

**THE TRAGIC HUMAN AND DESIRE  
IN  
“THE ETHICS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS”  
SEMINAR V11  
OF LACAN**

**SUBLIMATION IN THE  
PSYCHOANALYSIS OF LACAN AND  
FREUD**

**BY**

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**DESIRE AND THE TRAGIC HUMAN IN  
“THE ETHICS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS” SEMINAR V11  
OF LACAN**

To understand Lacan’s claim that “the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire”<sup>1</sup> this essay will argue is to understand desire and its relation to jouissance. In understanding this relation we gain a better understanding of how Lacan’s claim relate to the aims of psychoanalysis.. This essay will show that depending upon how one views jouissance and its relation to desire in fact colors how one views the aim of psychoanalysis. I will argue that jouissance is the price or pound of flesh we pay-experience- in the accessing of our desire. As such the aims of psychoanalysis are tragic. Tragic in the sense that the subject gives up the pursuit of happiness and is prepared to face castration –symbolic- to achieve his desire. In not giving up on desire is to accept the threat of castration and pay the pound of flesh for it accessing by jouissance. The achieving of castration is to give up the bourgeois dream and cross the limit of the real or the Thing and enter that place where one pays the price for this crossing by assuming his guilt in a tragic act of heroism. I will show that for Lacan the aim of psychoanalysis, in contradistinction to the bourgeois dream of happiness via the good, -commodities - is to purse ones

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<sup>1</sup> J, Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, Trans, D, Porter, Routledge, 1992, p.319.

desires and to accept the tragic consequences of this. The aim of psychoanalysis, it will be shown, is not to make the subject comfortable with the tragic consequences but to realize that all that matters is not giving up on ones desires.

So what are the aims of psychoanalysis? Lacan answers this stating “ [t]o have carried an analysis through to its end is no more nor less than to have encountered that limit in which the problematic of desire is raised.”<sup>2</sup> As we shall see later that limit is the other side of the Thing where one experiences jouissance . For the moment Lacan connects the accessing of desire with the aims of psychoanalysis. What it means for one to access his desire is to in fact trespass on death.<sup>3</sup> This means for Lacan to face ones castration. As Lacan notes “psychoanalysis teaches that in the end it is easier to accept interdiction than run the risk of castration.”<sup>4</sup> What Lacan means by castration is captured by Zupancic when she states “ “the fear of castration” is the fear of losing that which constitutes a signifying support for the lack involved in the experience of the desire as such.”<sup>5</sup> Lacan claims that the subject is constituted by the signifying chain it is through signifying practice that the subject emerges.<sup>6</sup> Now the lose of signifying support in fact is a sort of death since the subject loses his being. Lacan notes that the subject is in a relationship with death since “ ... it is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulate a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he might disappear from the chain of what he is.”<sup>7</sup> In other words the confronting of one’s castration , which desire brings us to, is the confronting of ones death or dissolution due to disappearing from the signifying chain. This what happened to

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p.300.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.294.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.307.

<sup>5</sup> A, Zupancic, ‘Ethics and Tragedy in Lacan’, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.178.

<sup>6</sup> J, Lacan *op.cit* p.219.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.295.

Oedipus when he did not give up on his desire. Lacan notes that in the pursuit of his desire Oedipus accepted “ he dies from a true death in which he erases his own being...the subsistence of the subtraction of himself from the world.”<sup>8</sup> It is with the fear of castration in mind that Lacan says the subject in the accessing of his desire must face all fear and pity, in this regard the subject learns a little more about himself.<sup>9</sup> Now, as we shall see, desire conditioned by the transgression of the law and in this way the subject has to confront his guilt in his accession desire.

