

Imagining Europe as a Global Player

The Ideological Construction of
a New European Identity within the EU

Christoffer KØLVRAA



P.I.E. Peter Lang

This book argues that since 2001 the primary discursive context for articulating a European identity within the EU has increasingly become the idea of a common foreign policy for Europe. A new grand project of making Europe a true global player is being put forth and it is this as yet unrealised ideal that European citizens are now being asked to identify with.

The author examines European identity as an ideological construction that seeks to elicit emotional and affective attachment to the political project of realising a utopian ideal. He unravels the discourses involved in the construction of European identity by drawing on theories and methods from discourse analysis, the study of political myths, narratology and psychoanalysis. The European Neighbourhood Policy is studied in detail, with a focus on the dynamic challenges that ensue when grand ideological statements have to be implemented in a concrete and specific context.

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Preface

The present book is based on my PhD research undertaken at Aarhus University, Denmark, between 2006 and 2009. As a PhD student I was fortunate enough to also be allowed extensive stays at both Freie Universität Berlin, and Lancaster University, England. I would like here to thank those scholars, colleagues and friends who both abroad and at home allowed me to present my work and were willing to debate it with me. Especially I would like to thank Jan Ifversen without whose guidance, patience and willingness to discuss my ideas, none of this would have been possible.

Introduction

If we are to keep pace with this changing world and shoulder our growing global responsibilities, we, as the Union, have to take the necessary measures. If we want to satisfy the rising expectations and hopes of countries abroad and the peoples of Europe, we have to become a real global player. We are only beginning to act as one.

(Prodi 2002, SP/02/619)

The statement above is from a speech in which Commission President, Romano Prodi in 2002 set out his ambitions for what was later to be entitled the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ambitions which he presents in this passage are however clearly beyond the confines of the ENP, indeed beyond the scope of any particular policy or concrete political goal. They concern the need for Europe¹ to assume a new identity – that of a *Global Player*. This new identity is a new European project, because as Prodi makes clear it is as yet unrealised. Hinted at in this short passage is also the forces which push this new European project into existence; they are both internal and external. Both a need to handle the rapidly changing world as it encroaches on Europe, and a European responsibility which is nothing less than global: a rising tide of expectations and hopes which from both within and without apparently look to Europe for their satisfaction. Europe needs a new identity, because there is a need – a desire even – for a new Europe; a Global Player Europe.

This book is about the discursive construction of a new “Global Player” identity for Europe as it appears in the official rhetoric and documents of the EU between 2001 and 2007². A main claim is that the construction of Global Player Europe rests heavily on what I call the “Unity in Diversity” construction of European identity. Whereas the Unity in Diversity construction portrays Europe as an internal continen-

¹ I borrow the designation “Europe” from Kalypso Nicolaidis and use it to designate the subject of arguments which logically pertain only to the EU, but which are made in the name of “Europe” (Nicolaidis 2005).

² More specifically it is an analysis of EU documents and speeches by EU Commissioners and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, commencing with the issuing of the Laeken Declaration “on the future of the European Union”, on the 15th of December 2001 and concluding with the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Rome treaty in the early spring of 2007.

tal project, Global Player Europe gives this construction an external dimension; a new European project and purpose in the realm of foreign policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy – launched in late 2002 – was almost from its inception imagined to be the concrete framework through which this new identity as a Global Player could be exercised.

It should be made clear that my focus is so to speak on the “producers” of European identity discourses, rather than on its potential “consumers”³. My ambition is not to investigate how “the Europeans as such” – a fragmented and unruly object of investigation to say the least – relate to Europe or to gauge the level of their identification with it. It is nevertheless interesting that when such a collective diagnosis is attempted the problem that it most often identifies is that the citizens do not *feel* anything for Europe. In other words that there remains a stark difference between the emotional bonds upheld to national identities and the rational – if not cynical – interest calculations through which the project of European integration is perceived. As Anthony D. Smith’s has famously remarked; “Who would die for Europe?” (Smith 1998: 139). Europe is apparently a political project unable to produce a discourse about itself which gets to “the hearts’ and ‘the guts’ of the peoples of Europe” (Stavrakakis 2007: 225-226). In this light Europe suffers from a deficit of “feeling”.

