

**ANTIGONE: FROM THE ETHICS OF DESIRE
TO THE ETHICS OF THE DRIVE**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

By

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*Στο σύντροφό μου Γιώργο Καλκάνη
για την αγάπη και τη συμπαράστασή του*

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ABSTRACT

In his Seminar the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Lacan aims at differentiating psychoanalytic ethics from the morality of goods. Leaving the Aristotelian *eudemonia* behind, he moves to the Hegelian dialectic of the *Master and the slave* focusing on the negating power of the signifier over the good. He names this power *pure desire* which essentially is the death drive that tends to deprive the Other of that good which constitutes him as whole. The idea of coming to terms with the lack of the Other is what Lacan wished to define as the ethical act which would bring about the experience of *jouissance*. In order to identify such an act, Lacan moves to Kant and his theorisation of the moral law. Kant proposes two readings thereof; one defined as a void through which the drive transgresses the limits of the signifier and comes to terms with *jouissance* and the other defined as the voice of conscience which restrains the subject into the field of the signifier aiming at pleasure.

Lacan develops an ethics of desire. Even though Kant's first definition of the moral law would have allowed Lacan to define ethics in terms of *jouissance*, he follows the second option and the idea that beauty can create a veil in front of the experience of lack. This allows Lacan to propose that the ethical act comes about through the process of sublimation which involves the redefinition of the subject's fundamental fantasy and the inability of the drive to transgress the limit of desire. Nevertheless he has chosen *Antigone* to show that the ethical act involves something more; that is going beyond the signifier. It is through the idea of the Other *jouissance* that the drive can transgress the limit of the signifier. This thesis proposes a redefinition of psychoanalytic ethics through a reading of *Antigone* in terms of the Other *jouissance*.

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CHAPTER

I

Introduction

Jacques Lacan in his Seminar *Encore* (1972-3) refers to his earlier work, the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), and claims that “with the passage of time I learned that I could say a little more about it [the ethics of psychoanalysis]¹. And then I realised that what constituted my course was a sort of ‘I don’t want to know anything about it’” (p.1). What could Lacan have said that he didn’t want to know about? Lacan would have argued that the tragedy of Sophocles *Antigone* is not a proper illustration of the ethics of psychoanalysis, for Antigone presents on stage what Lacan defines in *Encore* as the Other *jouissance*. In the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan aimed at showing that the ethical act signals the realisation of one’s desire through the transgression of the limit of the oedipal law. But he does not succeed in making the argument for such a transgression. Rather, the ethical act of psychoanalysis is defined in terms of the subject’s redefinition of its fundamental fantasy in terms of the process of sublimation. Sublimation results in a beautiful image. Beauty cannot be separated from the object of desire, the Imaginary effect of the oedipal law. In other words, the ethical act indicates the reformulation of the fundamental fantasy which is represented as a beautiful image since it covers up the lack of the Other and inhibits the painful experience of *jouissance*. This thesis intends to show that Antigone goes beyond this.

Lacan indicates the aim of his *Ethics*:

The effect of beauty on desire seems to split desire strangely as it continues on its way, for one cannot say that it is completely extinguished by the apprehension of beauty. It continues on its way...but there is no longer any object (p.249).

Lacan tries to show the way beyond the effect of beauty, beyond the effect of the Other on human desire, the disappearance of the Imaginary object, the *semblant* in front of the Other’s lack. Nevertheless, he does not succeed until *Encore*, fourteen years later, where he describes the experience of the Other *jouissance* as different from the phallic one. Phallic *jouissance* is achieved through the other as a partial object, beyond the field of the

¹ The use of brackets in between quoted material indicates explicatory additions of the author

Other. It is with this partial object that the subject is identified and through which it experiences the pleasure of keeping the Other whole. In this context phallic *jouissance* becomes the moment of experiencing pleasure's limit which does not necessarily lead to its transgression. The Other *jouissance*, on the other hand, is experienced in the field of the Other, beyond any Imaginary object. This is what Lacan wished to indicate when he said "there is no longer any object". For Lacan the experience of the Other *jouissance* corresponds to a state for which pleasure's transgression is necessary. Lacan wants to take us beyond the effect of the Imaginary and that is why he chose *Antigone*. Yet Lacan describes Antigone as being attached to the limit where her fantasy is projected as a beautiful image. He presents her as the object of that beautiful image which hides the lack of the Other.

Lacan thinks that the renunciation of the effect of the Imaginary order in the field of desire is a prerequisite for the ethical act. He defines the Imaginary order as that of the surface of appearances at the level of which we deal with the other(s) which is a mirroring reflection of our self. Appearances are deceptive and hide an underlying structure. This structure refers to language, what Lacan calls the Other under the term Symbolic order. The Symbolic order cannot signify everything, what eludes its capacity is what Lacan names the Real in which we find the locus of our desire, the object cause of our desire. The renunciation of the Imaginary order refers to the idea of catharsis which in difference to Freud (1923) who believed that it brings relief to the subject since it "comes about when the path to consciousness is opened and there is a normal discharge of affect" (p.133), for Lacan indicates a process that allows the subject to come to terms with its fundamental fantasy, that Symbolic structure that determines the subject's relationship to the Imaginary world of the different material goods. This is how the limit of pleasure is reached and the experience of phallic *jouissance* comes about. But Lacan wants to move beyond that limit, he therefore attempts to differentiate between the material goods that are supposed to satisfy desire and the Sovereign Good which he defines in terms of the subject's personal route to satisfaction. In his *Ethics Seminar*, following the tradition of Freud, Lacan wants to make clear that psychoanalysis has nothing to do with the Aristotelian *eudemonia*, the morality of goods. What he argues is that "what escapes him [Aristotle] is perhaps the fact that precisely because we take that path [of the goods] we miss the opening on to *jouissance*" (p.186). This opening cannot but refer to the state of the Other *jouissance*. So, the Sovereign Good of psychoanalysis becomes for Lacan

jouissance, as the transgression of the oedipal law which excludes the mediation of the field of goods (the Imaginary objects of satisfaction).

In fact, psychoanalysis was born in a time when the good of happiness had become the object of politics. *Eudemonia* dominated philosophical thinking and the French revolution made the pursuit of the “happiness of all” its emblem. Morality at that time was defined in terms of ideal happiness for all. Psychoanalysis through the revelation of the unconscious stood up as a defence against that morality which placed everyone under its aegis, it stood up as a support for individuality, a support for the personal route towards happiness. Now while Freud (1930) defined the law of the pleasure principle he also indicated its beyond. It is this “beyond” that differentiates psychoanalysis from the morality of happiness, from the morality of goods. So, Lacan’s intention was to strengthen that position by presenting an ethics where the good is defined subjectively in terms of desire’s realisation.