Lacan claims that guilt occupies the field of desire, there is a permanent book-keeping or debt to be paid via guilt in the subject not giving up on his desire.<sup>10</sup> Lacan notes “if analysis has a meaning, desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which roots us in a particular destiny and demands insistently that the debt be paid [guilt].”<sup>11</sup> All this guilt is nonsense for the hero.<sup>12</sup> The Hero, as opposed to the ordinary man, confronts guilt in his pursuit of desire.<sup>13</sup> It is this shying from guilt that keeps the ordinary man in the service of the goods.<sup>14</sup>

Lacan claims that the aim of psychoanalysis “... should not make it the guarantors of the bourgeois dream.”<sup>15</sup> The bourgeois dream comprises the comfort deriving from commodities.<sup>16</sup> Lacan is adamant that the aim of psychoanalysis is not to generate

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.306.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.323.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.318, 319.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.319.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.309.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.319.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.309.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.303.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.303.

happiness in the subject.<sup>17</sup> Lacan notes that at the end of analysis, on the contrary to happiness, the subject experiences absolute disarray where the subject experiences anguish as a form of protection as the danger, of not giving ground to one's desire, appears.<sup>18</sup> It is in this regard that Lacan speaks of the tragic dimension of the subject in his pursuit of his desire. As Lacan states not giving ground to one's desire "... implies the dimension that is expressed in what we call the tragic sense of life."<sup>19</sup>

Now how does this tragic dimension of not giving up on one's desire come about? In other words why is the end of analysis, or aim of psychoanalysis so tragic? The answer to this question is found in the relationship between desire, *jouissance* and the Real or *das Ding*. Now there are a number of interpretations of this relationship in the literature that disagree on what this relationship is.

J. Lee points out a tension in Lacan's account of his claim of not giving up on one's desire. Lee notes that there is Hamlet who assumes his desire. And there is Antigone who goes beyond the satisfaction of desire to achieve *jouissance*.<sup>20</sup> For Lee Lacan places the accessing of desire as limited by the law and not on the side of *jouissance*.<sup>21</sup> In this regard Lee sees Lacan claim, that one should not give up on one's desire, as situating desire on this side of the Thing and not on the other side where *jouissance* is. Lacan claims that a price has to be paid for accessing desire and this pound of flesh is *jouissance*.<sup>22</sup> Now Lee sees this price as being a sacrifice. On the

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.292.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.304.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>20</sup> J, Lee *Jacques Lacan*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1990, p.162.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>22</sup> J, Lacan, *op.cit.*, p.322

same point of paying the price Zupancic see the price as not a sacrifice but in effect as and experience.<sup>23</sup> In other words where Lee sees the price as a giving up of experiencing *jouissance* Zupancic sees it as the experiencing of *jouissance*. In my reading of Lacan I show that I agree with Zupancic. Now it is understanding *jouissance* and its relation to the ‘Thing’ and the Thing’s relation to desire that we can understand Lacan’s claim in relation to the aims of psychoanalysis.

The Thing is beyond all human objects. It is the ‘beyond-of--the-signified’ and is a relation in which “.. the subject keeps his distance and is constituted in a mode of relation of primary affect prior to any repression.”<sup>24</sup> In this regard the Thing belongs to the real in that it is outside the signifying network.<sup>25</sup> The Thing is the ‘absolute Other of the subject and is modeled on the mother<sup>26</sup>- the fundamental desire i.e. mother incest.<sup>27</sup> It is the object for ever lost and impossible to gain around which the subject and his desire revolve.<sup>28</sup> The Thing “ is a primordial function which is located at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of the unconscious ...”<sup>29</sup> J, Lee captures the gist of Lacan’s view with regard to the Thing, and desire when he states “... the subjects attempt to reclaim the lost *objet a* and in this way to map himself into the impossible and unmappable real which the primal repression of language has separated him.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A,Zupancic, op.cit, p.175.

<sup>24</sup> j, Lacan, op.cit, p. p.54.

<sup>25</sup> ibid., p.54.

<sup>26</sup> ibid., p.52.

<sup>27</sup> ibid., p.66.

<sup>28</sup> ibid., p.52.

<sup>29</sup> ibid., p.62.

<sup>30</sup> J, Lee op.cit., p.165.



