

FROM *VERNEINUNG* TO UNARY TRAIT

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ABSTRACT: From *Verneinung* to the unary trait. This paper is based on Jacques Lacan's postulation of the *subject as represented between signifiers*. We start off with a study on identifications and examine texts from the psychoanalytic literature referring to the constitutive function of lack. This leads us to relate *negation* to the constitution of the subject. Lacan's Seminar IX, on identification (1961-62), then to Freud's article on *Verneinung* (1925). We then theorize that the notion of existence presupposes absence and is therefore connected to the notion of *subject as -1* implicated in Lacan's formulation on the unary trait. **Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Freud and Lacan, subject, negation, unary trait.

RESUMO: Este trabalho parte da interrogação sobre o percurso lacaniano que leva à postulação do *sujeito como representado entre signifiers*. Iniciamos pelo estudo das *identificações* e percorremos textos da obra psicanalítica que nos apontam a função constitutiva da falta. Tal percurso nos conduziu à abordagem das relações entre a *negação* e a constituição do sujeito. Partindo do *Seminário da Identificação* (LACAN, 1961-62), retornamos às considerações freudianas sobre a *Verneinung* (1925) e pudemos considerar que a noção de existência pressupõe a ausência e, portanto, articula-se à noção de sujeito como -1 implicada na formulação lacaniana sobre o traço unário.

Palavras-chave: Psicanálise, Freud e Lacan, sujeito, negação, traço unário.

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At various points in *Seminar IX* (entitled *Identification*, 1961-62) Lacan discusses *Negation* and its relationship with early identification in regard to the constitution of the subject based on the unary trait. Freud had already treated this topic in his article entitled *Negation*, of 1925. There he presents the conception that repressed representations can sometimes be consciously accessed if they are stated in the negative form (FREUD, 1925/ 2007). As Freud himself observed, even though such representations may be accessed, the effects of the repression continue, and this fact indicates that knowledge of the repressed through negation implies other questions.

Lacan's approach to negation in that seminar refers both to the logic present in linguistics in the structuring of sentences and to the logic corresponding to the formal system of propositions categorized by Aristotle, according to the affirmative and negative possibilities contained in the presentation of universal and particular propositions. Lacan proposes to confront the times of privation, frustration and castration with significant support from negation, considering the constitution of the subject on the basis of the notion of the non-orientable surface that puts into evidence the paradox between the inside and the outside. The topological figures that Lacan uses indicate his proposal to discuss the times and events of differentiation of the subject in terms of radical otherness.

In the present article we bring up points on Lacan's elaborations in his seminar on identification regarding the relationships between the unary trait and the dialectic of *Verneinung*. For this purpose we return to Freud's hypotheses on the constitution of the subject to examine the sequence of thought that led Lacan to introduce the question of negation into his work on the primitive identification of the subject, based on the unary trait.

1. CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT ACCORDING TO THE OPERATIONS OF PRIMORDIAL AFFIRMATION AND PRIMORDIAL EXPULSION

In considering the function of negative statements that he heard in the discourse of his analysands, Freud said that "Negation [*Verneinung*] is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed, indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed" (FREUD, 1925/ 2007, p. 147-148).¹

With this observation Freud suggests that there is something much more complex in the analysis of an enunciated, unconscious representation in the form of a negation. There is intellectual access to unconscious representations, and

¹ English translation from Freud, S. (1925-1991) *The Penguin Freud Library*, V. II, *On Metapsychology*, New York: Penguin Books, p. 438.

it determines that the effects of the repressed remain unchanged since there is no encounter between the idea expressed through speech and its corresponding affect. Since the repression has operated on the idea, the lack of connection between the idea and the effect therefore permanently sustain the removal of that representation [*Vorstellung*]. Freud notes that the repressed idea can become known consciously while being unknown, but this access does not change the effects of what has been repressed in determining the psychic functioning of the subject.