And yet much of both the political and academic discussion about how to remedy this focuses on a lack of knowledge. The implicit claim is that in order for the citizens to become truly “European” they must be educated about the myriad ways in which the Union’s institutions and directives cater to their (personal) interests, secures their (individual) political rights or open up unique opportunities for their (specific) goals and ambitions. From such a perspective the “official rhetoric” of the EU is of course utterly irrelevant. What matters to academics, politicians and citizens alike – is the “reality” of the thing and not the hopelessly bloated, self-satisfied and emotional hyperbole of speeches and declarations seeming pouring out in an ever increasing flood of words. I am not denying that identification born from knowledge and self-interest can be powerful. But it is ironic that it should be posed as a remedy for what is most often identified exactly as a deficit to do with feeling.

My position is instead that the rhetorical and discursive construction of Europe is indeed both relevant and important. The European Union – not to mention the wider idea of “Europe”, whose name the Union

³ This division is used here only for clarity. It is in fact both crude and theoretically untenable. When it comes to identity and discourse there is not any neat line between producing and consuming. The speaking subject is inscribed in discourse just as his potential interlocutors are. The Commissioners in this sense might equally well be described as an elite group of “European identity” consumers.

imprudently borrows as much as possible – must be constructed in language, before it can be related to as an objective institutional and judicial “reality”. It is – like the nation or any other community too big to facilitate the simultaneous bodily proximity of all its members – an imagined community (Anderson 1983). And it is in its public rhetorical self-description that the specific style in which it is imagined becomes most clear. It is in this sphere that the political project produces an image of itself meant to elicit the identification of the citizens. This is where one can analyse the political attempt to make them *feel* something.

My primary interest is exactly in how official discourses about European identity seek to elicit an identification with the political projects of Europe at the level of affect and emotion. This is one of the reasons why I speak of the construction of an “ideological identity” for Europe. Ideology is not about rational argumentation, interest calculations or negotiated compromises. It is about eliciting an affectual, enjoyable and enthusiastic adherence to a communal cause or project felt to be grander than oneself. In ideology we are made to feel something.

My approach therefore includes but also attempts to go beyond the traditional discourse analytical concern with meaning; with the semantics and conceptual architecture of a given field, object or identity. In order to locate the dimension of affect and emotion in the discourses, I attempt to identify the structures through which one is invited to *enjoy* a European identity. In doing so I draw inspiration diverse fields and theories such as Ernesto Laclau’s discourse theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis and theories about political myth. The first part of the book is occupied with constructing the necessary theoretical framework to carry through such an ambition.

In the second part I analyse the construction of European identity in the form which I call Unity in Diversity Europe. I argue that the identity is semantically organised around an idea of common European values and that it presents European integration as a grand departure from a common past of war and suffering. EUrope in a sense becomes the framework through which the Europeans were finally able to leave a barbaric history behind and “civilise themselves”. This construction seeks to elicit emotional identification around the call of “Never again!” It invites the citizens to take part in a grand struggle to make war and genocide forever impossible in Europe.

The third part deals with “Global Player Europe”. Initially however I argue that the increasing prominence of this new construction must be understood in connection with a specific set of problems encountered by Unity in Diversity Europe. Its ideological project of preventing the re-emergence of war in Europe suffers from its own success. War is in fact