To understand desire, in regard to the aims of psychoanalysts, it is important to understand Lacan's notion of *jouissance*. We saw above that the Thing belongs to the real; it is the 'beyond-of--the-signified'. In this regard the Thing is an inaccessible and impossible to gain Real. Now *jouissance* is situated on the other side of the Thing. As Lacan states "... my *jouissance* which I don't dare go near ... and which is the very of the vanished law adds its weight to that which prevents me from crossing a certain frontier at the limit of the Thing."<sup>31</sup> Zupancic notes "...that Lacan situated *jouissance* on the side of the Thing."<sup>32</sup> Now sublimation is that process that by which we must pay a price or pound of flesh for the satisfaction of our desire. That pound of flesh or price is *jouissance*. Lacan states " sublimate as much as you like; you will have to pay it with something and that something is called *jouissance* ... That's the object, good, that you pay for the satisfaction of one's desire."<sup>33</sup> Lacan claims that "... *jouissance* appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive."<sup>34</sup> Thus when Lacan states that *jouissance* is "... the good, that one pays for the satisfaction of one's desire"<sup>35</sup> it is clear that the price is not a giving up off but in fact an experiencing off. In this regard Lacan's claim is like the statement ' you pay for being drunk with a head ache' in this regard you pay by experiencing the head ache. It is in this sense that I read Lacan's statement and thus agree with Zupancic reading on the matter.

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>32</sup> A, Zupancic, 'Ethics and Tragedy in Lacan', *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.174.

<sup>33</sup> J, Lacan, *op.cit.*, p.322.

<sup>34</sup> *Jbid.*, t p.209.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.322.

Now to access *Jouissance* the subject must go beyond the limit go beyond the barrier of the Thing. *Jouissance*, Lacan claims "... occurs at the site where fantasms are produced, fantasms that represent for us the same barrier as far as access to *jouissance* is concerned the barrier where every thing is forgotten [the Thing]."<sup>36</sup> Now what happens at this limit this barrier across which is *jouissance*?

We saw above that the subject is constituted by an exists via his construction through the signifying network If this network is dissolved then his being vanishes, he in fact dies a second, or symbolic death as we saw Oedipus do when he did not give up on his desire. Repeating Lacan the subject is in a relationship with death since "... it is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulate a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he might disappear from the chain of what he is."<sup>37</sup> It is this castration, or death that happens at the limit of the Thing, or when one does not give up on ones desire. How does this come about? It comes about through the eradicating of the very support on which desire depends i.e. the fantasms.

Lacan notes that it is rather in an imaginary function, and, in particular, that for which we will use the symbolization of the fantasm ... which is the form on which depends the subject's desire."<sup>38</sup> Now Lacan does not spell it out clearly in the *Ethics* but my reading and understanding of Lacan leads me to argue that in not giving up on ones desire right up to the limit of the Thing what one achieves is the eradicating of the fantasms that propped up the desire with the result that beyond the barrier or limit one experiences *jouissance*. On this point B, Fink captures my claim when he says that an

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.298.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.295.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

aim of psychoanalysis is to “... transform the analysand’s fantasy that props up his desire, for this desire impedes his or her pursuit of satisfaction ...”<sup>39</sup> Where the satisfaction the subject experiences is *jouissance*.<sup>40</sup>

Thus we see, bringing all this together, how right Lacan is when he notes that the pursuit of one’s desire has tragic consequences. It is tragic because the subject in accessing his desire dies a second, or symbolic death. The signifying chain that creates and maintains his being is dissolved as the fantasms which prop up his desire are eradicated. The subject, like Oedipus is tragic. Like Oedipus the subject is heroic in the confrontation of his castration. Unlike the normal man who shuns his guilt by avoiding the transgression of the law the tragic subject assumes his guilt in an act of heroism. It is this tragic heroic act that we understand Lacan’s claim in relation to the aims of psychoanalysis.