On the basis of this observation, Freud discusses the judging function exercised according to the intellectual activity of thought. The act of stating or negating is a tributary of the possibility of *thinking*, which derives from the psychic function of judgment, and this, in turn, says Freud, is defined by two types of decisions:

The function of judgment is concerned in the main with [...] affirming or disaffirming the possession by a thing [*Ding*] of a particular attribute, and it asserts or disputes that a presentation [*Vorstellung*] has an existence in reality (FREUD, 1925/2007, p. 148.²

Freud stresses two times: first, one must establish a sufficient separation between the organism and the environment by means of a judgment as to what is good and, therefore, belongs to the ego, on the one hand and, on the other, what is bad and constitutes the not-ego. That is, what is bad is defined by being outside the ego. Freud states that, “It is, we see, once more a question of *external* and *internal*” (FREUD, 1925/ 2007, p. 149 — author’s italics). The first time consists, then, of a *judgment of attribution*. In a second time, a *judgment of existence* aims at deciding in regard to the reality of something that is already represented in the mental apparatus.

This is an operation of *identification* between a perception and a representation, an operation that had already been treated in Freud’s article *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). There Freud writes that “the aim and end of all thought processes is thus to bring about a state of identity, and in the conveying of a cathexis $Q\eta$ [*sic*] emanating from outside, into a neuron affected from the ego” (FREUD, 1950 [1895]/ 2007, p. 378 — Author’s italics).³ In this sense, the *judgment of reality* consists of a conclusion of the objective of thinking activity.

² English translation from Freud, S. (1925-1991) *The Penguin Freud Library*, V. II, *On Metapsychology*, p. 439 N. York: Penguin Books.

³ English translation found at: https://books.google.com.br/books?id=MCdUFPMaIFYC&pg=PA20&dq=%22bring+about+a+state+of+identity%22&hl=pt-BR&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiHo_XfneDMAhWBdR4KHGyChcQ6AEIJTAB#v=onepage&q=%22bring%20about%20a%20state%20of%20identity%22&f=false

Some 30 years later, in his text entitled *Negation* (1925), Freud broadened the notion of *state of identity* when he wrote that, based on the *test of reality*, the point is not only to find an identification between the object of perception and its corresponding representation, but to certify *re-finding* the primordial object of the perceptive complex. In this sense, to the extent that a representation comes up as the possibility for reproducing an earlier perception without the object having remained present, the *test of reality* is established only under the condition that “[O]bjects that, at some earlier time, had brought satisfaction, have been lost” (FREUD, 1925/ 2007, p. 149). Not only is the representative function installed on the basis of the loss of the object, as we have seen; the very *judgment of reality* is also installed on the same basis. Thus, the *judgment of attribution* and the *judgment of existence* are closely intertwined.

The mechanism Freud uses to describe the process of differentiation between the organism and the environment is taken up in his paper entitled *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911). This same theme was discussed again in 1915 in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes* and, later, in 1925, in his article entitled *Negation*. Guided by the *pleasure principle*, the newborn human organism is seen as already possessing a primitive level of ego called the “*pleasure-ego*,” the exclusive interest of which is to “work for a yield of pleasure” (FREUD, 1911/ 2004). The principles of *inertia* and of *constancy*, discussed in the *Project* (1895), describe a mental apparatus the objective of which is to discharge all possible accumulation of tension. This process of discharge is associated with pleasure. Likewise, the *pleasure principle* is defined by the same logic and sustains Freud’s original hypothesis of the *pleasure-ego*. In 1911, he describes a *pleasure-ego* and a *real-ego* which act in favor of these two objectives, namely, to obtain pleasure and care for the organism, respectively.

In 1915, in his discussion on the drives and their destinies, or vicissitudes, Freud goes back to these principles treated in his *Project* (1895), no longer based on a terminology from physics, but now from psychology. A first differentiation between internal and external becomes possible on the basis of the organism’s incapacity to eliminate, on its own, a certain level of tension that has built up and that pressures it and causes displeasure. The constancy of this tension, dischargeable only through the intervention of a *specific action*, serves as a point of reference for differentiating the stimuli that impinge on the organism. They are of two types: the exogenous, which are dischargeable through simple muscular action, and the endogenous, also called “needs of the drives [Triebbedürfnisse]” (FREUD, 1915/ 2004, p. 147). Such needs can be satisfied only through specific changes in the outside world. Therefore, this differentiation has been present ever since a very initial stage in life. Here, however, there are allusions to the possibility that the *pleasure-ego* may exist prior to the *real-ego*, as discussed in

1911. In his description of this primitive instance of the ego as auto-erotic, Freud considers as initially prescindable a differentiation between what is internal or external for providing pleasure. As soon as the urges of the drives are perceived as unpleasurable, satisfaction is no longer attained solely through autoerotic activity and the organism is impelled to its environment by external objects. The differentiation between internal and external becomes more complex and the constitution of the ego becomes more and more consistent:

Insofar as the objects which are presented to it are sources of pleasure, it takes them into itself, 'introjects' them (to use Ferenczi's expression [1909]); and, on the other hand, it expels whatever within itself becomes a cause of unpleasure. Thus the original 'reality-ego,' which distinguished internal and external by means of a sound objective criterion, changes into a purified 'pleasure-ego,' which places the characteristic of pleasure above all others. For the pleasure-ego the external world is divided into a part that is pleasurable, which it has incorporated into itself, and a remainder that is extraneous to it. It has separated off a part of its own self, which it projects into the external world and feels as hostile.⁴

Freud therefore states that the drives of self-preservation are responsible for the ego's first operation of introjection of objects from the outside world. The relationship between the ego and the object is ambivalent from the beginning, since the same object that is strange to the ego can be a source of pleasure and therefore incorporated as belonging to the ego (FREUD, 1915/ 2004). A little later, in his text on *Negation* (1925), Freud brings up the hypothesis that "the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical" (FREUD, 1925/ 2007, p. 148).

This question is taken up again in his book *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). The judging — or adjudicative — function, therefore, is guided essentially by the pleasure principle when deciding on integrating things into the ego or expelling them from it, thus distinguishing inside from outside, an ego and a not-ego. Freud associates the opposition between the possibilities of judgments and the duality of the drives, in the sense that affirmation [*Bejahung*] is related to the life drives whereas negation is a successor to expulsion [*Ausstossung*] and is therefore related to the drives of destruction.

Rabinovitch (2001) says that "the fact that the primordial statement cannot be made without negation implies the existence of a negation before any *Verneinung*"

⁴ English translation from Freud, S. (1915). *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, p. 135.

(p. 25). In Freud's text, negation [*Verneinung*] arises from the original expulsion [*Ausstossung*], which, in turn, operates on the basis of affirmation [*Bejahung*]. The idea of a succession of *Verneinung* following *Ausstossung* is explicit, a fact that indicates that the movement of expulsion is prior to the constitution of the subject in relation to the inscription of the *symbol of the negation* transmitted by the *no*, or the *not*, in grammatical constructions. What is judged as being alien to the ego, that which is expelled for being judged as not-ego, can only be judged or expelled according to the affirmation of what belongs to the ego. Based on Freud, Rabinovitch (2001) notes that *Verneinung*, by supposing

the existence of that which it negates [...], carries out, at the same time, another operation, that of separating representation [*Vorstellungen*] from the thing [*das Ding*]. What is perceived [*Ding*] is, or is not, allowed into the *Ich*; that of the perceived which is allowed in (attributed), will become represented, whereas that which remains outside the *Ich* for having been excluded, will continue being in the order of the thing (p. 36). (Back-translated from the Portuguese.)

In this regard, by introducing the Lacanian thought that will be pursued from here on, we have, in a very clear way, the formulation about what negation operates in regard to the installation of the representation on the basis of what one sees as irreparable loss. Upon discussing in what *Verneinung* guides us, Lacan states that, according to Freud,

[I]t is the privileged means of connotation at the level of discourse for whatever is *verdrängt*, or repressed, in the unconscious. *Verneinen* is the paradoxical way in which what is hidden, *verborgen*, in the unconscious is located in spoken, enunciated discourse, in the discourse of *Bewusstwerden*; *verneinen* is the manner in which what is simultaneously actualized and denied comes to be avowed. (LACAN, 1959-60/1988, p. 64).⁵

In this way, the very installation of the representative function derives from the *experience of satisfaction* which has arisen, in turn, from this primordial differentiation that the encounter with the object implies. The paradox of the presentification of the lost object, through representation, is preceded here by another paradox: that of the primitive instance of very early instance of the ego which judges at the same time that it is constituted by making judgments. Freud's text indicates

⁵ English translation from: Lacan, J. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: the Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, p. 64.

that *Ausstossung* and *Bejahung* are therefore the two sides of the same initial operation, and it is impossible to define which precedes the other.

At some points Freud (1925) indicates that the ego precedes the negation consequent to *Ausstossung* or *Bejahung*, but at others he argues that the ego is constituted as a result of these operations and of the radical definition of an inside and an outside. In view of this fact of different approaches by Freud we can look more deeply into Lacan's thought on the topology of the subject of the unconscious. We can also inquire into the relationship between Freud's *Verneinung* and the constitution of the subject, basing ourselves on the unicity of the trait.