perceived as *de facto* impossible in Europe. The Global Player construction re-focuses the grand common project towards the external realm; towards a world which is portrayed in the rhetoric as longing and hoping for Europe. Here the Europeans are invited to enjoy their European identity, by imagining the admiring and desiring gazes from abroad. However the analysis will not entirely remain at the level of grand ideological constructions. In the final chapter, I analyse how ideology “works” at the level of a concrete policy. Namely how the ideological construction of European identity in the form of “Global Player Europe”, expressed itself in the concrete formulation and implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Conceived in 2002 as a policy which would spread European values in the immediate vicinity of the Union, the ENP was infused from the beginning with a rhetoric clearly connecting it to the identity of Europe as a Global Player. But the ENP was in no way simply a neutral medium through which Europe’s new identity could be showcased. Rather the ideological “fundamentals” or “universals” here encounter a specific context with an irreducible particularity of its own. This meant that the ideological structure of Global Player Europe, in its very application, had to be bent and sometimes seemingly even broken, in order to legitimate the ENP in the face of what seemed like a flood of problems, challenges and compromises arising from the different particular identities, priorities and power-relationships of the concrete context that it now had to navigate.

Focusing on the ENP allows me to observe in more general terms how ideological structures must always be negotiated in relation to the concrete context of their application. How, in other words, identity must always be performed, and how such performance is never an exact replication of the discursive framework of meanings that it enacts, but must always be an interpretation of identity in relation to the particular demands of the context of the performance.

PART I

IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 1

Discourse, Desire and Ideology

In constructing a theoretical framework for the investigation of the ideological construction of collective identity, I have especially drawn inspiration from the works of authors who in recent years have attempted to employ the theories of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, in analysing the political sphere. Authors such as Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Yannis Stavrakakis and Jason Glynos in particular have been active in developing a “Lacanian theory of ideology” (Laclau 2005, Žižek 2005, Stavrakakis 1999, Glynos 2001). It is as an ideological construction in this sense that I will analyse the different modes of European identity. A primary task in this chapter is therefore to unfold what this theory of ideology entails. First however I shall treat the concept of discourse which I employ and the subsequent fundamental understanding of identity as discursively constructed. I turn then to the Lacanian theory of ideology, and the Lacanian understanding of the subject as haunted by a lack, which it builds on.

Proceeding from this foundation, I shall move to a lower level of abstraction as I seek to develop theoretically what I conceive as the three central dimensions of the ideological construction of collective identity. These are the community’s nodal point, its social logics, and finally its mythical narrative.

These three dimensions will guide the analysis of the structure of European Identity at what I call the ideological level. Initially this level can be thought of as the realm of “grand constructions” – meaning the overt and direct articulation of the community’s self-images, place in the wider world, and political project. This is a genre, or a mode of speaking, which the EU employs extensively, and perhaps more so than is the case in more established forms of community such as nation-states. It is at this level that one can detect a shift from a Unity in Diversity Europe to a Global Player Europe.

However the ambition here is also to understand how ideological constructions of collective identity “work” in the realm of the formulation and implementation of concrete policies (specifically the European Neighbourhood Policy). Therefore at the end of this chapter it is necessary to develop a theoretical understanding of how ideological certainties and fundamentals are present in the exercise of politics tied to

concrete contexts. How, in other words, ideology must be interpreted or negotiated in relation to the particular setting, goals and actors which are entailed in a specific policy.

I am of course aware that this separation of the ideological level and the level of articulating concrete policies is heuristic rather than real. There is strictly speaking no articulation without a concrete context and no discursive/ideological structure aside or apart from its articulation in such various contexts. I am nevertheless convinced that it is an analytically fruitful distinction. Regarding the source material for the analysis of the ideological level I have attempted to locate a genre of speeches where the immediate context is – although certainly present – then at least not marked. This is a genre of speeches where the negotiation between ideology and context is weighed heavily in favour of ideology – allowing one in such texts the clearest possible view of ideology undisturbed by its contextual implementation. On the contrary I have, when I at the end of the book turn to analysing the employment of ideology in the concrete setting of the European Neighbourhood Policy, instead sought source material with the exact opposite characteristics. That is articulations where the particular context to a large extent “crowd in” on the pristine universals of ideology.

