiations and maturations that strengthen the capacity for attention and rational symbolic thought. But as I said, this capacity is not the same ego that existed prior to the development of the ego-ideal, or is it?

It is difficult to distinguish the ego-ideal from the ego itself, since the ego is also explained as formed by processes of identification with the object or the other.

According to Lacan, the subject is a signifier of the Other, and is inhabited by language and a social, sexual, and cultural history. So why is the ego-ideal a differentiation within the ego if the ego-ideal was not there before? If we think of the ego as emerging from the ideal ego and from the objet a prior to that, the ego-ideal as a differentiation within the ego would not make a whole lot of sense. It is the subject of language and culture that re-signifies the ideal ego and the objet a.

Perhaps the solution to this dilemma is to think of the proper name as actually linked to the ideal ego and the specular image since most mothers address the
child (in front of the mirror) by the child’s name. At the same time the specular
image and the name could be construed as the mother’s imaginary phallus, unless
a lack within the image is also formulated. The ideal ego/specular image as the
mother’s imaginary phallus explains the character of omnipotence associated
with the ideal ego. The child is what completes the mother and threatens to make
the father expendable.

Once the child moves past the specular image in search of the signifier of the
mother’s desire, the ego-ideal appears in the horizon of the subject under the
Name of the Father. The father as a signifier of the mother’s desire now replaces
the mother as the object of the child’s desire. The child wants what the father has
but has to give up the mother and the imaginary phallus in order to get it. This
transaction inaugurates the entire realm of substitution and gift giving linked to
the symbolic order, and it constitutes the vertex of the phenomenon of identifica-
tion. From this point of view the ego-ideal is another name for the patronymic or
the paternal metaphor as a unary trace that over time re-signifies the bodily and
mental states of the child with a new inscription. The subject and the ego-ideal
(the paternal metaphor/name) become signifiers within language.

The ego can be understood as the reified name for something that is actually an
energetic bodily and mental state that endures across time in the form of a trace or
an inscription. In this sense I argue that the ego is the same as the name of the
subject. Beyond the name, the ego is simply an aggregate of functions that, to one
degree or another, exist in all human beings: attention, memory, thinking, percep-
tion, and consciousness. These functions are organized within a symbolic order
and the metaphoric order of language.

The energy for these functions arises from the Real It rather than from the Id or
the ego. The division between the mind and the body and the division of the mind
and the subject is laid down on an undivided Life drive that strives towards greater
unities or that “grows together,” as Freud says. The Id or the drives evolve out what
I call Infinite Life in a way that I will explore in an upcoming section of this chapter.
The It or das Ding, as the no-thing, is consistent with what Lacan called the pre-
subject or unbarred subject and that I will represent as S₀ and the subject of the Real.

The answer to the question of what to call the “maturation point,” commonly
referred as the ego, ultimately comes from the Real and not from the symbolic or
linguistic subject. The Real here is represented by a modality of jouissance that
was an integral part of absolute primary narcissism and that represents the ener-
geic origins of the ego. And, unfortunately, Freud’s ego psychology here becomes
haunted by the specter of Jung’s theory of the libido. According to Eigen (2009),
Winnicott spoke of an unexcited state and of a background of quietude as an
original or primary state of the infant, which is unpatterned and unplanned but not
chaotic. A radiant and quiescent innocence describes the moment after birth and
many momentary experiences of an infant. This is consistent with an undifferenti-
ated state between subject and object.

A reader could object at this point that I have retrogressed to a pre-Freudian and
quasi-spiritual and romantic notion of childhood innocence. I don’t think so. For
one thing, the mythical notion of the innocence of childhood is used to defend against and deny the fact of childhood sexuality and the condition of polymorphous perversion described by Freud. Second, there is a difference between an infant and a child. The state that I was alluding to, as containing energy in a primary bound or quiescent state, refers to an infant and not necessarily to a child. Third, I will follow Lacan’s (1964) elaboration of Freudian theory where he distinguishes between perversion and the polymorphous perversion of childhood. It is the presence or absence of the ego of narcissism that differentiates between these two conditions.

In perversion the ego plays a prominent role since the objet a is prevented from disappearing by the ego occupying the place of the $a: a \rightarrow \$ (feces or urine, stand in for the ego, for example). The $a$ does not complete the ego as in neurosis, or threaten the ego with aphanisis, disappearance, or malevolent depersonalization, as in psychosis, but, rather, occupies the place of the ego function itself. In the primary state of a beginner’s mind or of a radiant and quiescent innocence, the ego and the object are altogether absent. It is this state that explains two things:

1. The energetic origins of the ego-ideal.
2. That there can be differentiation and further development beyond the ego-ideal and towards the Lacanian subject. The Lacanian subject returns full circle to the pre-subject in the form of the subject qua nothing.

The rational reality ego is actually a subject that includes the pre-subject, before the object/ego differentiation, and that can be defined as either self or non-self. It is the subject that retroactively and proactively reaches towards non-duality and the principle that over-includes contradiction, not the ego. Finally, the subject differs from the Jungian concept of the Self because it also functions as a metaphor in language and not only as an archetype of the imagination. The question of the imagination will be addressed in the final chapter of this book.

**The ego and the identification with the sinthome**

In the seminar on the *sinthome*, Lacan says that the registers of experience (RSI) support a bone or an object bone, an osobject, which characterizes the letter as an objet a.