Lacan’s intention was to define the ethics of psychoanalysis within the field of human desire. The overcoming of the effect of the Imaginary order is accomplished through a force that Lacan names *pure desire* (a term that he borrows from Kant’s *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Ethics*, 1785) which nevertheless corresponds to the transgression of the field of the Other and accordingly of the field of human desire (that construction which “orders” the quality of the Imaginary object that will take up this Symbolic place). The route towards *jouissance* (as the overcoming of the sum of goods) constitutes the ethical Law and cannot but indicate the transgression of the subjective oedipal law. For Freud (1913) the oedipal law is universal and has an objective, mythical orientation. For Lacan, on the other hand, the oedipal law is the subjective response to/articulation of the Law which is no other than civilisation, language itself. The oedipal law is for Lacan the way that the subject answers to the constitutive lack of language, of the Symbolic order. It is that scenario which allows the subject to place different material object to the lack of the Other, the lack of the Law. So, the route towards the state of *jouissance* presupposes the revealement of the lack at the Symbolic level.

Hence, by leaving aside the Aristotelian *eudemonia*, Lacan (1959-60) moves to Hegel’s dialectic of the Master and the slave in order to prove that the all powerful Master of Aristotle’s time becomes “nothing more than his obverse, his negation, the sign of his disappearance” in the philosophy of Hegel (p.12). Lacan defines human desire in terms of the dialectic of the Master and the slave. He focuses on the circular movement of the

dialectic which constitutes desire as metonymic (the change of different goods). Even though for Hegel this dialectic, this circular movement has no exodus, for Lacan the route towards the state of *jouissance* indicates exactly the opposite. Most importantly, Lacan focuses on the negating power of the signifier over the good; in a sense he points out the possibility that the subject has of depriving the Other/Master of the object/good that constitutes him as whole. This development of the Hegelian idea leads Lacan to the definition of the ethical act as that which allows the subject to come to terms with the lack of the Other.

Nevertheless, this idea was not enough for Lacan to define psychoanalytic ethics. He had to find a process that would lead there. In order to do that, he moves to Kant and the idea of the moral law. Kant offers to the moral law a double reading; either as a void or as the voice of conscience. Lacan, in the Seminar on *Ethics*, tends to support the first version. By differentiating between the oedipal law, which is the law of the pleasure principle, and a Law that forces the subject towards the law's transgression (since the Law is the internal limitation of the oedipal law to be an absolute law), Lacan comes to terms with the idea of the Real, the void of the Kantian ethics. Following Kant, Lacan defines *pure desire* as that force that aims at desire's purification from all the pathological objects – the different goods – and it is through this purification that one can reach the Real. It is in relation to the Thing (the Freudian *das Ding* – that which the Other lacks and which constitutes the source of one's desire), the core of the Real, that he defines the experience of *jouissance*, the Law of the Real. Nevertheless, in the Seminar on *Ethics*, the Real is unapproachable for the subject and so is *jouissance*. So, even though Lacan recognises the possibility of the subject transgressing the limits of the oedipal law through pure desire, he cannot produce the argument for it. He defines the moral law in terms of an unapproachable void for which the fundamental fantasy functions as protection against pain (*jouissance*), as the Kantian voice of conscience. Consequently, for Lacan, the oedipal law allows access to pleasure and the Law of the Thing renounces access to *jouissance*. The moral law is defined in terms of the Law of the Thing only in order to follow the Hegelian negativity concerning the inappropriateness of every object/good to satisfy the desire of the Other and the eternal search of the subject among different goods. Accordingly, Lacan will define the ethical moment as the "meeting" with that scenario which becomes the veil in front of the void that the Thing represents at the heart of the Real, the unapproachable moral law.

Even though Lacan makes efforts to accomplish the disappearance of the Imaginary object, in fact he defines as ethical an act that circles around that object. At the possibility of realising the lack of the Other, Lacan counter argues that the subject should strengthen its relationship to the Other; this is what the redefinition of the fundamental fantasy indicates. His ethics does not support a free choice since the subject uses the goods, the ideals of the Other in order to redefine its fantasy. Lacan in *Ethics* relates the ethical act to the process of sublimation, which he defines as raising “an object to the dignity of the Thing” (p.112). In other words, an object/good is used in the representation of the Thing. In order for Lacan to demonstrate the beautiful image that sublimation produces, he used Hegel’s reading of aesthetics and Kant’s ideas on beauty. For Lacan, the idea of beauty indicates “a state of excitement ... that is involved in the sphere of your power relations; it is notably something that makes you lose them” (*Ethics*, p.249). In other words, beauty, for Lacan, has a paralysing effect on the function of meaning, on the signifier itself. Meaning “freezes” and this is how its limited possibilities, its lack might become obvious for the subject.

However the function of beauty is dependent on the image, the form of the object is necessary in order for its effect to take place. According to Kant, the appreciation of the beautiful involves disinterestedness in the object, meaning that the object is not valued for its utility (in terms of which a good is defined) or for its actual existence (as far as its form is concerned). So, even though the beautiful image makes the subject give up understanding since it cannot specify the content of the object, its effect is defined as the subject’s fascination in terms of circling around it. The subject does not bother about the object itself. It is in this sense that Lacan reads Kant and argues that the object “disappears”. Nevertheless, Kant makes clear that it is the content of the object that disappears in the effect of beauty and not its form. So, the lack of content/meaning opens up to the point that its form is there in order to be refilled once again.

Hegel, who remained a great influence on Lacan’s ideas, wrote a series of lectures on *Aesthetics*. He developed the idea of beauty in relation to his category of the Ideal. According to Houlgate’s reading of Hegel (1998),

The Ideal is genuinely beautiful, since the beautiful exists only as a total though subjective unity; wherefore too the subject who manifests

the Ideal must appear collected together in himself again into a higher totality and independence out of the divisions in the life of other individuals and their aims and efforts (p.421).

Hegel illustrated the beautiful in terms of art and most specifically through the heroes of tragedy. Even though he believed that the protagonists of a tragedy represent “particularity”, that is, they suffer from one-sidedness, he presents them as beautiful:

For even if the heroes of the tragedy, for example, are so portrayed that they succumb to fate, still the heart of the hero recoils into simple unity with itself, when it says: ‘It is so’. The subject in this case still always remains true to himself; he surrenders what he has been robbed of, yet the ends he pursues are not just taken from him; he renounces them and thereby doesn’t lose himself. Man, the slave of destiny, may lose his life, but not his freedom. It is this self-reliance which even in grief enables him to preserve and manifest the cheerfulness and serenity of tranquillity that characterises the beautiful (ibid, p.423).