For now, however, I turn to the task of developing the basic theoretical framework for studying collective identity, starting with the concept of discourse.

The Concept of Discourse

A discourse will here be understood as a structure of meaning through which human communities relate to some part or aspect of their world, and which therefore establishes the way in which the objects and the actors are understood. Initially then, I will claim with David Howarth that “the category of discourse refers to historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects” (Howarth 2000: 9). Before it can be unfolded fully what exactly such a social construction of reality in discourses entails, it is necessary to understand how, and with what implications, discourses can be viewed as *systems* of meaning. In Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s 1985 book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe [1985] 2001) they propose a concept of discourse which draws on Ferdinand de Saussure’s model of language as a system of differential relationships between signs¹. Laclau and Mouffe present discourse at its most basic as

¹ Saussure defined the sign as consisting of the signifier (the word) and the signified (the meaning or conceptual content). The fundamental point for Saussure was that the meaning of a sign did in no way derive from the object it designated in reality, but

a complex of differential relations – as a system whose internal order of differentiations determine the meaning of its contents. They can thereby define *articulation* as the basic operation of establishing meaning by claiming that it is “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe [1985] 2001: 105), and from this move immediately to a definition of discourse as “the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe [1985] 2001: 105). This somewhat abstract definition might not seem very informative as regards the finer points about how discourses shape social reality, but it does set the stage for a number of fundamental points. A basic one is that by aligning their understanding of discourse with a basic theory of meaning, Laclau and Mouffe can claim that “every object is constituted as an object of discourse” (Laclau & Mouffe [1985] 2001: 108). This does not entail scepticism about the existence of a world external to thought, but simply makes the claim that humans perceive and relate to every part of this world through meanings established in language. They insist that no object or sphere of social interaction, can be conceived of as “extra discursive” without introducing an essentialist foundation and thereby reducing discourse to a mere super-structural phenomenon (Laclau & Mouffe 1985 (2001): 107-108, Laclau & Mouffe 1987: 82). This means that there is no connection to an extra discursive reality which can stabilise or limit discursive meanings. Discursive structures exist entirely by way of their articulation, but conversely the structure must always to some extent already exist for articulation to be possible; it is the system into which something is placed through articulatory practice. This introduces a tension between the agency of articulation in the production of new meanings, and the structure of the system as regulating meaning. If on the one hand the structural dimension is allowed to completely prevail, then every new articulation is simply a structural effect, and no structural change can come about. If on the other hand the structural dimension is completely denied, then it becomes possible to articulate any object in any way. In such a situation communication would be impossible because no meanings would retain enough stability to be socially shared – we would all be living in the lonely and terrifying universe of the psychotic (Laclau & Mouffe 1985 (2001): 112). The way out of this dichotomy which Laclau proposes is to conceive of discourses as incomplete and unstable structures – but structures capable of partially regulating articulation nonetheless. Discourses must in other words be conceived of as always less than com-

was produced entirely by its differentiation from the other signs of the language. The meaning of a specific sign proceeded from its differential relationship to all the other signs in language (Saussure 1974: 120-121).

pletely structured, and thereby as never *fully* able to structure – that is determine – the productivity of articulatory practice. In plainer terms this point concerns the fundamental and necessary theoretical claim that no single discourse can ever fully establish itself as the sole available framework for representing reality (or some part of it), because one would then have reduced the speaking individuals to mere mindless reproducers of its meanings. In this case one would have arrived at a situation in which no change or innovation is possible; a situation in which reality presents itself in one uniform and unchallengeable way circumscribing all space for controversy or dissent, indeed for subjectivity. The space for articulation as something more than structural repetition is therefore precisely the gap which marks any discursive structure as incomplete.