The letter as a different form of writing with the body comes from a different place than the signifier: it comes from the unary trace, or the infinite straight line that Lacan says is equivalent to a circle. This equivalence can be observed in a drawstring bag or sack. The string points to something that lies at each point of a sphere or a circle and that ties the circle together. The many points or holes found along the circumference of a circle point to the pointillist and discontinuous reality of a circle rather than to its imaginary totality.

Related to the question of the letter as a form of writing with the body, in the seminar on the *sinthome*, Lacan also examines the function of the ego in the work
of novelist James Joyce. Joyce was an Irish writer considered to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. *Ulysses* (1922) is his best-known work. According to Lacan, Joyce was able to avoid psychosis by using his literary work to construct for himself a new ego and a new name. The function of the ego in Joyce and in the *sinthome* plays a different role than in most cases. Usually the function of the ego is involved in writing and in the image of the body that is tied to the ideal ego (i[a]). But the body in the case of the new ego of the *sinthome* is only a quanta, a q’bit, a string or trace of jouissance. The letter as a (as a trace) has been separated from the total image of the ideal ego (i[a]) thanks to the discontinuity and the cuts found within the signifying chain.

It is the enigmatic function of the ego, as a unary trace or as an infinite straight line, that has a reparatory function. The infinite straight line, or unary trace, is the line that is found inside the brackets that represent the cutting or unknotting of the knot (see above diagram).

Lacan also links the Real with the ego of primary narcissism that is not necessarily without a subject but where there is no discreet relationship between the inside and the outside. There is no relationship in the sense that two terms have not been differentiated that could have a relationship with one another. But the absence of a structural relationship does not mean that the inside and outside are isolated from each other. The unary trace is a trace of the One prior to a differentiation of an inside from an outside. The unary trace constitutes a pre-subject that is recovered or produced (going around a circle twice) via the *sinthome* and the Name of the Father as a new letter or signifier/signification of jouissance.
The symbolic subject is produced and reproduced via the signifier and the process of representation. It is in this sense that the subject is an effect of speech and language. The logic of the sentence holds the subject together. And here the signifier is the signifier that, according to Lacan, is ruled by the pleasure principle as the principle of repression and defense (the avoidance of unpleasure). In this instance, the signifier and the subject have some equivalence with the ego-ideal and the super-ego, with the exception that the ego-ideal and the super-ego also have an imaginary dimension, or better still, actually constitute the imaginary dimension of the signifier, the symbolic, and the father.

The purely symbolic signifier is consistent with a definition of the subject in the strict sense outlined by Lacan. The Lacanian subject can also be differentiated from Freud’s ego and ego-ideal. If anything, the subject comes closer to the definition that Freud gives of an evolved ego ruled by the reality principle. The signifier is logically organized and is the site of reason or of the cogito. The subject is the ego without the narcissistic dimension of the ego or as a fourth-degree differentiation within narcissism. The second- and third-degree narcissism of the ego fall under the rubric of the ideal ego and the ego-ideal.

Lacan discovers an imaginary dimension of the signifier in the function of meaning and metonymy, or the endless displacement of the word, that never hits the target of invoking a particular form of jouissance in the Real. This displacement could be called an imaginary dimension of the rational ego: the more the ego speaks, the less the ego says. This is in fact a definition of the ego-ideal, wherein thinking or speech is confounded with the imaginary project of becoming someone worthy of the recognition of the Other.

The symbolic aspect of the ideal ego and ego-ideal is found in the function of three anchoring points: the specular image, the proper name, and the patronymic. The patronymic, of course, is a reference to the Name of the Father, and to the naming of the subject by the Other. Without this symbolic and unsubstantial dimension of the anchoring point, the subject could not acquire a stable identity within a particular context. I say unsubstantial because the image and the name speak for a subject that otherwise remains indefinable and that has the structure of a Real hole or emptiness. The image and the name are devoid of substantiality (they are a topological bubble and a letter, respectively), or, in other words, the true subject is no subject, and the no subject is a true subject as a bubble and a letter.

In Seminar XXIII, Lacan proposed that Joyce’s literary work was his sinthome or his way of “making a name for himself” and of supplementing a deficit in his father’s symbolic function. The sinthome functions as the Name of the Father and as the fourth ring in the Borromean knot. Joyce made a body and a name for himself through his work. In his work, Joyce speaks about the body in great detail, against convention, at the same time that he subverts the rules of the colonizing English language.

Lacan notes that Joyce’s name is related to joy, and to jouissance, and that it is this jouissance that is evoked and comes through in his text and in his deviant use of the signifier and signification.
I argue that when Lacan thinks of the sinthome as an ego he is referring to Freud’s third form of identification that Lacan called the einziger Zug or unary trait. The ego, subject, or self, as a body or a symbolic body, corresponds to the figure of its own negation. Both the ideal ego and the ego-ideal have to be first established and later abandoned in order for the subject to realize its being as a subject (son être du sujet). The ideal ego is replaced by the objet a, and the ego-ideal is replaced by the signifier of a lack in the Other. The unary trace, as the third form of identification, is the something or the residue of Life that remains as a result of the process that Lacan called subjective destitution. The One, or the unary trace, is the most that can be said about the Real. In addition, the Real is intrinsically linked to transformations between different types of 
jouissance.