Even though Hegel (1819-30) refers to the sum of the heroes of ancient Greek tragedy, it is only Antigone that he commends; “the heavenly Antigone, that noblest of figures that ever appeared on earth” (p.441). According to Steiner (1984), “Hegel’s idealization of ancient Hellas is representative of his generation” (p.22); of a generation which believed that *Antigone* “was not only the finest of Greek tragedies, but a work of art nearer to perfection than any other produced by the human spirit” (ibid., p.1). Hence Hegel’s ideas on *Antigone* were seminal for the majority of the consequent intellectuals who contributed to her analysis. According to Hegel, Antigone’s act accentuates the dialectical conflict between two equal opposites, human and divine law, the family and the state, woman and man. *Antigone* represents the inevitable partiality and so the impossibility of two parts to become One and to constitute the ideal Absolute of the Hegelian philosophy. Even though

Hegel proposes this analysis of partiality and inability of reconciliation for all tragic heroes, he presents (1820-9) Antigone in terms of beauty and her text as “one of the most sublime and in every respect most consummate works of art human effort has ever brought forth” (p.464).

It is in terms of beauty that philosophy managed to give an explanation of what eluded it. It is this beyond of meaning that beauty attempts to conceal. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, beyond its characteristic of searching for meaning at the source of its orientation (the unconscious), it was also defined in terms of the quest for its beyond. Freud (1920) was innovative because he recognised but also had the courage to declare that there is a beyond of pleasure which he attempted to approach in terms of the death instinct. For Freud (1920) there are life and death instincts;

We ... have been led to distinguish two kinds of instincts: those [ego instincts] which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life (p.318).

Lacan, on the other hand, constituted every drive a death drive. This is actually how he follows Hegel on the definition of human desire as a metonymic process in a circular movement. The subject “vitalises” its desire through a material object to the point that it destroys it for another one and so on so forth. The death drive “destroys” the object of desire to the point that it creates a new one *ex nihilo*. Nevertheless, for Lacan this is not a closed circuit process. Through the introduction of the idea of the Other *jouissance* in his later work Lacan moved a step further. The death drive has the power to exit this circular/metonymic movement and so to move beyond the pleasure’s limit that the Other imposes on the subject. However, in the Seminar on *Ethics* Lacan seems to have inherited philosophy’s mistakes. Lacan’s inability (in his Ethics Seminar) to define a state that would characterise Freud’s idea of the beyond the pleasure principle (what he later on defined as the Other *jouissance*) made him succumb to what philosophy has described as the effect of beauty in order to avoid coming to terms with what language cannot explain. Like Hegel, he used Antigone in order to conceal what in *Encore* he recognises as that which “he didn’t want to know anything about”.

This 'beyond of meaning', what Freud called the beyond of pleasure principle, is what tragedy performed on stage and psychoanalysis defined. Tragedy is an exception to pleasurable and beautiful artistic activity. Contemporary with the apogee of ancient Greek statuary, tragedy, in contrast to what most thinkers believe, does not exemplify beauty. Tragedy's aim is *catharsis* (the purification of fear and pity) for the spectators and it is accomplished in terms of their identification with the hero. The hero illustrates catharsis and it is only after its completion that s/he can commit an ethical act. It is catharsis which brings the subject to the position of "counting the vote relative to his own law" (Ethics, p.300), of making a choice relative to the law of its desire, which for Lacan is the essence of man. But while Lacan attempted to read this choice in terms of sublimation, tragedy presents a tragic act in terms of which the hero makes the absolute choice of following its consequences to the end, to death. According to Vernant (1970),

The tragic heroes are men who are placed at the crossroads of action in a world in which all legal values are ambiguous and elusive, and when these men choose the Good on their right hand then all of a sudden Good goes over to the other side and their choice of Good becomes criminal (pp.279-280).

It is precisely the inability of the tragic figure to side with either law (divine or human) that constitutes the subject as a hero. Tragedy accentuates an act which is committed against the interests of life. Tragedy does not exemplify the power of any good over the subject and this is what made psychoanalysis interested in it. It is precisely the disappearance of any good that makes the subject a hero and determines its choice of acting tragically. Aristotle defined the hero of the tragedy as the one who fights against the unsurpassable of his/her destiny; s/he is the one who, blinded by passion, tries to overcome the limits of human possibility. Tragedy is not destiny; it is a choice that the hero makes in order to overcome the latter. What is represented in tragedy is that destiny can only be overcome in terms of death. There is no possibility of changing that. The hero proves that the human being can deny the law that constitutes him/her as the carrier of a predestined life and that s/he does so by realizing that death is the only synonym of

freedom. The climax of tragedy's plot meets death. This is the message of tragedy: the only free choice of the human being is death which is not related to the fear of confronting life but has to do with the shrugging off of a life that is revealed in the eyes of the hero as a game pre-ordered by the Other.

Antigone is the perfect illustration of this. Though Freud did not ignore the brilliance of ancient Greek tragedy, he limited himself to the study of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in order to define the birth of the superego, the birth of oedipal law through the Oedipus complex. It is through a tragedy that Freud defined the birth of human desire. Lacan, on the other hand, has chosen *Antigone* in order to differentiate himself from Freud, in order to present the effect of tragedy as the transgression of the pleasure principle's limit. Now tragedy exemplifies the transgression of exactly this law; it presents the transgression of the limits of desire, of the frame that supports the materiality of the object. But, as it has been argued, even though Lacan has chosen the most appropriate example of transgression, he did not succeed in **theorising** transgression.

Figure 1.1 presents Lacan's ideas on the ethics of psychoanalysis as these can be illustrated by the tragedy *Antigone*.