Even before his elaborations on the unary trait Lacan made notable references to some of the meta-psychological texts quoted above as he prepared for his seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60). In the first part of this seminar he went into what is at stake in Freud's first construction of a mental apparatus, that which appears in the *Project*. There the concept of pleasure principle and reality principle link perception and thought in a way that sustains Lacan's statement regarding a subject that is represented between signifiers, since the unconscious is structured like a language. Relating this to what Freud tells us about the revealing function of negative statements, as we explained in the beginning of this section, Lacan says that:

[A]t the level of objectivization, or level of the object, the known and the unknown are opposed, in opposition to one another. This is because what is known cannot be known except in words; what is unknown is seen as having a structure of language" (LACAN, 1959-60/ 1988, p. 47).⁶

2. *VERWERFUNG* IMPLICATED IN *VERNEINUNG*:

THE CONSTITUTIVE CHARACTER OF A PRIMORDIAL EXCLUSION

During Lacan's lecture during his seminar given at Hospital Sainte-Anne on 10 February 1954, on Freud's *Technical Writings*, Lacan takes up the question of negation. The topic was "resistances" and Lacan invited Jean Hyppolite to comment on Freud's text *Die Verneinung* (1925). Hyppolite's presentation, which can be found in Lacan's *Écrits* (1966/1998),⁷ consists of a detailed analysis of Freud's article and provides a clear understanding of issues related to the function of negation in analysis. Hyppolite also talks about the constitution of the mental apparatus, based on the primordial operations of *Bejahung* and *Ausstossung*. In his

⁶ English translation from: Lacan, J. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: the Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 47.

⁷ English translation by Bruce Fink in Lacan, J., *Écrits*, "A Spoken Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung* by Freud," translation by Bruce Fink. W.W. Norton, New York, London (2006, 2002).

response to Hyppolite's comments on *Verneinung*,⁸ Lacan referred to Freud's theory on the primordial differentiation between ego and not-ego, with the purpose of continuing the debate on the establishment of the first delimitation among the registers of symbolic, real and imaginary as resulting from the early operations of the constitution of the subject.

Lacan's reference to Freud's *Verneinung* begins with Lacan's analysis of the case of the Wolf Man (1918), which Lacan wrote during the first year of his seminar (1951-52). Lacan draws from this case Freud's well-known formulation that, as for castration, that subject "did not want to know anything in regard to repression" (FREUD, 1918, quoted by Lacan, 1954/1998, p. 388). To stress the difference between the negation referred to in *Verdrängung* and the negation expressed by the Wolf Man in regard to castration, Freud uses the term *Verwerfung*, for which Lacan proposed, at that moment, the term "suppression" (LACAN, 1954/ 1998). This is a return to Freud based on a meticulous reading of the text that permits a precise study of the text and of the terminology used in the German language. Following Freud's words, Lacan affirms the effect of "symbolic abolition" (LACAN, 1954/ 1998, p. 388) resulting from *Verwerfung*. Freud is emphatic "A repression is something different from a judgment that rejects and chooses" (FREUD, 1918, in LACAN, 1954/ 1998, p. 389). In this sense and based on Hyppolite's comments Lacan locates *Verwerfung* in the dialectic of Freud's *Verneinung* as judgment that is absolutely opposed to primary *Bejahung* and from which, what is expelled is constituted. Concerned with formulating the effects of *Verwerfung* for structuring psychosis, Lacan goes back to Freud's theory of the origins of the mental apparatus. *Verwerfung*, referred to in the dialectic on *Verneinung* and placed in opposition to *Bejahung*, gives Lacanian discourse a recourse to primordial delimitation between the symbolic and real registers in a mythic time of the constitution of the subject:

Verwerfung thus cut short any manifestation of the symbolic order — that is, it cut short the *Bejahung* that Freud posits as the primary procedure in which the judgment of attribution finds its root, and which is no other than the primordial condition for something from the real to come to offer itself up to the revelation of being, or, to employ Heidegger's language, to let-be (LACAN, 1954/ 1998).⁹

At this point in Lacan's teaching, *Verwerfung* seems to take on a definition corresponding to that given by Freud for the word *Ausstossung* in his artic and in le

⁸ English translation by Bruce Fink in Lacan, J., *Écrits*, "Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*," New York: W.W.Norton & Company (2006, 2002).