The sinthome allows or facilitates rather than represses the flow of 
jouissance. In contrast to this, the ego and the signifier repress 
jouissance. A symptom also constitutes a destructive form of the 
jouissance of the Other, or of meaning. The sinthome implies a transformation of 
jouissance that renders 
jouissance sublimatory rather than destructive or inconvenient. In some ways this would be the equivalent of Freud’s “where id was, ego shall be.” Lacan already redefined this formulation by stating “where It was, I shall become.” What is at stake now is the status of this I. Lacan says that the knot needs to be undone, in order to get past the imaginary dimension of the Symbolic, represented by $S_1$–$S_2$. “The knot must come undone. The knot is the only support conceivable for a relation between something and something else” (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975: 9–10).

In this imaginary dimension of the Symbolic the subject in the Real always falls into the structure of a synaptic gap in-between the chain of signifiers. Lacan initially conceived of this hole as a kind of traumatizing and senseless absence of self and meaning that haunts the words of those who speak. The Real was construed as disruptive of the symbolic order.

In a fabulatory manner, I propose that the real, as I think it in my pan-se (homophony between penser and panser or to bandage) is comprised really – the real effectively lying – of the hole which subsists in that its consistence is nothing more than the totality of the knot which ties it together with the symbolic and the imaginary. The knot which may be termed Borromean cannot be cut without dissolving the myth it offers of the subject, as non-supposé, in other words the subject as real, no more varied than each body which can be given the sign speaking-being [parlêtre]. Only due to this knot can the body be given a status that is respectable, in the everyday sense of the word.

(Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975: 10; bold and bracketing added)

At the end of his work Lacan arrives at a new conception of the Real:

In any case, it is very difficult not to consider the Real as a third, and let us say that all that I can solicit by way of a response has to do with a call/appeal

http://www.routledgementalhealth.com/the-emptiness-of-oedipus-9780415608299
to the Real, not as linked to the body, but as different. At a distance from the body there is the possibility of something I termed last time resonance or consonance. In relation to its poles, the body and language, the real is what harmonizes [*fait accord*].

(Seminar XXIII, lesson of 9 December, 1975: 11)

Lacan finds the new ego of the Real most clearly in the scene of Joyce where young Stephen is “beaten” by his peers. Lacan points out that Joyce describes Stephen as literally “emptied out,” as having no relation to his body at all.

It is not immediately obvious what would be harmonizing about the beating of the body, unless the beating of the body resulted in a dropping of the imaginary/symbolic mind, in a movement from thinking to non-thinking and then to a different form of thinking that emerges from the leaning on and beating of the meaning-making body. A Jewish mystical story described the experience of emptiness or no self that a Chasid had after receiving an anti-semitic beating. This is precisely what would have infuriated Freud, given his memory of witnessing a Gentile exercise his privileged right of way and dominion of the sidewalk by forcing Freud’s father to step down from the curb. The Zen tradition has many stories of Zen teachers slapping or hitting their students in order to wake them up from their slumber and complacency. Japanese Zen teacher Dogen referred to the experience of waking up or realization as the dropping of body and mind. In another related story, Japanese Zen teacher Ryokan lived the simplest kind of life in a little hut at the foot of a mountain. One evening a thief visited the hut only to discover there was nothing in it to steal. Ryokan returned and caught him. “You may have come a long way to visit me,” he told the prowler, “and you should not return empty handed. Please take my clothes as a gift.” The thief was bewildered. He took the clothes and slunk away. Ryokan sat naked, watching the moon. “Poor fellow,” he mused, “I wish I could give him this beautiful moon.”

(Reps, 1985: 27)

In the unknotting of the Borromean knot, what is bracketed or “desupposed” are both the total ego and the total Other. Both forms of totalization and knotting divide the subject and force the subject of the Real to haunt the symbolic order. It is the barring and bracketing of the Other that produces a new subject: “Where id and ego, Imaginary and Symbolic were, the unary trace or the One shall be.” What lies inside the bracket [...] or [...] is the unary trace that appears in a hole within the Symbolic and that reconstitutes the Symbolic and symbolizes the imagination. The signifier is now composed of letters or traces that are inherently empty. By virtue of this emptiness the differential structure of the symbolic order is maximized/harmonized, precipitating thereby an outflow and transformation of *jouissance*.
To produce a true hole, it must be framed by something resembling a bubble, a torus, so that each one of these holes is outlined by something which holds them together, for us to have something which could be termed a true hole. (Seminar XXIII, lesson of 18 November, 1975: 7)

The true (w)hole that Lacan says is not hooked up to the Freudian unconscious is distinguished from the lacuna or gaps that lead to repressed signifiers. The true (w)hole represents Being beyond signification. Wondrous being resonates with senseless traces of jouissance contained within the letters that circumscribe a beyond signification.

The sinthome is unique to each subject and follows after the traits or marks that characterize each subject. The universal is in the particular, the absolute within the relative, the abstract within the concrete. The traits of the ego, the ego-ideal and the super-ego are transformed into sinthetic unary traces. S₂ is returned to S₁, and S₁ is returned to S₀ as part of a structural re-knotting and reorganization/harmonization of the Borromean knot.

**Identification and the objet a**

So far I have considered how Lacanian theory links the unary trace to the ideal ego or the specular image, to the Name of the Father, the ego-ideal, the problem of the letter as distinguished from the signifier, and to the phenomena/noumena of jouissance. Now I must consider how Lacan also considers identification with the objet a in a way that goes beyond the imaginary dimension of relative primary narcissism already mentioned.