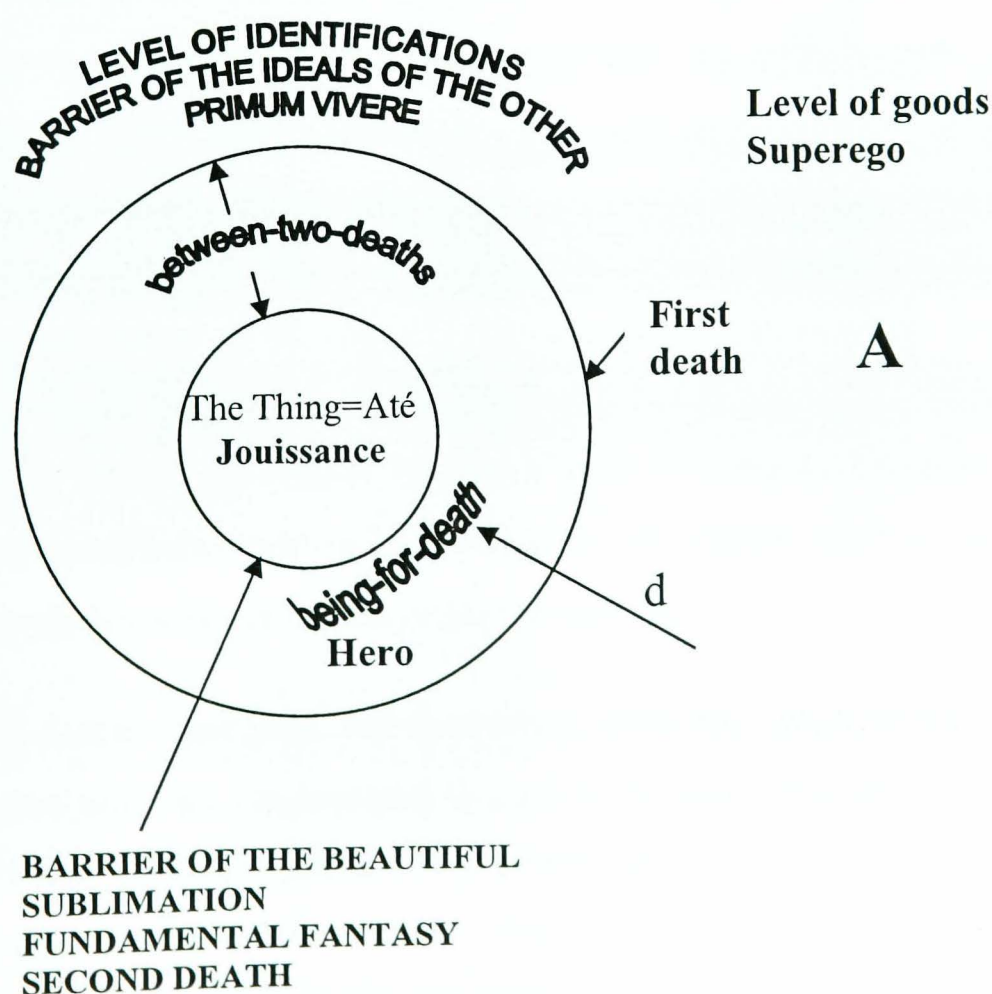


Figure 1.1. Lacan's ideas on the ethics of psychoanalysis

The outer space is the level of the Other, the level of goods, of which the subject has to be purified. Lacan claims that the heroine has transgressed the first barrier from the beginning of the tragedy. She has already been purified from the Imaginary order. The “first death”, the ‘death’ of the materiality that supports her desire, is accomplished. Antigone finds herself in the zone between-two-deaths where every tragedy is played out, according to Lacan. In that zone she comes to terms with her fundamental fantasy, the second and last barrier before encountering the source of her desire, the Thing. She has entered that zone through the power of pure desire, desire purified from the Imaginary “obstacles” that hide its pure nature; desire to desire beyond the support of any material object. It is through pure desire that she comes to terms with the second barrier, which indicates the “second death”, a Sadean idea which signals the subject’s disappearance, the disappearance of the possibility of desiring. But at the same time, in the Seminar on *Ethics*, the Thing, the Freudian *das Ding* is inaccessible to the heroine; there is no way for her to come to terms with it and in this sense the transgression of the second barrier to the source of her desire where Lacan “situates” the experience of *jouissance*, the experience of pain, is constituted as impossible. So, Lacan proposes that the ethical act is accomplished in terms of the fantasy’s reformulation. For Lacan, the ethical moment is related to the subject’s Symbolic knowledge of the structure that defines its desire (*savoir*) and realisation of the possibilities that it has of hiding the lack, of answering the desire of the Other. The ethical act is defined in terms of sublimation which indicates the object’s anamorphosis that results in a beautiful image, the drive’s creation *ex nihilo*. In other words, the ethical act signals the reformulation of Antigone’s fundamental fantasy, the relocation of the object’s position within this structure. Antigone raises the object of her desire (the corpse of Polyneikes) to the dignity of the Thing (her family’s Até) and in these terms she comes to terms with her desire constituting the ethical subject of psychoanalysis. Immobilised at the second barrier, on the frame of her fantasy, *Antigone* represents a beautiful image for the spectator.

For Lacan Antigone, being purified from the effect of the Imaginary order, comes to terms with her fundamental fantasy to the point that she confronts the lack of the Other. This is what his phrase “to traverse one’s fantasy” indicates. At the moment of this realisation, where the subject experiences phallic *jouissance*, it is offered at least two possibilities where it can act ethically depending on the context that we ascribe to the ethical field of action: either it will reformulate its fantasy through the process of

sublimation avoiding the pain of *jouissance* and limiting itself in the field of desire, the field of the Other or it will transgress the limit of its fantasy reaching the state of the Other *jouissance* and so extending the possibilities of acting ethically beyond the effect of the Other. For Lacan Antigone commits an ethical act in terms of traversing her fantasy and by choosing to reformulate it. This is what the process of sublimation indicates. The example of *courtly love* offered by Lacan in his *Ethics Seminar* makes this clear. The poet “illustrates” the lack of the Other by presenting the inaccessibility of the feminine object and a variety of different “contents” that we might ascribe to this lack. Sublimation cannot but signal the triumph of life’s interests over death. On the other hand, the transgression of the limit that the Other imposes on human desire signals exactly the opposite; death triumphs over life. It is in this sense that the tragic hero, Antigone more specifically, illustrates a perfect example for that. The heroine, freely and autonomously (beyond the effect of the Other) chooses not to re-enter the game of life, the game of the Other; she denies to cover up the lack of the Other once more; she transgresses the limit of the Other. So, in order to define the ethical act we have to consider whether transgression is necessary or not.

For Lacan Antigone has transgressed the limit of her desire through the process of sublimation. But if we accept that *Antigone* is the ethical subject of psychoanalysis by virtue of acting in terms of sublimation and if this process signals the Real end of analysis, a number of questions are raised. Like the hero who finds him/herself alone and betrayed at the end of the play, the analysand is supposed to traverse its fantasy and come to terms with the *jouissance* that he/she had “offered” to the Other in order to keep him whole. The confrontation with the lack of the Other signals the end of analysis for Lacan. Nevertheless Antigone does not support such an argument. A number of questions are raised and it is in terms of these that this research began. Is *Antigone* a case of the ethics of desire – is she in the process of sublimation? Does the ethics of psychoanalysis offer to the subject the possibility of a choice? Is it possible for a subject to act freely?

In order for this research to clarify the above questions it has to introduce the concept of object *a* and its double nature. Throughout Lacan’s early teaching the object cause of desire had an Imaginary status; nevertheless, in Seminar X Lacan ascribes to it a Real status. According to this thesis, object *a* is Real, it institutes the lack from which desire orientates. Object *a* is Real to the point that the signifier dresses it up with a *semblant* in

order to hide the lack that it actualises at its core. To be more specific, the Thing, the Freudian *das Ding* is the term that Lacan borrows in order to indicate that the subject's confrontation with object *a*, the object cause of its desire, is traumatic. Object *a* read as the Thing is a lack, a lack from which desire orientates. The subject is supposed to dress up this lack by an Imaginary object, what Lacan named a *semblant*. In this sense object *a* becomes Imaginary. So, object *a* is "situated" on a threshold, the limit that the fundamental fantasy indicates. Being the protagonist of the fantasy, object *a* holds an Imaginary status; but, the subject's confrontation with its Real nature introduces the Real dimension of it which is traumatic. It is through this understanding of object *a* that the schema presented in order to illustrate Lacan's ethics can be developed and can include the act of Antigone as an illustration of the Other *jouissance*. Through this reformulation of the schema, *jouissance* is made approachable. It results from the transgression of the Other's ideals that Lacan wanted to show in his Seminar on *Ethics*. What will become evident is that the two definitions of *jouissance* that Lacan proposes in *Encore* can define psychoanalytic ethics as a case of phallic *jouissance* (at the limit of human desire and so of pleasure) and the act of Antigone as an example of the Other *jouissance* (as the death drive's transgression of the oedipal limit). This calls for a reorganisation of the diagram.