Because the incomplete structure of discourse cannot fully domesticate every element of social reality, it cannot fully determine how a certain situation should be understood either. Articulation always involves a dimension of interpretation which is not determined by the discursive structure. The “instructions” or “rules” which discourses entail for a specific situation can always be understood in several ways because the unique situation always throws up something more than that which is accounted for in the categories of a given discourse. One can therefore also think of discourses as an ensemble of rules with regard to both what something is – forming the identities of subjects and objects by organising them according to certain categories – but also as rules regarding the interactions of certain subjects and towards certain objects². In connection with the issue of collective identity below, these ideas will be continually refined and expanded, but for the present purposes this preliminary skeleton definition will do. A simple example might here be made of national discourse, in which the identity of communities will be formed as nations united around distinct cultures, and which will involve rules about how to relate to other nations (codified in international law) as well as towards other kinds of groups (e.g. immigrants). It will furthermore organise certain objects as representing the category “national culture” and interaction with these will be subject to other rules – other standards of “appropriate behaviour” – than for other objects in society (such as commodities).

What is entailed in the concept of articulation is to insist that each employment of a discourse – that is of a set of categories, identities and rules – involves interpreting what this system of meaning entails for a unique situation. We are not constantly consciously engaged in such

² Laclau himself seems to move in this direction when he at one point enlists Wittgenstein to describe discourses as a certain set of language games (Butler, Laclau & Zizek 2000: 284).

reflexive contemplation, because certain applications in certain situations have become routine – they have become *sedimented* (Laclau 1990: 34). But even the most sedimented of practices involves an interpretation in its repetitive application. Sedimentation simply indicates that this interpretation no longer demands our conscious reflection. But because discursive structures exist only in and through their articulation, they are not safe “elsewhere”, while we interpret their meanings in daily articulations. Rather a constant feedback is at work between the structure and its application. Each use of the discourse both reproduces it and – because this reproduction is never fully structurally determined – modifies it. Emphasising this point, Laclau describes discourse an “ensemble of rules, plus the actions which implement/distort/subvert them” (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 284). Nevertheless an articulation is only meaningful – only constitutes a successful communication – in so far as it makes use of already established structures of meaning. That which is interpreted (the discursive structure) must remain detectable in the interpretation (the particular articulation), if it is to be deemed a meaningful statement. The incomplete structure of discourse thus opens for interpretation, but the interpretative creativity has limits.

From this basic understanding of discourses as incomplete structures continually interpreted through articulation, it is possible discern the two levels of the following analysis.

The first is the investigation of the discursive structure – its subjects, objects and rules. As regards collective identity this “ideological level” would as already indicated be the level at which the overarching self-conception of a community is established. That is the fundamentals of who “we” are and what kind of relationships this should entail to other communities. But given that such structures are incomplete and continually fails to “automatically” domesticate all the elements of social reality in its sedimented practices, the question arises as to why does it not collapse as discredited or inadequate understandings of “reality”? How in other words do these incomplete structures retain a precarious stability and durability in all their incompleteness? And conversely under what conditions can they then be expected to encounter some sort of “catastrophic” unravelling? I believe that a substantial answer to such questions has been given by recent developments of a Lacanian theory of ideology.

A second level of analysis is that of focusing on specific articulations that entail a high degree of interpretation within a discursive structure. The focus here is on how the discursive structure is employed, interpreted and modified in a specific situation. How a particular action is legitimated by reference to the overarching discursive structure, but simultaneously bends and modifies this structure in relation to the unique

demands of the situation. As regards collective identity, this would entail investigating how a certain political action – or as in this case the formulation of a specific policy – is legitimated as expressing the identity of the community, but in its implementation encounters problems and opposition which take it beyond the bounds of what the already established discourse about the community can easily domesticate.

In the subsequent investigation of European identity I will operate on both these analytical levels, investigating first the ideological constructions of European identity and from this turn to the legitimating articulation or – as I shall call it with Judith Butler – performance of European identity in the more concrete setting of the formulation and implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

I will return to the dimension of articulation as a performance of identity at the end of this chapter, but first more needs to be said about the discursive construction of collective identity, including its ideological dimension where I seek inspiration in Lacanian theory.