Identification (identity) can only happen in relation to what the subject imagines rightly or wrongly to be the desire of the Other. In the normal, neurotic or perverse subject it is always a matter of identifying oneself in accordance with or in opposition to what one thinks is the desire of the Other. As long as this desire can be imagined, fantasized, the subject will find there the necessary reference points in order to define himself, either as the object of the desire of the Other or as an object refusing to be the desire of the Other. In either case he will be able to locate himself, to define himself.

But from the moment when the desire becomes something mysterious, indefinable, the subject discovers that it is precisely this desire of the Other which constitutes him as subject; what he will encounter faced with this void is his fundamental fantasy. To be the object of the desire of the Other is only bearable in so far as we can name this desire, can shape it in terms of our own desire. To become the object of a desire we can no longer name, is to become oneself an object without a name having lost all possible identity: to become an object whose insignia no longer means anything since they have become undecipherable for the Other . . .

(XVIII: 11)
It is by articulating in the most precise fashion this $a$ at the point of lack of the Other, which is also the point where the subject receives from this Other, as locus of the word, its major mark, that of the unary trait . . .

(XXIV: 11)

In Seminar XI, Lacan (1964) defines the objet $a$ as the index of a void. At first Lacan located the objet $a$ in the Imaginary (as the object of fantasy), whereas the later Lacan (1969) linked the objet $a$ to the Real. The first definition is related to the object of fantasy cause of desire, and the object of the drive, whereas the later is exemplified by the agency of the analyst in the theory of the four discourses. The $a$ is first the breast that the infant identifies with and that will lead his/her search for the specular image or ideal ego. Once the child realizes that the $a$ is also absent from the specular image, this realization will turn the object back into being an object of the other rather than of the ideal ego. Now the ego will look for its own object (which originally represented the part-object of the mother) in the other or the sibling/peer of the ego.

The Imaginary and Real aspects of the objet $a$ are also related to two other distinctions within Lacanian theory: that between das Ding as the archaic maternal Thing, and das Ding as the no-thing. The no-thing before the breast, or before the subject–object or self–other differentiation (inaugurated by the presence of the breast), bears no mark whatsoever. The no-thing can only be recaptured under the signifier when the subject itself finally becomes a signifier of nothing or “What” represents the signifier for another signifier. In the practice of analysis, the $a$ of the agency of the analyst is the subject qua-nothing. It is the latter that allows for the other (the analysand), to identify ($S_1$) and relinquish (rather than identify with) the primitive objet $a$ subject of their unconscious identifications.

In the quote above, Lacan first establishes the connection between identification and the desire of the Other. Freud’s super-ego, for example, is predicated on the desire of the Other. Most school children know that their parents want them to do well in school. A child may choose to identify with or against this desire of the Other. In the second paragraph, Lacan moves to consider the desire of the Other as an unconscious desire that now has more to do with sexuality than the law. Since, for the most part, this desire is unspoken, it remains invisible or void, and it is in this void of the Other that the subject will construct fundamental oedipal fantasies.

When a girl, for example, feels she is the intense object of desire of her father, she may name this desire the “great big bear.” Thanks to the metaphor of this animal, a girl may now have identified her desire in relationship to her father’s desire and her father’s desire may have become bearable and bear-like as a unary trait. This may be the common origin of the teddy bears found in the beds of many homes. In this instance a teddy bear would be an example of a unary trait, a signifier, and an objet $a$ contained within a transitional object (teddy). The letter “b” stands for the unary trace, whereas the “ear” represents the voice of the Other.
The word bear is the signifier, and the actual teddy bear is the transitional object. The fact that the bear represents the desire of the Other (father), as a love object or lover, also conveys traces of phallic jouissance and of sexuation, making this a girl rather than a boy.

The question of the identification with the objet a, or the unary trace that comes from the other, also raises the question of the relationship between this identification and the identification with the signifier.

The identification with the signifier is mediated by nomination and the Name of the Father. But in Lacan’s paternal metaphor, the Name of the Father is an S2 that replaces the S1 in the sense of the child as the mother’s imaginary phallus. The objet a represents a movement from the child to the mother, and the identification of the child with a partial object of the mother, whereas S1–S2 represents a movement from the parent to the child and the capture of the subject in a net of identifications coming from the Other.

In the imaginary register, the objet a is replaced by secondary narcissism and the unary trait of the specular image. In the Symbolic and in language, it is the S1 or phallic signifier that will give rise to the divided subject.

“The signifier is essentially different to itself, namely that nothing of the subject can be identified to it without excluding itself from it” (Seminar IX, 1961–2: 12). In this quote Lacan proposes that the signifier replaces/excludes the subject from herself.

If one identifies the subject with a signifier that represents the subject (S1) then the subject is excluded from it ($). This exclusion or erasure/cancellation of the subject can mean either the subject of the Real/Void or the subject that is subjected to the Other or to the signifier. The bar on the subject can either have the usual meaning of the divided subject, a subject divided by the bar of repression, or the bar can have a similar meaning to the bar on the Other (Ø). The bar on the Other signifies the lack or emptiness of the Other. In the same way the bar on the subject has the double meaning of subjection/division as well as the emptiness of the subject within the Symbolic.