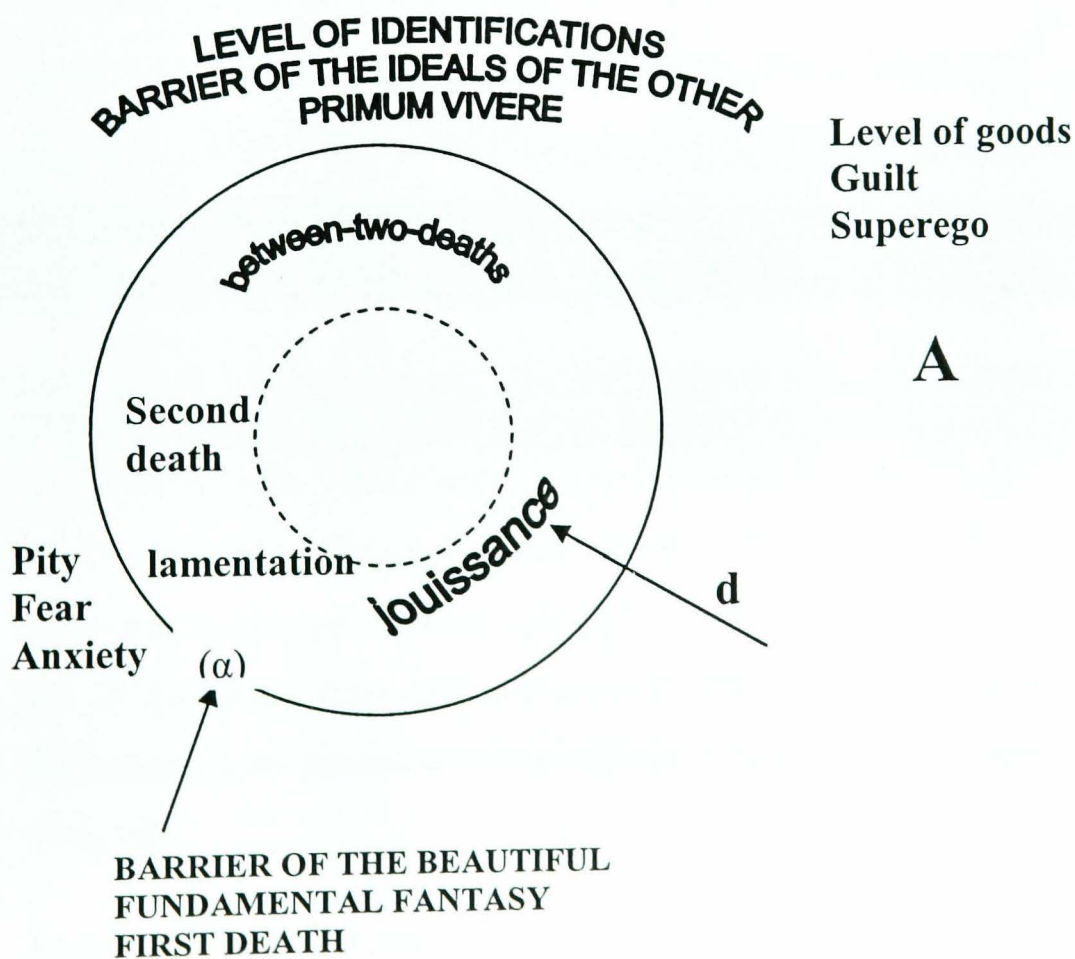


Figure 1.2. Reformulation of psychoanalytic ethics.

This new diagram presents only one limit, the limit of the oedipal law, the law of the pleasure principle that is “articulated” as the scenario of the fundamental fantasy. It is at that limit that the subject confronts the Real nature of object *a*. Coming to terms with its fantasy, the subject recognises that beautiful scenario/construction which inhibits the subject’s confrontation with the Real. It is at that limit where the possibility of acting ethically is located. If we follow Lacan the ethical act is strictly limited to the process of sublimation after the subject’s realisation that the scenario which protects the limits of pleasure is Imaginary. In other words, the subject confronts the lack of the Other and chooses to reorganise its fantasy in order to sustain the limit of pleasure. But if we accept this definition of the ethical field of action we have also to accept that *jouissance* is prohibited by the phallic limit. In order to define the transgression of the oedipal limit, as Lacan wished to do, we have to argue that the act which tragedy represents is not determined in terms of sublimation. The zone between-two-deaths refers to the state where the subject apart from realising the Imaginary status of the object that supports its desire, it comes to terms with the “death”, the destruction of the object itself and not its re-vitalisation as Lacan claims. The first death refers to the recognition of the *semblant* that covers up the lack of the Other and the possibility of re-attaching to it another Imaginary content – this is how the process of sublimation can be defined. The second death refers to the death of the object itself, to the death of the possibility of reorganising a fantasy. This is how the subject unveils the Real nature of object *a*, the Real nature of that object that supports its desire. In other words, the Thing, the traumatic, Real nature of object *a* is not excluded and so unapproachable by the subject, as Lacan believed. The opening up of the lack of the Other offers to the subject another possibility and this is the transgression of the oedipal law to the point that “there is no object any longer” (Lacan, 1959-60, p.249). The zone between-two-deaths is the “space” where the tragic act takes place and makes the hero choose death over life; it is in this sense that none tragic act takes place on scene. Rather a tragedy is played out on the level of the Other and it is the act of the tragic hero that indicates the transgression of this level that is why it is not described, there are no words to explain a tragic act. The state of *jouissance* cannot come to words.

Figure 1.2 makes it clear that the concept of sublimation cannot fulfil Lacan’s wish to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the signifier’s transgression. What becomes evident is that the heroine, through her absolute choice, is in the zone between-two-

deaths, far beyond the limits of her fantasy. The meeting with the lack of the Other is what gives rise to her lamentation which verifies Aristotle's definition of the hero as betrayed and alone. Far beyond the effect of any beautiful image, this thesis aims at showing that Antigone is moved beyond the limit of her image by her death drive. It will be argued that what Lacan defined as "pure desire" is but another word for the death drive, whose function is not limited to a creation *ex nihilo* but extends to its destructive nature over the illusion of pleasure.