Thus we see how Lacan’s claim, “the only thing of which one be guilty is giving ground relative to one’s desire”, is related to the aims of psychoanalysis. The aims of psychoanalysis are not to make the subject happy, or give him the bourgeois dream. The aims of psychoanalysis are to make the subject assume his guilt in an heroic act. The aims of psychoanalysis is create in the subject fear and anguish. In not giving ground to one’s desire, or in others words pursuing one’s desire, the subject embarks upon a heroic but tragic journey. It is heroic because the subject must face anguish and fear and his eventual castration. The subject must transgress the law and thus be prepared to take on guilt. To pursue desire the subject goes to the limit of the Thing. At the limit of the Thing the subject faces his own second death, or symbolic death,

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<sup>39</sup> B, Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Harvard University Press, 1997, p.209.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.208.

in that his being ceases to be. The subject's being is constructed and maintained through the signifying network. At the limit of the Thing this network is dissolved and thus his being is dissolved; he dies symbolically - he is castrated. To not give up on his desire the subject follows such tragic characters as Oedipus across the barrier of the Thing. This is the aim of psychoanalysis. To pursue his desire the subject, at the limit of the Thing, collapses the fantasies that support his desire, the signifying network dissolves his being is destroyed. At the limit of the Thing he pays a price. In not giving up on his desire he crosses the barrier and pays the price in that he experiences the enjoyment of *jouissance*.

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AN ESSAY ON SUBLIMATION. DISCUSSION IN RELATION TO FREUD AND LACAN. WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE CONCEPT? CAN IT PLAY ANY ROLE IN THEORY OR CLINIC PSYCHOANALYSIS?

## **SUBLIMATION IN THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF LACAN AND FREUD**

This essay will show how Freud's and Lacan's views in regard to sublimation are similar and in important ways different. It will be shown that Lacan alters the process of sublimation such that it in effect reverses the process as outlined by Freud. It will be shown that where Freud claims the process of sublimation involves a change of aim of the drive, Lacan in effect argues that the aim remains the same but there is a change in the object. It will be shown that Freud in places puts forward the possibility of a modification in the object of the drive. It will be shown that both Freud and Lacan see sublimation as being the social valorization of something. To account for sublimation requires a certain plasticity in the drives. It will be shown that both Lacan and Freud agree on this point. I will show in this essay that Freud's view of sublimation is 'underdone' in that it leaves a lot of phenomena unaccounted for. I will also present some difficulties that Lacan found in the Freudian account of sublimation. Such difficulties as the paradoxical nature of the aim in regard to the satisfaction of the drives, as well as a contradiction in Freud's formulation of sublimation. This essay will argue that sublimation has a useful part to play in theory and the clinic psychoanalysis. I will argue that in terms of Freud sublimation has the benefit of preventing psychic illness by avoiding the repression of instincts. In regard to Lacan I will argue that sublimation has an important part to play in desire.

Laplanche & Pontalis notes that sublimation occurs through out Freud work in the accounting for artistic creativity, intellectual pursuits and activities that achieve some sort of social value.<sup>41</sup> Laplanche & Pontalis point out that “Freud calls upon the notion [sublimation]throughout his work to account in economic and dynamic terms for certain kinds of activity governed by desire not visibly directed towards a sexual end ...”<sup>42</sup> We will see how Lacan likewise connects sublimation with desire. In *On Narcissism* Freud notes that sublimation concerns the object-libido and is the deflection of the sexual instincts towards non sexual aims. As Freud states “[s]ublimation is a process that concerns the object-libido and consists in the instinct’s directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon the deflection from sexuality ...”<sup>43</sup> This redirection of drive to non sexual aims is different from the direction of the drives in the process of idealization. In idealization the object is aggrandized but without any alteration in the object. Freud notes “[I]dealization is a process that concerns the object; by it that object without any alteration in its nature, is aggrandized and exalted in the subjects mind. Idealization is possible in the sphere of ego-libido as well as in that of object-libido.”<sup>44</sup> Now the difference between idealization and sublimation is that idealization involves the object were sublimation involves the aim of an instinct.<sup>45</sup> In mentioning the aim of the instinct brings us to the crux of Freud’s views on sublimation and as we shall see brings about the major difference between him and Lacan.