The emptiness of the subject within the Symbolic recuperates and symbolizes the void that was the subject prior to identification with the partial object under relative primary narcissism. Absolute primary narcissism is reborn under the signifier and in the form of the subject qua nothing. This is exactly the new meaning that the divided subject will represent at the end of analysis. The division of the subject remains but acquires a new signification. However, the subject must be first alienated in the S1–S2 chain of meaning and subjection.

I propose that the subject of the Real should be written as S0 or δ, as a double zero or the redoubling of zero where the Real is the first zero, and the subject the second. There is a zero for the Real and a zero for the subject. It can also be conceived as the splitting of zero, of one zero into two zeros: a zero for the Real and a zero for the subject. The splitting of zero produces a one zero or zero as a differentiated unit, with zero value, and then two (zeros), meaning zero as the absence of
a particular unit or something, and zero as the absence of any unit whatsoever, including zero.

Zero as a number or unit, and zero as the absence of a unit larger than zero, is different from absolute zero as the absence of zero or of any unit whatsoever. Arithmetically, there is no absence of zero since it would be the absence of the absence, and the absence of the absence would be a number larger than zero, therefore the presence of something as distinct from the presence of zero. Zero is the presence of absence rather than the absence of a particular presence. Zero points to the fact that absence or non-manifestation exists and that emptiness is the origin of the unit and of the One.

Lacan says,

Sign, sign of What? He is precisely the sign of Nothing. If the signifier is defined as representing the subject for another signifier – indefinite referring on of meanings – and if this signifies something, it is because the signifier signifies for the other signifier this “privileged thing” that the subject is qua nothing.

(XIV, 1961–2: 8)

The signifier is what represents a subject to another signifier. This formula represents the subject as metaphor but also metaphor as a subject. The subject is nothing, yet without this nothing, which is not someone in the usual sense, the signifier could not be something in speech. The subject as nothing is essential to understand the unary aspect of the signifier.

The Symbolic in order to be established needs to have something of the Real in it. Something of the Real means something of the order of zero, and it is written: $S_0 \rightarrow S_1 \rightarrow S_2$. This action takes place in the form of primary repression that establishes mental structure or the structure of the psyche. In actuality, however, primary repression may also come in two forms. In other words, there are two primary forms of repression. One is philogenetic, the other ontogenetic. The first concerns the history of the species, the second the development of the individual.

In the first type of primary repression, $S_0$ becomes $S_1$ as a signifier of zero or zero as the signifier of One:

$$\frac{S_1}{S_0}$$

Symbolization erases or represses at the same time that it represents. Thoughts and letters represent an erasure of the original relationship to the object. The thought/letter is the death of the object. This is the negative function of the thought/letter that then is preserved as pure erasure without an object. The negativity of a thought/naught and the letter points to emptiness and senselessness as an absolute value.
The letter represents a form of erasure that does not preserve a link to the object that was erased. The letter or $S_1$ now represents the void rather than a repressed act/trace. Instead of representing the repressed object of an iconic sign, or of a step or action, the void replaces the object, and the mirror/screen, or the blank paper or the sand, on which the letter is written, in turn, represents the void. The act or object now is transformed into perception or writing with erasure, and the act of erasure is not only preserved in the writing but also in the void represented by the blank slate of paper. The feelings or *jouissance* that accompanied the erased act or object are now in the ink as the very element of expression. It is the paper as void, or the ink, that makes letters a symbolic One of the Real. Ink and paper links letters, the same way that letters link words.

As mentioned earlier, Lacan taught that the vocalization of the step/action erases the step (trace of *pas* is transformed into *pas* of the trace) and eventually transforms the step or the action into made-up stories. The voice represents the void, *voi* or O, the unary trace that reveals/conceals the step or act, the $S_1$ that then will pair up with $S_2$ to constitute speech.

The second definition of primary repression involves a definition of $S_1$ as the first signifier but not as the signifier of zero or of the void. Here zero does not become zero and is not redoubled as One. Rather, zero becomes something, a thing more than the presence of absence or no-thing. The subject as zero is replaced and becomes represented as the absence of the $S_1$ signifier rather than as the presence of the absence. This process formative of the Freudian unconscious is identical to Lacan’s representation of the master’s discourse where $S_1$ becomes a master signifier that subjugates the subject:

$$S_0 \rightarrow S_1 \rightarrow S$$

The difference between the two types of primary repression is that the first type is philogenetic and affects the symbolic cultural order and the preconscious or the collective storehouse consciousness of humanity. The second type of primary repression is ontogenetic and affects the individual personal history or the repressed unconscious.

The master signifier is the imaginary phallus as the signifier of the mother’s desire and of the primal father. In the first phase of Oedipus, the subject becomes a phallic object for the mother. Why do we call a beautiful baby a phallic object? Do Lacanians and psychoanalysts like to objectify people? First of all, and on a phenomenological level, the baby was conceived via the phallus, which provided the link and coupling during intercourse. From a structural perspective, the baby had a prior existence as an equivalent signifier in the mother’s unconscious symbolic equation, and as a signifier in the mother’s own oedipal structure. Secondly, and also from a phenomenological perspective, the baby replaces the father/phallus in the relationship between the mother and the father. The mother is now complete with her baby and no longer has the same desire for sex with the
father. Once the baby is born, the baby becomes a real obstacle in the way of the sexual relationship and the relationship between the parents, period. If the reader is not convinced by this, then please do a careful empirical investigation of what happens between couples once a baby is born. That is, if you are let into the bedroom and intimacies that in a family go beyond what the ideological self-reports may be (during interviews and surveys). Psychoanalysis has learned about these matters in the intricacies, dreams, and disclosures that transpire in psychoanalytic sessions over an extended period of time.