⁹ English translation by Bruce Fink in Lacan, J., *Écrits*, "Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*," New York: W.W.Norton & Company (2006, 2002), p.387.

on *Verneinung*. There he defines *Verwerfung* as the reverse, or the inverse, of *Bejahung*, something that participates in the first differentiation between inside and outside. Lacan takes the same approach to *Verwerfung* in his seminar *The Psychoses* (1955-56), describing the concept as an operation of rejection of something primordial in terms of the being of the subject. Lacan makes *Verwerfung* equivalent to a non-*Bejahung*, and describes the essential of *Verwerfung* as the non-symbolization of a primordial and tangible signifier. He thus introduces the category of the real outside the register of the symbolic. It is therefore irreducible to signifying structuring. His exact words are:

At the level of this pure, primitive *Bejahung*, which may or may not take place, an initial dichotomy is established — what has been subject to *Bejahung*, to primitive symbolization, will have various destinies. What has come under the influence of the primitive *Verwerfung* will have another. [...] In the beginning, then, there is either *Bejahung*, which is the affirmation of what is, or *Verwerfung*. (LACAN, 1955-56/ 2002).

Therefore, the mental apparatus supposed by Lacan implies a judgmental operation toward a primordial signifier. In the article where he brings together the content of the first months of the seminar on the psychoses,¹⁰ Lacan states that “the primordial *Bejahung* refers to the signifier” and mentions Letter 52 (1896) as an example of the importance Freud gives to this “term of an original perception by the name of a sign, to wit, *Zeichen*.” (LACAN, 1966/ 1998, p. 564). On this point, *Verwerfung* seems to be subtly different from *Ausstossung*. If *Verwerfung*, like non-*Bejahung*, consists of the rejection of a primordial signifier, one might think that it refers to a time after the early separation between what is of the order of the Other and of the Thing, that is, of the symbolic and the real. It is something of the symbolic that *Verwerfung* rejects; Lacan’s thought continues and makes it clearer that “*Ausstossung* refers to the real and *Verwerfung* refers to a fragment of the signifying battery introduced into the subject by *Bejahung*” (RABINOVITCH, 2001, p. 30).

Therefore, it is through his study of the psychoses that Lacan invites his listeners to consider this paradox of the presentification of the absence that runs through Freud’s work. Just as we looked at the Freudian texts that discuss the constitutive effects of the loss of the primordial object, Lacan considers, on the basis of his discussion on *Verwerfung*, regarding the outcomes, or destinies, of that which is expelled from the primitive operation of judgment. That which is suppressed from his *Bejahung*, says Lacan,

¹⁰ LACAN, J. (1966/ 1998) “De uma questão preliminar a todo tratamento possível da psicose”, in *Escritos*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor.

constitutes, as Freud tells us, that which truly does not exist; as such, it ek-sists, for nothing exists except against a supposed background in of absence. Nothing exists except insofar as it does not exist. (LACAN, 1954/ 1998, p. 394).¹¹

In Lacan's seminar on *Identification* (1961-62), the question of negation is guided by the philosophy of the Aristotelian propositions and in relation to the times of the constitution of the subject, marked out by privation, frustration and castration. The effects of constitutive abolition in the mental apparatus are approached on the basis of the effacement carried out by the unary trait in the constitution of what Lacan defines as symbolic identification.

3. EFFACEMENT AS ABOLITION: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT AS -1

In proposing the approach of symbolic identification, Lacan continues with his lectures and gradually introduces the question of negation. Even though it is enunciated in different ways and can be found at different moments in his discourse, his question is "What goes on in the origin of the unconscious?" Lacan bases his elaborations on the notion of a primordial signifier that sustains the times, or stages, in the constitution of the subject. In this sense, Lacan goes back to the topology of the Freudian mental apparatus discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) to indicate the first notions of border¹² with which Freud works in his supposition about the systems he named consciousness, pre-consciousness and unconscious. By asking what is at stake in the passage of something from one system to another, Freud wonders about the status of this passage: is it a change in investment or is it a double inscription? Lacan's intent is to indicate that there is very definitely a necessary division between inside and outside in the topology of the mental apparatus theorized by Freud.