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<sup>41</sup> J, Laplanche & J.B, Pontalis, *The language of Psycho-analysis*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, **Hogarth Press, 1973** , p.447.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.447.

<sup>43</sup> S, Freud, ‘On Narcissism’, SE, 1915, Vol. .14, p.94.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.94.

According to Freud sublimation is a redirection or deflection of a sexual drive. The sexual drive abandons its original aim and takes on another genetically similar one and in the process it loses its sexual current and becomes non-sexual in nature. On these points Freud states "... the component instincts of sexuality, as well the sexual current which is composed of them, exhibit a large capacity for changing their object for taking another in its place ...the sexual trend abandoning its aim of obtaining a component or reproductive pleasure and taking another which is related genetically to the abandoned one is itself no longer sexual and must be described as social ... we call this process 'sublimation' ..."<sup>46</sup>

This deflection of the aim of the drives/instincts would seem to indicate a certain plasticity in the drives. It will be shown how for Lacan sublimation must begin with the drives. In fact Freud acknowledges that the drives can substitute for other, the drives can take the place of others. The drives can in effect take on the intensity of another drive. The Drives according to Freud are in effect quite malleable and amenable to diverse forms of satisfaction and substitution. Freud notes himself on this point "... we must bear in mind that the sexual instinctual impulses in particular are extraordinary plastic ... one of them may take the place of another, one of them can take over another's intensity ... the satisfaction of another can afford complete compensation."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> S, Freud, 'Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis', SE, 1917, Vol.16, p.345.

<sup>47</sup>ibid., p.345..



Now these comments by Freud would seem to indicate that sublimation involves a modification of the aim without any change in the object. This view is not quite correct for, Freud in fact articulates a view very similar, as we shall see, with Lacan. In the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud in fact mentions the fact that there can be a modification in the object as well. As he states “[a certain kind of modification of the aim and change of the object, ... is described as “sublimation”].”<sup>48</sup> This claim by Freud about a modification of the object would seem to invalidate his distinction above that it was only idealization not sublimation which involves a change of object. It will be shown that Lacan is aware of this problem in Freud’s formulation.

Now one further point of Freud’s, which we shall see Lacan agreeing with, is the social valuing of sublimation. For Freud sublimation involves those objects to which society holds in high esteem. In other words only those things that have value for society can be regarded as being due to sublimation. As Freud notes in regard to an object only those “... in which our social valuation is taken into account, is described as “sublimation”.”<sup>49</sup> On this point we shall see that Lacan agrees.

Now with account of Freud’s views regarding sublimation in mind we shall see how Lacan in one important and profound way reverses Freud’s sublimation process. For Freud sublimation was a change in instinctual aim, but for Lacan sublimation is a modification of the object and not a change of the object.. We shall see that this modification of the object is tied to object as ‘the Thing’. Sublimation for Lacan is a

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<sup>48</sup> S, Freud, ‘Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis’, SE, 1933, Vol. 22, p.97.

<sup>49</sup> S, Freud, ‘Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis’, SE, 1933, Vol. 22, p.97.

relation between the drive and something in the object which is in addition to the object.. Thus sublimation is not a change of object but in fact a change in the object. This addition to the object which sublimation brings about is separate to but still related to the object . This modification in the object in fact has some effect upon the object of sublimation. All this is spelt out when Lacan states sublimation "... brings to the *Trieb* [drive] a different satisfaction of its aim – this always defined as the natural aim –is precisely what reveals the proper nature of the *Trieb* [drive] insofar as it is not purely instinct but has a relation with *das Ding* [the ‘thing’] as such, with the Thing insofar as it is distinct from the object.”<sup>50</sup> This change in the object is , as Lacan states, sublimation "... lifts up the object ... to the dignity of the Thing.”<sup>51</sup> Thus in contradistinction to Freud for Lacan sublimation does not involve a change in the aim of a drive but instead a modification in the object of the aim. A modification that alters the object by giving it an extra something .i.e. elevating it to the Thing.