When the subject unconsciously identifies with the imaginary phallic signifier he/she causes a division between ego identity/strength, as the place of the agent (upper left-hand corner of the formula below), and the subordination or weakness of the ego, as the place of truth for the subject ($). We see this in the matheme or symbolic formula for the master’s discourse

\[
\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{\text{the agent}} \frac{\text{the other}}{\text{a truth}} \frac{\text{production}}{}
\]

In this matheme, \(S_2\) in the place of the other represents the servant. The ego, as the identification with \(S_1\), relates to his/her own division through the servant \((S_2)\). In contrast to the formula for the master’s discourse, in the paternal metaphor, \(S_2\) stands for the Name of the Father and is in the place of the agent: \(\frac{S_2}{S_1}\).

In the four discourses \(S_2\) represents knowledge rather than the Name of the Father.

In the first moments of Oedipus, and in the master’s discourse, \(S_1\) becomes the signifier for the absence of one or for the minus one, rather than for the presence of zero. The presence of zero is transformed into an \(S_1\) and its absence into the subject ($). \(S_1\) becomes a signifier for a minus one or what the divided subject lacks. The unit that is something rather than nothing becomes the one of the imaginary phallus, or the \(S_1\) of the master’s discourse, and the zero becomes the bar placed on the divided subject.

Eventually the \(-\phi\) (phi: imaginary phallus), instead of representing the absence of something in the Imaginary, becomes the presence or the \(S_1\) of the symbolic phallus as a negative category. The symbolic father has the imaginary phallus because of his subjection to the law. He can have it because he has already lost it. This is a good example of a negative dialectic: the synthesis between the thesis of the imaginary phallus, and its absence in the minus phi, is resolved not in a positive presence but in the presence of a symbolic absence, the negation of the absence, that returns the imaginary back into the Real of zero. The symbolic phallus is a non-identity rather than an identity. The negation of the imaginary phallus returns the subject to the One of negation itself.

The Name of the Father in the paternal metaphor adds a second bar to the subject and converts the imaginary phallus into a minus phi and allows for a de-identification with the master signifier of the mother (\(mater\)) and the primal father. The identification with the phallic mother and the primal father has now been barred.
In the paternal metaphor, the Name of the Father replaces the desire of the mother in the child’s mind, a signifier replaces another signifier, and the phallus as the first signifier (of the desire of the mother) takes the place of signified in relation to the new signifier (the Name of the Father).

\[
S_0 \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S} \frac{S_2}{S_0} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S} \frac{S_2}{S}
\]

S₂ or the Name of the Father establishes S₁ (the signifier of the mother’s desire) as a missing phallus which the subject is seeking within the order of language and what this signifies to the subject ($). Within the symbolic order of language inaugurated by the Name of the Father, the subject seeks the object cause of the mother’s desire.

In the formula above, the barrier between the Name of the Father (S₂) and the signifier of the imaginary phallus (S₁) is a vertical instead of a horizontal line. In the denominator we still have the overall divided and repressed subject. If we added the two lines together, then we would have the money sign with two bars representing the subject.

Now what is missing from the matheme for the subject \(\frac{S_1}{S}\) and the one for the paternal metaphor \(\frac{S_2}{S_1}\) is the objet a as the fourth element found in the formula for the four discourses. This fourth element will bring us back to the Real dimension of the objet a (and to the subject as S₀ or the subject of the Real).

In the Lacanian theory of the drive, the drive or the libido begins with what is lost with sexed reproduction. What is lost is infinite or long-lasting life. What is missing from this model is the place of the objet a as the representative of unborn life. At this level of the unknown of the body, the objet a appears as a unary trace in the form of what Lacan called an infinite line or string. Unary trace, infinite line, or string takes the place of what Freud called the affective representative of the drive. According to this perspective, the objet a precedes the phallus, although this is a circular argument since, under ordinary circumstances, you can’t have sexed reproduction without the phallus.

As aforementioned, this object can be found in the formula for the discourse of the master

\[
\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}
\]

However, juxtaposing the discourse of the master and the paternal metaphor

\[
S_0 \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S} \frac{S_2}{S_1}
\]
leads me to the following reflections and conclusions. In the paternal metaphor, $S_2$ has ascendancy over $S_1$ whereas the reverse is true for the master’s discourse ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$). In the latter, the servant is compelled to produce the good object to compensate the master for the loss of the $a$. In the paternal metaphor, the $a$ is lost under the phallus and stays non-manifest in its non-phallic aspect other than within the subject in the Real as a potential and latent meaning of the barred subject. The imaginary objects $a$ of the drive are in a relation of compensation to the loss of the imaginary phallus. On the other hand, the imaginary phallus also compensates for the loss of the objet $a$.

However, the discourse of the analyst has the analyst in place of the $a$, and in the place of the agent, and the analysand as divided subject, and as other, has to find within itself the $S_1$ or phallic signifiers that will signify the $a$. The $a$ over $S_2$ represents unknown-knowing or unconscious knowing rather than the knowledge that is typical of the $S_2$ of the university discourse.