In other words, Lacan is saying that the subject of the unconscious is constituted according to the notion of *border*. There are thoughts — one's representations — that are expressed by speech and work together with a language accessible to communication and make up the preconscious and conscious systems. In addition, there are thoughts restricted to the unconscious system. These are representations that operate like a language, but are not accessible. In this sense such thoughts are located in an inside separated from the outside. When discussing Freud's apology, Lacan wonders whether the borders between the systems are as clear as they might seem.

¹¹ English translation by Bruce Fink in Lacan, J., *Écrits*, "Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*," New York: W.W.Norton & Company, (2006, 2002), p.327.

¹² NT: sometimes rendered in English as frontier or borderline.

What is involved, is to see that the articulated language of common discourse, with respect to the subject of the unconscious in so far as it interests us, is outside, an “outside” which connects to it what we call our intimate thoughts (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 10 January 1962).

The idea of joining the outside and the inside concerns the topology proposed all during that seminar on identification. Based on the *torus* and the *Möbius* strip, Lacan, “The problem of what happens when the unconscious comes to make itself heard is where we see the problem of the border between this unconscious and this preconscious” (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962). So negation, as described by Freud, emerges due to its function of interrogation of this same border. More than this, the question of negation is introduced on the basis of the problem of the very existence of beings, together with the constitution of the subject that interests us here, which is represented between signifiers. Lacan wonders what negation supposes, and gives indications as to the road he will take in studying this question: “Does it suppose the affirmation on which it is based? No doubt. But is this affirmation for its part simply the affirmation of something of the real which has been simply removed?” (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962).

Lacan starts off with grammatical constructions to discuss once again the effects of the *not*, found in the sentence, on the basis of which Freud tells us that negation makes possible the intellectual admission of a certain unconscious representation in the consciousness. The observation of the particles that comprise negation in the French language — the disagreeing *ne* and the excluding *pas* — as analyzed by Pichon¹³ — let Lacan discuss this disagreement that the negation expresses, this distinction between the *subject of the enunciation* and the *subject of the statement*. Far from defending Pichon, however, Lacan talks about what is beyond the significations attributed by Pichon to the negative particles, considering the positions where *ne* and *pas* are found in the sentence. That is, Lacan points out how positive value can be returned to negative particles in order to indicate that the negative and the positive charges of the terms end up crossing one another in some way, according to the way in which the sentence was structured. For Lacan, therefore, the particle *pas*, besides connoting:

¹³ According to Milner (2010), Édouard Pichon (1890-1940), founding member of the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris, played an important role in the psychoanalysis of the French language. It seems that the paper that Lacan refers to in the seminar on identification, regarding the topic of negation, is: J. DAMOURRETTE and E. PICHON (1928) “Sur la signification psychologique de la négation en français” in *Journal de psychologie pathologique*. Paris: Félix Alcan.

[T]he pure and simple fact of privation, is indeed a matter of something which, far from being at its origin, the connotation of the hole of absence well expresses on the contrary reduction, disappearance no doubt, but not completed, leaving behind it the furrow of the tiniest, the most fleeting trait (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962).

So what is at stake here is the absence that presupposes the presence; the abolition that implies the permanence of the mark left by the trait, that is, effacement. This is the negation that supposes the affirmation on which it is based, therefore. But in view of the question asked by Lacan and quoted above, it is the affirmation of something of the real that is not merely suppressed but, on the contrary, is fundamentally related to the being, to the extent that it is made eternal as a trait.

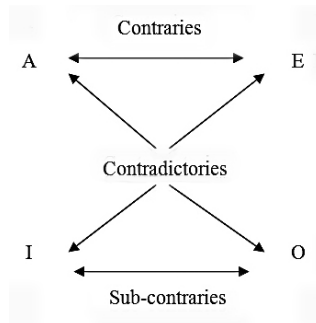
In this aspect, Lacan proposes a study of Aristotle's logical propositions to present an overall scheme of the various forms of negation based on what psychoanalytic and philosophical experience has shown, to wit, the question of privation, frustration and castration. His path starts off first with Freud's text and aims at answering "[T]he question which precisely links the definition of the subject as such to that of the order of affirmation or of negation in which it enters in the operation of this propositional division" (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962).