Subject-Positions in Discourse

At its most basic level, the identity of human individuals or communities can be thought of as yet another element inscribed in discourse. As with objects and concepts, individuals or communities are as such inscribed meaning – given a specific identity – by their positioning in discursive structures. The identity of an individual or a community proceeds therefore from the occupation of a certain *subject-position* in discourse defined by Michel Foucault as simply “a position that may be filled in certain conditions by various individuals” (Foucault 1972: 115). As Louis Althusser claimed, it is by the *interpellation* into discourses that individuals are made into subjects, meaning that it is by the occupation of certain subject-positions that individually unique human beings become inscribed with socio-political meanings, identities and roles in the wider social framework (Althusser 1971). The concept of subject connotes both sides of the consequences of interpellation. On the one hand, the human individual is *subjected* to a framework of meaning which is external and prior to him. Althusser left little room for any resistance or choice on the side of the individual³. There is in other words a dimension of violence in interpellation, because the identities

³ Althusser famously likened the process by which the subjects are called into place in discourse with being called or hailed by a policeman in the street. By turning around – in simply reacting to the call – the individual is subjected as the kind of subject for which this call is intended. Althusser here remarks that nine out of ten times it is the right subject which turns around and thus renders interpellation successful (Althusser 1971: 174-175).

which we are ascribed are not fully of our own choosing or of our own making. As Foucault puts it, the power by which the subjects are inscribed in discourse is a “form of power [which] applies itself to immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals into subjects” (Foucault 1982: 781). But subject-positions should also be thought of as socio-cultural mandates. The identity ascribed to the individual in the subject-position is the basis on which he is recognised by others. It is the foundation on which he enjoys certain privileges, is expected to possess certain qualities, and enter into specific relationships with other individuals occupying different subject-positions. To become a subject is thus also to be afforded the ability and the right to act in certain ways not necessarily accepted when performed from other subject-positions. Although the very inscription into discourse is in a sense a violence done to the individual – an alienating imposition onto his body by something beyond it – one must maintain that the consequences of this interpellation in terms of a more concrete suffering does of course entirely depend on which subject-position one is called upon to occupy. In some cases the mandate of a position might be reduced to such a degree that it is more precise to speak of certain subjects inscribed in discourse as the mere objects of subject-positions occupied by others⁴. The basic point to be drawn from this fundamental understanding of the discursive construction of identities is that to understand an identity is to investigate the discursive structure of which it is a part – in which it is a subject-position. One must in other words examine what concepts are associated with it and give it meaning and what kind of mandate towards specific objects or different subjects it entails or excludes. It should be stressed that since subject-positions are socio-cultural mandates constructed in language, they can express the position of a community in relation to other communities as well as an individual in relation to other individuals. It is no different to analyse in political discourse the mandate and conceptual content of the subject-position which marks out an individual subject – e.g. “a worker”, than it is to do so with the subject-position of “the working class”, “the nation”, “the West” or indeed “Europe”. Both kinds of entities exist as a position in discourse, and can be analysed as such. Constructing a subject-position for Europe in political discourse is simply to attempt the interpellation of certain individuals as Europeans, to elicit that they conceive of themselves and each other as a community expressing the characteristics and fulfilling the mandate that this subject-position entails.

⁴ The fate of the colonial subject might be conceived in this way (see e.g. Pratt 1992).