In what follows Lacan's elaborations on the issue of the object cause of desire will be presented in relation to the function of the drive. The Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real status of the object will be clarified. The influence of the Hegelian dialectic of the *Master and the slave* will be highlighted in Lacan's definition of human desire as the desire of the Other. The Imaginary object of desire acquires the status of a *semblant* in front of the lack that the object cause of desire inaugurates in the Other. It is at the limits of this dialectic that desire has the function of a bridge between the subject and the Other. Nevertheless, the metonymic nature of desire will define the "autoerotic" function of the drive in this context. The repetitive attempts of the drive to satisfy the libidinal demands of desire will constitute the drive as achieving satisfaction through the process of not reaching its aim, though desire as unsatisfied. The idea that the signifier's demands are never fully satisfied will bring to the surface the drive's ability to transgress the limits that the signifier imposes on the human body. The effect of the signifier on the human body will make clear the dichotomy that it inflicts on it. Beyond the level of pleasure that it can afford (Symbolic body), there is also a great amount of pain with which the body can deal (Real body). The idea of *jouissance* will be related to the possibility that the drive challenges the limits that the signifier imposes on the human body.

A second necessary step is to show how object *a* became the link between the signifier and its beyond, the Real. It is in terms of Kantian ethics that Lacan will try to define psychoanalytic ethics. Nevertheless, at the point at which he engaged with the reading of Kant, Lacan had not yet defined the object cause of desire. This research will show how Kant can be read in terms of Lacan's concepts and how the philosopher offers us the possibility of defining both the ethics of desire and those of the drive in terms of the dual reading that he offers of the moral law. It is through the elucidation of Kant's ideas on ethics that the concepts of beauty and sublimity will find their proper place in the ethics

of psychoanalysis. The effect of beauty will be related to the Imaginary order and the idea of sublimity will illuminate the gap that the function of the object cause of desire inaugurates at the heart of the signifier. In other words, on the one hand, sublimity will be related to beauty and will result in sublimation as this is defined by Lacan and on the other hand, sublimity will be defined in terms of the object which is devoid of any mask, of any *semblant* that restrains the subject's confrontation with the fundamental lack of the Other. The study of the issues of beauty and sublimity will provide a basis for the differentiation between the phallic and the Other *jouissance* in terms of the Imaginary and Real status of the object cause of desire, respectively.

Based on the above differentiation, this thesis will attempt to show that the ethics of desire aims at the creation of a myth that tends to sustain the illusion of pleasure. The illusory belief that *jouissance* is lost and can be re-experienced through the function of the pleasure principle mobilises the metonymic function of desire towards the direction of a mythical *jouissance*. It is the filling up of the lack of the Other, the answering to the enigmatic desire of the Other that keeps the myth alive. So the ideas of sublimation and of phallic *jouissance* are brought under the aegis of the ethics of desire and the Lacanian definition of love that tends to the ethics of Oneness. It is in this context that Lacan's analysis of *Antigone* will be presented. Underlining Lacan's emphasis on the issue of Antigone's beauty as this is illuminated by the heroine's attachment to the limit of the second death and Antigone's lamentation as a regret for all those goods that she has denied herself, we will be allowed to offer a clear demonstration of the ideas of phallic *jouissance*, love and sublimation. But there is another ethics suggested by the definition of heroism in the context of ancient Greek tragedy along with the idea of catharsis, defined by Aristotle as the aim of tragedy. What will be argued is that the subject's absolute choice of death cannot but indicate the revelation of the Other's lack, the subject's confrontation with its inability to sustain any myth since the *semblant* of object *a* is not there any more.

The final step of this thesis will be to argue for a different analysis of the text of *Antigone* in which the progressive fading out of the signifier will be traced. It will be argued that this demands that the ethics of the drive be read in terms of the Other *jouissance*. Challenging analyses of *Antigone* by commentators in the field of psychoanalysis – J. Bollack, G. Morel, J. Copjec, J. Butler and A. Zupančič - this thesis aims at presenting

Antigone as an illustration of the Other *jouissance*. Inspired by Lacan's analysis of the text, contemporary thinkers remained enslaved to the philosophical reading of the heroine as a beautiful image and condemned her through a reading of phallic *jouissance*, of beauty and love. Recognising B. Baas' reading of *Antigone* as an exception in the psychoanalytic field, this thesis aims at developing this path and even moving beyond it. For philosophy *Antigone* might be an exemplary example of beauty but for psychoanalysis it is an example of the Other *jouissance*.

CHAPTER

II

**The Object Cause of Desire and its
relationship to the Imaginary, the
Symbolic and the Real**

2.1. Introduction

In order to argue for a different reading of the psychoanalytic ethics, we have first to show how the concept of the object cause of desire changes faces throughout Lacan's teaching. It is in relation to it that Lacan defines the function of desire but also the possibility of transgressing its limits. As we will see, it is around a *semblant* of the object cause of desire that the subject achieves satisfaction and when this *semblant* disappears, revealing the lack that the object cause of desire actualises, the subject is confronted with the painful experience of *jouissance*. The effect of the signifier on the human body can divide it to a Symbolic and a Real one; it is within the limits of desire where the drive circles around the object of desire and human body experiences pleasure and so it is presented as being tamed by the signifier defining the Symbolic body. Nevertheless, the drive is not just circling around a *semblant*; rather it tends to transgress the limits of the pleasure principle revealing the emptiness lying beyond the Imaginary content of the object of desire. The lack that this *semblant* hides is what defines the object cause of desire which corresponds to the dimension of the Real where human body is presented as able to deal with suffering; this is how we can define the Real body. So the object cause of desire will be presented in relation to the three fundamental orders defined by Lacan, in order to support the argument that his main concern was to find a way to define the possibility of transgressing the limits of human desire and experiencing *jouissance*.

What this chapter will present is how Lacan deals with the object of desire in relation to the three fundamental orders, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The issue of desire will be presented in order for its structure (S), effect (I) and cause (R) to become clear. In order for this to happen, the analysis of desire will be divided in two main fields, the field of the signifier and that of the drive. Within the first, desire is defined, following the Hegelian dialectic of the Master and the slave, as a social and cultural product, which aims at supporting the relationship between the subject and the Other. The second field deals with the function of the drive, which while being at the service of the signifier represents the dimension of the body's surplus enjoyment achieved by the challenging of the signifier's limits. In other words, the issue of desire will be presented as holding a double function; on the one hand, it establishes the limits in between which the subject deals with meaning, builds up the certainty of a subjective reality and enjoys the pleasure attained by it. It is in between the limits of desire that the subject "secures" its

understanding of the world around it. In other words, the fundamental fantasy, the scenario which articulates human desire, “establishes” the certainty that it can answer and so satisfy the desire of the Other. On the other hand, the function of desire tends to the meaning’s deterioration by unmasking the inability of the signifier to support it fully. This second function of the signifier will make possible the subject’s confrontation with the Real as that dimension which resists symbolisation and that characterises the body’s painful experience, *jouissance*. It is within this theoretical framework that the material object towards which desire tends is differentiated from the object cause of desire. The material object becomes a tool for the object cause of desire and supports the latter in order to protect the subject from any confrontation with the lack of the signifier, the lack in the Other. In other words, the object towards which desire tends masks the lack that the object cause of desire is; it represents a *semblant*, an attempt to signify the lack.