Now it is only in understanding the ‘Things’ relation to desire that we can fully appreciate what Lacan means by the process of sublimation. The Thing is beyond all human objects. It is ‘beyond-of--the-signified’ and is a relation in which “.. the subject keeps his distance and is constituted in a mode of relation of primary affect prior to any repression.”<sup>52</sup> In this regard the Thing belongs to the real in that it is outside the signifying network.<sup>53</sup> The Thing is the ‘absolute Other of the subject and is modeled on the mother<sup>54</sup> - the fundamental desire i.e. mother incest.<sup>55</sup> It is the object

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<sup>50</sup> J, Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, e.d, Jacques-Alain Miller, trans, D, Porter, Routledge, 1992, p.111.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.112.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.66.

for ever lost and impossible to gain around which the subject and his desire resolve.<sup>56</sup> The Thing “ is a primordial function which is located at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of the unconscious ...”<sup>57</sup> J, Lee captures the gist of Lacan’s view of sublimation, with regard to the Thing, when he states sublimation is “... the subjects attempt to reclaim the lost *object a* and in this way to map himself into the impossible and unmappable real which the primal repression of language has separated him.”<sup>58</sup> Thus we see how Lacan reverses the dynamic of sublimation and makes the change in the object central to it where Freud argued that it was the change in aim that was central to sublimation.

There are some similarities in the way Freud and Lacan view other aspects of sublimation. Like Freud Lacan see the drives as depending on the plasticity of the drives.<sup>59</sup> Lacan believes that “[o]ne thing only alludes top the possibility of the happy satisfaction of the instinct, and that is the notion of sublimation.”<sup>60</sup> Lacan seems to believe that sublimation can only be applied to a work of art if it has achieved some social value i.e. like art.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless Lacan appear to disparage this valorization of the object of sublimation.. Lacan notes that in the activity of art “... it literally means that man has the possibility of making his desires tradable or salable in the form of products.”<sup>62</sup>On this claim Lacan the cynicism of such a formulation nevertheless as great merit.<sup>63</sup> This apparent disparagement is similarly state when Lacan claims that sublimation was used by culture “... to colonize with imaginary

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>58</sup> J, Lee *Jacques Lacan*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1990, p.165.

<sup>59</sup> J, Lacan, *op.cit.*, p.92.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.293.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.293.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.293.

formations the field of *das Ding*.”<sup>64</sup> It is this colonizing of the Thing with the imaginary which takes us to the heart of the social valorization of the sublimated object.. Lacan claims that the valorization has nothing to do with the social world. Sublimation of an object is in effect a product of fantasy and not the macro world. As Lacan notes “ [s]ociety takes some comfort from the mirages that moralists, artists artisans, designers of dresses and hats, and creators of imaginary forms in general supply it with. But it is not simply in the approval that society gladly accords it that we must seek the power of sublimation. It is rather in an imaginary function, and, in particular, that for which we will use the symbolization of the fantasm ... which is the form on which depends the subject’s desire.”<sup>65</sup>

Now there are certain problems with the concept of sublimation. Laplanche & Pontalis note that Freud’s use of the term is underdone. By this they mean that it does not explain a lot of psychic phenomena. Firstly the ask does it only involve intellectual activity or all forms of mental work. Secondly does it sublimation involve all forms of adaptive activities i.e. leisure, work etc.<sup>66</sup> Laplanche & Pontalis claim that Freud’s lack of coherence in his notion of sublimation remain as a lacunae in psychoanalysis.<sup>67</sup> Lacan argues that there is a trap in claiming that the individual can obtain satisfaction of his drives in object which have social value.<sup>68</sup> Lacan go as far to say that “... complete sublimation is not possible for the individual.”<sup>69</sup> Lacan claims that there is a fundament contradiction at the heart of Freud’s idea of sublimation. This contradiction comes about by the phenomena of certain reaction-

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>66</sup> J, Laplanche & J, B, Pontalis, *op.cit* p. 433.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p.433.