If the concept of subject-position signifies an identity – individual or collective – positioned in a wider discursive structure then it should immediately be recalled that this is an incomplete structure. The incomplete structure cannot exercise the kind of determination that a fully successful interpellation entails. In fact it is the starting point of a more Lacanian understanding of the subject's identity to claim exactly that interpellation always to some extent fails (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 119-120, Žižek 1999: 158-161). Because the incomplete structure can never fully domesticate all elements of social reality, there is always something which does not conform to the dictates of the subject-position, which blocks the subject from fully assuming this mandate and thus from being fully identified by it: the "people" is never as pure, the nation is never as glorious, and Europe never as integrated as their respective subject-positions would demand. What we have is not a full and incontestable identity, but only the identification towards an ideal yet to be achieved. The act of identification emerges from the fact that one is never already completely and securely inscribed at a definite and fully meaningful subject-position. Identification expresses the subject's *desire* for full identity, and therefore implies exactly the absence of such fullness of identity. The function of ideology in relation to collective identity emerges as that of sustaining identification, as keeping the subjects in pursuit of a certain ideal of identity, rather than as a structure which "automatically" grants them such full identities through successful interpellations. This is the basic tenet of the Lacanian understanding of the subject's identity as afflicted by a lack, and of the theory of ideology which has been developed from it.

The Lacanian Subject and the Ideological Fantasy of Community

In order to present the fundamentals of Lacanian theory as it is relevant for a study of the ideological construction of identity, it is necessary first to establish the three so-called "orders" which it employs. These are the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The Lacanian orders are both individually complex and fundamentally interrelated to a degree which makes it impossible to adequately define them independently of each other. In what follows, I will first introduce the bare essentials of each and afterwards elaborate each one further in relation to the other, as well as introduce the range of concepts which together make up a Lacanian theory of identity.

Lacan theorised the Imaginary as constituted through a distinct stage in the human child's psychic development: the so-called Mirror Stage (Lacan [1949] 1994). This occurs when the child for the first time sees itself reflected in a mirror and recognises the image as itself. The crucial

point here is that there is a fundamental misalignment between what the child sees – the image of its body as a unified totality – and its experience of this body as still underdeveloped and not fully under control. As Jenny Edkins puts it “The mirror image is a totality, a gestalt, which can be mastered. This imaginary mastery anticipates the biological mastery of the infant’s body he or she has not yet achieved” (Edkins 1999: 91). This first representation of the self is therefore in fact also a relation to something other than oneself. The unity and wholeness of the image is not matched by the present experience of the infant’s body, rather “the mirror (...) supplies (...) an image of the future and the subject identifies with what it will become” (Macey 1994: xx, quoted from Edkins 1999: 94). The mirror stage introduces a temporal dimension into subjectivity, our self-image is the image of something yet to come, yet to be realised, of an ideal. The imaginary is this realm in which we construct for ourselves our *Ideal-Ego*, an image of who we are which is pursued in acts of identification precisely because it is not experienced as fully present, but only anticipated through imagining a future stage of development. The Imaginary can thus be thought of as the realm of fantasies about a fullness of identity yet to be achieved (see also Leupin 2004: 15-16 and Stavrakakis 1999: 17-19).

Lacan’s Symbolic order is the realm of language and of social rules. As a concept it draws inspiration both from the Saussurean idea of language and from Levi-Strauss’ theories about the structures of kinship (Homer 2005: 33-36). Identity is here assigned as the subject is given a signifier⁵ to distinguish and differentiate him from other subjects. Here in other words identity takes the form of subject-positions in a shared fabric of symbolic rules and roles. Whereas identity in the imaginary has to do with the fantasies of similarity (between the self and its image), in the symbolic it has to do with socially enforced rules of difference; here one is meant to become a certain sort of subject in the social field, here one should assume a mandate in relation to other subjects. In terms of the child’s psychic development, the inauguration of the Symbolic – the child’s insertion into a wider framework of social rules and roles – is a result of the drama of the Oedipus complex first theorised by Freud. In very brief terms, this drama entails that the father (not necessarily the biological father but rather a figure of authority) intercedes and breaks up the mother-child dyad. The child which has so far been engaged in attempting to become the sole object of the mother’s attentions and love – to fully join with her in a symbiosis undisturbed by the surrounding

⁵ Lacan conceives of the Symbolic as consisting of signifiers rather than signs. One reason for this is to emphasise that the exact meaning of the signifier one is given – its signified – is not immediately available to the subject of the symbolic (see e.g. Homer 2005: 40-43).