The formal system of propositions as classified by Aristotle into the categories of affirmative and negative, universal and particular, is presented by Lacan according to boxes A E I and O. The proposition *Homo mendax* is taken to illustrate his thought by constructing the following box (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962):

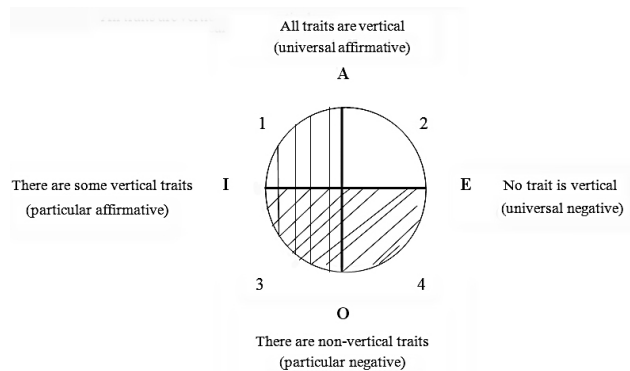
A	E
Omnis homo mendax	Omnis homo non mendax
Nullus homo non mendax	Nullus homo mendax
Aliquis homo mendax	Aliquis homo non mendax
Non omnis homo non mendax	Non omnis homo mendax
I	O

One should note that, organized in this way, the propositions occupy positions called *contrary* and *sub-contrary*. That is, in the case of the contraries, in the line of the universal propositions — A-E — it is not possible for both propositions to be true at the same time. The statement that "All men are liars" [A] excludes the veracity of the affirmation that "Not all men lie" [E]. As for the sub-contraries, in the line of the particular propositions — I-O — affirmative and negative propositions do not reciprocally exclude one another since it is possible to take

them both as true at the same time. That “Some men lie” [I] does not exclude the veracity of “Some men do not lie” [O]. In the same way, “Not all men do not lie” [I] does not contradict the particular negative that “Not all men lie” [O]. There is also the relation between the *contradictories*, the diagonal opposition between the propositions which determines that, universal A being true, for example, it excludes the veracity of its opposite, the particular O. On the other hand, if particular I is false, it excludes the falsity of that which is opposed to it, namely, universal E. The relationships established among the propositions, in the manner expounded by Aristotle, are seen, therefore, according to the figure below:



Based on the classical organization of the affirmative and negative propositions, both universal and particular, Lacan brings up a different arrangement of these propositions and describes the model described by Charles Sanders Peirce,¹⁴ who discusses relations beyond those that Aristotle gave us. Peirce’s dial shows traits that vary according to the attribute of *verticality*.



¹⁴ According to Salatiel (2010, 2011), Charles Saunders Peirce was an (1839-1914) American philosopher, most known as the founder of classical pragmatism and of the modern theory of signs (semiotics). During his career as scientist Peirce produced innovating work in logic and philosophy.

Lacan tells us that the trait fulfills the function of the subject and the *vertical* function takes the place of attribute, or support. Thus, the universal affirmative “All traits are vertical” is illustrated by dial 1. Differently from the classical organization of the propositions, this affirmative not only is not contradicted by dial 2, but is even confirmed by it. “[I]f I say, *all traits are vertical*, that means that when there is no vertical, there are no traits” (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962).

Therefore, there is no contradiction, since “There is no trait that is not vertical in this sector of the dial. Here the universal affirmative is illustrated then by the two first sectors.” (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 17 January 1962). To make his explanation clear, Lacan discusses the negative and affirmative, universal and particular functions of each dial. The universal negative is shown in dials 2 and 4 according to the formulation that “No traits are vertical.” Once again, Peirce’s model is different from the classical doctrine since it allows dial 2 to share both the universal affirmative and the universal negative. The particular formulations are illustrated by dials 3 and 4 — “There are non-vertical traits,” and 1 and 3 — “There are some vertical traits.”

At this point it is important to stress the function of confirmation of the universal formulas which the empty dial (2) takes on. In this sense, the universal affirmation is sustained by the universal negation to the extent that the empty sector is the maximum expression of the truth of the attribute of verticality of the trait. As mentioned above, dial 2 carries the formula “There is no trait that is not vertical” — a negative that sustains the possibility of dials 1 and 4. Lacan therefore defines “The negative space 2 as essential correlative for the definition of universality” (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — lecture of 17 January 1962). This reference to logic is useful for Lacan’s exposition since it indicates that identification with the unary trait, as it is presented to us as primordial identification, implies the abolition, the void, from which the subject will emerge. And, through Peirce’s dial, the constitution of the subject can be related to negation and this negation, in turn, to privation “[L]inguistically negation is never a zero, but a *not one*. [...] [T]he whole history of negation is the history of this consumption by something which is where? It is precisely what we are trying to get close to: the function of the subject as such” (our italics) (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — Lecture of 21 February 1962 — our italics).