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{S}{S_1}$$

Here the signifier, as symbolic phallus, as an absence or the signifier of a lack, points back to the objet $a$ of infinite life. $S_2$, in the discourse of the analyst does not function as a bar (as in the paternal metaphor), but rather as the place of truth, which undergirds the agency of infinite life. In the discourse of the analyst the divided subject goes back to zero and to the objet $a$ via the master signifier now re-signified as unary trace or senseless signification.

The Name of the Father, as a function, now grounds the objet $a$ in the place of truth in the Real. With this in place, the divided subject as the symbolic Other, and the servant, can produce the signifiers or unary traces of the $a$ of long-lasting life.

This formulation also illuminates another important problem raised by Lacanian theory. How is it that the Name of the Father for Lacan is not simply a signifier of the symbolic order but rather what organizes and grounds the symbolic order? Moreover, for Lacan the Name of the Father does not come from the Symbolic but rather is a manifestation of the Real. The Name of the Father is not only what organizes culture and even atheism but also what returns culture to its source in the Real.

The Name of the Father is what remains of the Real within the Symbolic, just like steps or actions are negations or vanish under the process of representation. These actions remain as the negative function of language or signification. The symbolic Name of the Father is a unary trace or an infinite straight line with the void all around it.

The Real appears in two forms: as objet $a$ representative of unborn life, and as the Name of the Father as a unary trace within the Symbolic. But this unary trace is not I(O) because the latter represents the ego-ideal and the identification with ideas of the father or of ideology, “my father always told me” kind of thing. The super-ego and ego-ideal are imaginary and symbolic. The Name of the Father is the traceless trace or nameless name appearing within the lack in the Other as a
place empty of designation, and as the place of permutation and transformation of the structure at the same time.

The symbolic phallus operates in the intersection of the Real and the Symbolic. In the subject in the Real there is no subject, only the Real of the drive. In the subject of the Real, the subject is the agent of transformation, whereas the lack in the Other is the potential for transformation inherent to the structure. Thanks to emptiness or the lack within the structure, the structure is in constant motion, although the set of elements remains the same (the more it changes, the more it remains the same). The dynamism of the structure constitutes a different level of change from the change associated with the emergence of new elements. The subject of the Real has to do with the possibility of the emergence of new elements via the lack in the Other.

The symptom, the unary trait, and the sinthome

Freud described the phenomenon of identification as a process by which a subject assimilates an aspect or a trait of another subject. In the process, the subject becomes transformed in the likeness of the other. At the same time, by the very same process of identification, the subject becomes differentiated from the other by virtue of the fact of the partiality of the identification. The unary trait becomes incorporated into the rest of the character structure, making the latter both similar and different to the other at the same time.

Freud used the unary trait (einziger Zug), as a type of identification associated to the formation of hysterical symptoms. A partial identification, as an unconscious process, is used to identify with and construct an unconscious partial object of fantasy. This differs from the identification process used to construct the ideal ego and the ego-ideal. The unary trait involved in the type of identification used to construct a symptom is similar to the earliest form of identification with the breast/objet a that I have defined as a relative form of primary narcissism. This objet a is the same object involved in the formula for the unconscious fantasy ($\hat{a}$) and can also be brought into relation with the concept of oral incorporation.

A clinical example of this would be the case of a hysterical cough or a tic that is acquired by identification and represents, for example, both a desire to suck the mother’s breast and the father’s imaginary phallus and a punishment for the same. What remains of the imaginary phallus is simply a cough of the father that the daughter (or son) is identified with. At the same time the cough, as a metaphor for the phallus, also reveals the father’s lack or imaginary castration. Another example, would be the case of a man (male or female) who identifies with certain intonations, gestures, or words used by an idealized figure of authority. All of these traits could be used to convey forms of aggressiveness towards the other as well as the self.

The unary aspect of a symptom is also linked to a difference between Freud and Lacan, as well as to a difference between the early and later Lacan. The early Lacan followed Freud in considering the symptom as a symbol, and as having a
symbolic meaning, therefore. However, since the early development of the psychoanalytic movement, the increasing accumulation of clinical experience began revealing the limited efficacy of interpretation as an intervention constructed on the basis of the understanding of a symptom as a symbol. The later Lacan came to understand the symptom as a form of *jouissance* in the Real rather than from the Real (the distinction is mine).

This understanding of the Real aspect of a symptom also led Lacan to develop his notion of the *sinthome*, which together with the Name of the Father became the fourth ring of the Borromean knot that tied the other three together. The symptom as the *sinthome* explains two things: why a symptom endures and is immune to interpretation, and that there are also good reasons for this being the case. With the concept of the *sinthome*, pain becomes linked to sublimation, and growth through strife and effort. This conceptualization also answers the question/fear that artists often have that analysis or the cure of the symptom will be the end of their creativity. Artists have no need to worry about this since the symptom will not be eliminated that easily.

The concept of the *sinthome* can also be linked to Jung’s (1935, 1957) notion that a symptom also represents future purposes and intentions (Lacan’s future anterior and his definition of sublimation with a twist: “Where the (ego) symptom was, I shall become”). The *sinthome* highlights positive as well as Real dimensions of a symptom. The ego is a symptom in the sense that it is meant to cover a hole, in the same way that a delusion is meant to cover a hole in the signifying chain. Jung’s concept of individuation, as a humanistic striving towards wholeness, can be understood as an imaginary attempt to close the hole within the whole. The only possible way to close the hole within the whole is to leave the hole open and empty. In other words, self-realization is the same as the realization that there is no enduring self, only a series of processes and transformations held together by a unary trace (as already amply discussed).