Trying to supersede the Imaginary nature of the subject’s relationship to the material object of desire which offers the subject pleasure and recognition from the Other, Lacan will take advantage of the theoretical elaborations of Hegel on the issue of desire in order to move a step beyond that. Initially Hegel shows that the aim of desire is to limit the subject to the service of goods under the aegis of the pleasure principle whose limits constitute a law that is challenged whenever the subject cannot achieve pleasure from an object and changes it for another good. Following Hegel’s introduction of the dimension of death, Lacan will raise the function of desire to a Symbolic level. This is the level where the drive, the representative of enjoyment, will enable Lacan to detect the vacuum that “inhabits” the Real and constitutes the source of desire.

At the Symbolic level the subject comes to terms with the illusion of the material object, its presence (life) and absence (death); its position within a game, which is set up by the Other and realises its slavish nature in relation to him. It is at that moment that the subject acquires a Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) of its specific relationship to the Other. Additionally, it is then that the subject has the ability of changing its position in this dialectic by redefining the material object through which it deals with the Other. Nevertheless, the redefinition of the material object underlines the circular movement of the Hegelian dialectic which implies the death and rebirth of the object of desire. But, this process does not leave the body indifferent since it is the function of the drive that “allows” the redefinition or not of the object towards which desire tends. When the

materiality (the Imaginary content) of this object is decomposed the drive cannot sustain the desirable distance from that dimension which does not lack anything, from the absolute emptiness that characterises the Real. The Imaginary object that covered up the lack of the signifier “disappears” and leaves open the gap that it was meant to cover. Therefore the signifier paralyzes and so no limit can be imposed to the “satisfaction” experienced by the body. The moment when (phallic) *jouissance* is experienced brings the subject to a dilemma: either to return to the path of the signifier (by revitalising the dead object of its desire), holding nevertheless a Symbolic, second knowledge (*savoir*), or to quit this circular movement, to quit the repetition compulsion revealing the void that the object cause of desire, object *a* inaugurates at the heart of the signifier. This is where the subject’s resistance to the signifier’s domination might have become for Lacan (in contrast to Hegel’s belief that there is no exodus from this circular movement) the path towards the Real.

2.2. Hegel on human desire

Human desire is a desire for recognition. This is how Hegel defines it through the dialectic of the *Master and the slave* in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807). Desire is the product and the support of this dialectical relationship. This desire is what differentiates man from animal. Meaning that desire is the force that attributes to the given (natural)-being the possibility of acting; in other words, of entering into a *fight-for-recognition*, which presupposes, according to Hegel, that human desire must be directed towards another desire. Human desire is different from animal desire in that it is directed not toward a real, “positive”, given object, but toward another desire seeking recognition for its human value. According to Kojève (1947), Hegel does not argue that desire towards a natural object is not human; rather he says that it is human to the extent that it is mediated by the desire of another directed toward the same object. “It is human to desire what others desire, because they desire it. Human reality is created only by action that satisfies such Desires: human history is the history of desired Desires” (Kojève, 1947, p.6). According to Kojève’s reading of Hegel, human desire for recognition is raised to a value; while the animals’ desire tends to preserve their natural life. To desire the desire of another is to desire that the value that I am or that I represent be the value desired by the other: I want him to recognise my value as his value. Of course, the animal

desire is the basis for the human desire, meaning that the human being must overcome his biological need for preservation in order to attain human desire. In other words, according to Kojève, man's humanity "comes to light" only if he risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human desire" (ibid, p.7). This is how the *Fight-for-Recognition*, that Hegel introduces as a prerequisite for human desire, can be read.

Following Hegel (1807), the action, the attempt to actualise desire, tends to satisfy the subject by negating, destroying or just transforming the desired object. In other words, all action is negating. Since desire is realised as action negating the given, and since this desire is at the heart of the human being's essence, the very being of man will be action, negating action that Hegel assimilates to freedom and death, or better, to freedom as death.

It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not just being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only being-for-self (§187).

The human being has to act in order to enter the *fight for recognition*. This act presupposes the possibility of death. And if we accept that freedom is a synonym of death, we have also to accept that in this dialectic someone has to sacrifice his freedom in order to remain alive; and this is the slave. It is the slave who acts in order to achieve the recognition in this fight. The slave, as a given-(natural) being, tries to negate its given nature forced by the desire that it acquired through its fight with the Master. According to Hegel (1807), the slave, in its animal life, is one with the natural world of things to which it is bound. The Master, on the other hand, is related to a thing, the object of his desire and he sees in things only a simple means of satisfying his desire and in satisfying it, he destroys things, he consumes them. So, in between the Master and the slave there is an object; this is what mediates their relationship and this object is what the slave has produced as an offering to the desire of the Master, but also as the means to relate to him.

Hence, desire for Hegel is born in the dialectic of the Master and the slave as a prerequisite for their relationship. It is related to nature, to the slave who has to create an object as an offering but also as a way to pursue the desire of the Master. So, the Master is actualised through an object; an object that the slave creates in order to answer the enigmatic desire of the Master. The slave needs an object in order to get the recognition of the Master and the latter needs this object in order to exist. So, in this dialectic the slave acts and so is alive and the Master consumes what the slave produces. In other words, the Master is dead if the slave chooses not to produce an object for him. Nevertheless it is a vital need for the slave that the Master should remain alive; that it should attach to him some form of desire in relation to an object.