The *not one* confers the notation of -1 to the empty space. This explains Lacan’s effort to indicate that the mark conferred by the unary trait is essentially the mark of a distinctiveness (*Einzigkeit*) and a not a unification (*Einheit*). This distinction defines the signifying function of the trait, since it is the very essence of possibility. It is the void, the absence, that supports any existence. The subject

therefore emerges from this original privation to which the primordial loss of the object is related and which Freud talked about. Lacan put it this way:

The possible involved is not the possible of the subject. The subject alone can be this negated real of a possible which is not real. We thus see the minus 1 constitutive of the *ens privativum* linked to the most primitive structure of our experience of the unconscious, in so far as it is not that of prohibition, nor of saying not, but of the unsaid (du non-dit), of the point where the subject is no longer there to say whether he is no longer master of this identification to the 1, or of this sudden absence of the 1 which, you will remark, here finds its force and its root; (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — lecture of 28 February 1962).

It is through logic, therefore, that Lacan refers to the relationships between negation and the constitution of the subject by the unary trait. Lacan's view clarifies the relationships among the *Seminar on Identification*, other phases in his own teaching, and aspects of Freud's work. Lacan describes to his listeners how his train of thought that began with identification moved on to the implications of the primordial loss of the object and then to the notion of the subject constituted as negativized, -1. In that year of 1962, when discussing privation, frustration and castration as constitutive lacks of the subject, Lacan returns to the term by which he approached the idea of a primitive exclusion as the installer of this void from where the subject starts off:

Some people are upset because I am not providing a place for the *Verwerfung*: it is there beforehand, but it is impossible to start from it in a deducible fashion. To say that the subject is first of all established as -1 is indeed something where you can see that effectively, as one might expect, it is as *Verworfen* that we are going to rediscover him. (LACAN, 1961-62, unpublished — lecture of 7 February 1962).

The unary trait operates with this constitutive *Verwerfung* and demarcates, during this period in Lacan's research, that which is of the order of the installation of the symbolic register organized by the chain of signifiers. Here one should understand *Ausstossung* as implicated in, and referring back to something of the real. It is on the basis of this supposition of a primitive division between the real and the symbolic, in contrast to an inside and an outside, as proposed by Freud, that Lacan looks to topology to refer to a continuity among the constitutive instances of the subject. The subject is marked by the trait that symbolically finds it and provides the possibility for linking between that which is organized as imaginary and that which mobilizes without writing itself, that is, without being inserted into the logic of representations [*Vorstellungen*], the real.

Introducing the study of topological figures allowed Lacan to give a first shape to the thinking that later enabled him to develop the notion of *object a*. The unary trait, as a mark of otherness on the body, implicates the relationship of the newborn being with the Other. It is a relationship on which desire is founded, beyond a specular bond. There are many implications in the formulation of the notion of *object a* for the continuity of Lacan's theory. The idea that something can be seen as the remainder of the primordial operations of symbolic identification indicates its relationship with what Freud, and later, Lacan, elaborated about *das Ding* and beyond, in terms of the precision of the nodal articulations among the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary registers.

In this article we will not comment on later moments along this road. Our objective has been to indicate how the *not one* of the unary trait demarcates the function of the absence which sustains any existence. In this sense, the elaborations found in the *Seminar on Identification* authorize us to consider, therefore, that the subject results from this first privation to which is related the primordial loss of the object referred to by Freud in his works ever since the *Project*, of 1895. Thus, the paradox of the presentification of the absence led to Lacan's formulations and on the constitutivity of lack. The notion of unary trait implies the consideration of an operation of abolition for its effects of effacing, not of disappearance. To define the subject of psychoanalysis as represented between signifiers implies, therefore, the study of the notion of loss as effacement. The subject represented between signifiers is affirmed by Lacan as the very "introduction to a loss in reality" (LACAN, 1966/ 1976, p. 205). The function of the unary trait is to demarcate the place of otherness in the inscription of this loss as representation, as something that can be located in the field of the Other.

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