The symptom is a traumatic S₁ or signifying letter/signifier stuck to the Real or in the Real. Here the signifier is functioning as a letter rather than a signifier in the following specific sense. Although letters are linked to other letters in the same way that words are linked to other words, letters by themselves are senseless. In addition, as aforementioned, letters constitute an erasure of the relationship to things outside language. The sensual aspect of a letter that was linked to a particular animal, for example, is lost. What remains in lieu of the erasure of the animal or of an action is simply a void. This void is traumatic, since an animal’s ghost or voice haunts it. But the void, and *jouissance* as an experience outside language, is not only traumatic or inconvenient. A trauma, a symptom, or even a delusion can represent a form of illumination. The aspect of the *sinthome* that is positive or not only traumatic is the aspect of the symptom that is not in the Real but rather is of the Real.

The symptom as representing a repressed form of *jouissance* or pleasure/pain can also be recognized as having a similitude with the oppositional or contradictory aspects of identifications. To become himself/herself the subject must not
only follow but also oppose the other by following and follow by opposing. Freud compared the resistance of the symptom to the way in which children rebel against the parents by failing or hurting themselves.

The *sinthome* as a form of identification constitutes a refusal of the symbolic order or the order of words and language. However, this refusal need not be seen as a form of maternal challenge of the law of the father or as a form of psychotic foreclosure of the symbolic order and the Name of the Father. More than refusing symbolic links, the unary trace is a form of *jouissance* and a place of openness to new meanings or to what Ricoeur (1991) called peculiar predication and semantic innovation.

The Symbolic is split in two between two types of $S_1$: symptom/symbol and unary trace/*sinthome*. There is a difference between signifiers as they are related to each other in the production of meaning ($S_1$–$S_2$) and signifiers insofar as they are related to a One, a signifier that resists any linking ($S_1$–$S_0$). This split, Lacan (1975–6) says, is a false hole. Symbols appear to be seeking a symbol or signifier that remains elusive, and the latter would also be seeking symbolization, but this is not the case. The unary trace links to the Real rather than to other signifiers. Signifiers are looking for other missing signifiers that are repressed in the Real of the unconscious, but this unknown has two forms:

1. Repressed signifiers/speech that are also looking to become associated. This is what I called the ontogenetic repressed unconscious.
2. The unary trace that simply links an element of the Symbolic order to the One void of the Real and not to other signifiers. It appears as a false gap or hole that leads to the repressed unconscious but instead simply leads to the void or the unconscious in the sense of the unknowable.

With the help of the unary trace, any signifier is capable of becoming auto-referential, taking on the function of the *sinthome* that opens up the signifying system. Like the Jungian symbol, the signifier here is only related to itself, not as relative but rather as an absolute difference in the sense of the Real. There is something of the Real in the Symbolic that resists the Symbolic. Lacan calls it a pure, radical, or absolute difference. This piece/trace of Real also erases meaning within the order of language.

Let us say that the Law has repressed $S_1$, or a phallic signifier. Within the order of language, $S_1$ would be replaced by $S_2$ in the same way that previously $S_2$ (Name of the Father) replaced $S_1$ (imaginary phallus). $S_2$ here stands both for the function of metaphor in language and also for the primary repression under the Name of the Father that installed the metaphoric order to begin with.

The $S_2$ substituting for an $S_1$ signifies that the $S_2$ wants to become $S_1$ in the same way that $S_1$ wants to become $S_2$. Words look for the missing/repressed words, and repressed speech looks for signifiers to emerge from repression. The imaginary aspect of language and of the Name of the Father seeks to close the gap left over by the two types of primary repression described above. With the unary *trait*, defined
as a distinctive distinction, the $S_1$ is a master or narcissistic signifier (the narcissism of small differences) that totalizes the symbolic order by closing the gap or void of the Real within the Symbolic. The $S_1$ of the master signifier, or unary trait, links by subordinating other signifiers to a ruling idea or signifier. However, by the same token, the ghost of an imaginary void that threatens to destroy the order of the system haunts a closed symbolic system. In this way the $S_1$ of the master signifier becomes linked to an inconvenient or destructive form of *jouissance*.

In contrast to this, the $S_1$ of the unary trace is not linked to other signifiers but rather to a modality of *jouissance*. $S_1$ or the symbolic aspect of the Name represents the emptiness of the symbolic order. This $S_1$ reveals rather than conceals the void. With the $S_1$ of the unary trace, the void or emptiness becomes an ennobling form of *jouissance*, the luminous human face of the void. The unary trace is of the Real and not in the Real: like the sinthome or the Name of the Father (in the later Lacan), it ties the RSI knot together. In the same way the Name of the Father is not of the social-symbolic order itself.

The unary trace resists binary linking that divides the One and destroys *jouissance*. The unary trace or the One manifests the plenitude of the Real in the form of a benevolent *jouissance*. When dual or binary linking is resisted and the lack is left open, then out of the empty navel of the Real emerges or evolves the Name of the Father, as a nameless name, or a unary trace, that re-links the registers to one another. This name is nameless because there is no repressed signifier that could give the name its signification: it is because it is.

**References**