<sup>68</sup> J, Lacan, *op.cit*, p.94.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.91.

formations i.e. shame disgust. Because of these reaction-formations Lacan points out an antimony in the formulation of sublimation.<sup>70</sup> A paradox Lacan sees in sublimation involves symptoms. According to Lacan psychoanalysis has had a problem in distinguishing symptoms from sublimation. A symptom is the way a repressed drive find a substitute satisfaction On this point Lacan asks how dose a substitute satisfaction not be a sublimation.<sup>71</sup> In looking at this question Lacan finds a paradox in that the whole sublimation being seen as a satisfaction of a drive means that in the fact of symptoms it paradoxical seems to occur elsewhere than the aim.<sup>72</sup>

The notion of sublimation plays a large part in Lacan's theory of desire and the ethics of psychoanalysis. To understand sublimation in the theory of Lacan it is important to understand his notion of *jouissance*. We saw above that the Thing belongs to the real it is the 'beyond-of--the-signified'. In this regard the Thing is an inaccessible and impossible to gain Real. Now *jouissance* is situated on the other side of the Thing. As Lacan states "... my *jouissance* which I don't dare go near ... and which is the very of the vanished law adds its weight to that which prevents me from crossing a certain frontier at the limit of the Thing."<sup>73</sup> Zupancic notes "...that Lacan situated *jouissance* on the side of the Thing."<sup>74</sup> Now sublimation is that process that by which we must pay a price or pound of flesh for the satisfaction of our desire. That pound of flesh or price is *jouissance*. Lacan states " sublimate as much as you like; you will have to pay it with something and that something is called *jouissance* ... That's the object, good,

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p.111.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>74</sup> A, Zupancic, 'Ethics and Tragedy in Lacan', *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.174.

that you pay for the satisfaction of one's desire."<sup>75</sup> Insofar as psychoanalysis, for Lacan, is an activity where the subject does not give up on his desire<sup>76</sup> this activity is conceived as tragic experience.<sup>77</sup> Lacan posits an equivalence between the ethics of tragedy and the ethics of psychoanalysis. As he states "the ethics of psychoanalysis ... properly that ethic implies the dimension that is expressed in what we call the tragic sense of life."<sup>78</sup> Freud had a somewhat different view of the usefulness of sublimation in clinic psychoanalysis and theory.

Freud regarded sublimation as performing a useful role in that people did not get ill through the act of sublimation. Sublimation in that it did not repress a drive stopped people from becoming ill Through sublimating their drives into socially valuable object the subject avoided illness . Though their aim was not directed towards a sexual object the aim nevertheless was satisfied and thus not repressed As Freud noted " there are in general many ways of tolerating deprivation of libidinal satisfaction without falling ill ... [through sublimation] [through] displacablity and readiness to accept a substitute must operate powerfully against the pathogenic effect of frustration."<sup>79</sup>

Thus we see that Freud and Lacan have agreement and disagreement on the notion of sublimation. For Lacan sublimation is the change in the object not a change of drive. For Freud sublimation is a change in aim, but as we saw he did acknowledge a modification in the object. Freud saw sublimation as bring about the possibility of non-illness via its process of non-repression. Lacan saw sublimation as bringing about

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<sup>75</sup> J, Lacan, op.cit, p.322.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.321.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p.243.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.313.

<sup>79</sup> S, Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, SE, 1917, Vol. 16, p.345.

the pay meant of a pound of flesh i.e. jouissance in the satisfaction of our desire. There are problems with the Freudian notion of sublimation. Such problems as it being underdone in that it is not clear if it applies to such things as leisure or work. Lacan also pointed out a contradiction in its formulation in regard to symptoms and certain reaction formations i.e. shame and disgust. Both Lacan and Freud see sublimation in regard to applying to socially valued objects. But Lacan saw a trap here in that he felt that a subject could not fully achieve satisfaction through sublimation.

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