The creation of an object by work corresponds, according to Hegel (1807), to the fact that the slave's consciousness dialectically overcomes the opposed form that exists as a natural given-being. Following again Hegel, man achieves its true autonomy after surmounting the fear of death by work performed in the service of an all-powerful Master. And to serve a Master is to obey his law. In this way, we can read Hegel as describing a natural world hostile to man. In the sense that the Master dominates this natural world and since his desire is not known because he is actually dead, the slave has to negate the totality of the given world as such in order to create a subjective one in which it will try to find a proper and possible place for the Master to exist. Accordingly, the "world" of the slave is a continuous struggle in the service of the Master's desire; indeed we can talk of this world as an impasse, where no object can fully satisfy the Master since the latter's desire constitutively remains enigmatic. It is evident that it is the slave who gives a position, who gives birth to the Master; in the sense that the slave submits itself to the service of the Master in a specific way offering him the objects of its work in order to satisfy him in the way that the slave has "decided" to. This decision is in Lacanian terms what structures human desire. The Master, on the other hand, is enslaved in the world that the slave has created for him; "he can never detach himself from the world that he lives in, he only perishes with [this world's] perish", as Kojève says (p.22). In other words, it is the Master who is a slave in the world of the slave. If the slave decides to give a different position to the Master, the latter has no other option than obeying to it. Certainly, the fact that the slave works/acts is not a sufficient condition for its freedom, but by transforming this world the slave transforms itself too, and thus creates the new subjective conditions that permit it to take up once more the liberating

Fight-for-recognition that it refused in the beginning for fear of death. But, as we will see and as Hegel proposes, the Master is the carrot and the stick for the slave; in the sense that human desire, is born in the dialectic of the Master and the slave; so, there is no possibility of a slave standing alone. This is the idea of negation; meaning that the slave, after realising that the Master remains unsatisfied, takes up a new position in relation to him. The slave reconstructs their relationship as an attempt to satisfy him but also itself. This is what Hegel means by the slave who re-enters the *Fight-for-recognition*. So the slave negates its position in relation to the Other in a way that instantly negates the Other too; but, he immediately reconstitutes their relationship. This process has no end since the slave will always look for a new relationship to an object that will satisfy the constitutively unsatisfied desire of the Master.

This negativity, which “orders” the slave to produce objects that keep the desire of the Master unsatisfied and so alive, is what determines the Hegelian idea of human desire. The idea of negativity has nothing to do with the destruction of an object external to the subject. Rather, according to Kojève, the Hegelian concept of recognition refers to the doubling of self-consciousness within its unity. This can be understood as if each one exists not only as the mirror but also as the punisher of the desire of the other. In other words, it is that the *fight-for-recognition* refers to the struggle between the slave and the Master that is nothing but a fight between the human being and the “shade” of another that it chooses to impose on itself. The slave tries to annihilate its innate nature, to transform the natural world, in order to satisfy the desire of the Master/Other who offers it the possibility of being recognised. So, the doubling of this process refers to the movement from the purely subjective certainty that each has of its own value, from the microcosm, to the macrocosm, to the recognised value accepted universally. This is how Hegel introduces the idea of the Particular and the Universal; the former refers to the slave and the latter to the Master. The Master becomes an alterity of the slave in the sense that the slave tries to impose rules on its own chaotic nature. So, the slave succumbs and depends on the Master who now becomes a regulator, a guarantee, a reference point for its subjective world. But since the Master is dead, his desire is not “known” because a dead alterity has no desire; so the slave will everlastingly guess what that desire might be and so it will never satisfy the Master; hence the former must overcome him dialectically, as Hegel proposes. This is how Hegel introduces the idea of the Individual which indicates a synthesis of the Particular and the Universal, of the slave and the Master.

Nevertheless, Hegel does not believe that such a synthesis is possible because, as we have already detected in his philosophy, the slave will not quit from its attempt to satisfy the Master. The slave, after the negation of the object's formation, it will create a new one in order to keep this circularity going on. It is only through this process of creating new objects that the slave achieves the vital illusion of recognition.

What is expressed in the *fight-for-recognition* is Hegel's attempt to reconcile the particular (slave) with the universal (Master) in order to reach Individuality. This can be also expressed by Kojève's reading of this circular movement as an equation of being + nothing = becoming. Rather, according to Žižek (1993), we have to focus on the issue of negativity in order to conclude that the subject/slave is constituted as alienated in this process.

When we reach the apogee of this dialectic, 'absolute freedom', the exchange between the particular and the universal will, the subject gets nothing in exchange for everything. He passes into an empty nothing (p.23).

It is clear that in the Hegelian philosophy the element of negativity/nothingness is crucial. The ideal of Individuality consists of absolute freedom, which the subject has already sacrificed in order to remain alive. This indicates that what rests from the dialectic is an "empty subject" that Žižek calls an "empty nothing". "Being + Nothing" is our essential division in our core; a division that Hegel tries in vain to reconcile. In this way, according to Žižek (1993), we come to terms with the Imaginary "appearance of a complementary relationship between thesis and antithesis, the illusion that they form a harmonious whole, filling out each other's lack" (p.123). This "becoming" refers to the subjectivization of the being; a process that attaches to the subject the "empty form of a container which remains after all its content was subjectivised" (ibid, p.21). This is how we can understand the ideas of subject and object by Hegel; the subject being a form and the object being the content, the stuff of the empty form. Even though Hegel tries to reconcile the subject and the object, he does not succeed in doing so. In other words,

according to Wood (1990), the task of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to get the subject free from its disambiguate thoughts through its confrontation with their essential negativity and so the realisation of their nothingness. The being or the Identity that is acquired by nature should be abandoned in favour of universality (negativity), which leads to individuality. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* exposes the successive failures of this attempted reconciliation. Finally, the Hegelian subject remains alien to itself, unable to detach itself from its otherness. The subject's relationship to its otherness is what Hegel exposes since throughout the *Phenomenology*, though unsuccessfully, he tries to detach meaning from all the Imaginary oppositions that he presents. Hence, the way that the subject relates to the other is what gives it the possibility of producing meaning around itself. So, Hegel's successive failures of detaching the subject from the object present the subject's inability to detach itself from meaning. In this way, the Imaginary nature that Žižek attaches to the dialectic of the Master and the Slave is what mainly characterises it.

However, we cannot ignore Hegel's attempt to elevate being to nothingness in order to reach becoming. This process is defined in terms of circularity in the sense that "becoming" constitutes a rebirth, a new thesis (being) and a new antithesis to no end. What is important to mention at this point is that in the Hegelian philosophy the subject is presented as a void, a lack, which seeks "material" to fill out this gap. This gap, according to Žižek (1993) "separates phenomena from the thing, the abyss beyond phenomena conceived in its negative mode" (p.21). So, even though Hegel tries to empty the subject of every attached characteristic, to take it out of the Imaginary realm, he presents this process as a failure, he presents the subject as being condemned to be enslaved in its alterity. Nevertheless, what is interesting is that at the same time Hegel opens up a great potentiality for the subject. By situating the Master in universality, he automatically devalues him in the sense that he gives all the possibilities of acting to the slave. The possibility of acting is what constitutes the slave the possible "winner" of this fight. As Žižek (1993) claims, "the Master is always an impostor, somebody who illegitimately occupies the place of the lack in the Other...He is of a strictly metonymical nature. He remains forever the metonymy of death" (p.160). In this way, even though Hegel never reaches the desirable result of Individuality, he presents the slave as able of overcoming the Master since the latter indicates, as Lacan claims in his Seminar on *Ethics*, the "great dupe, the magnificent cuckold of historical development" (p.11). The Master is the nothingness that the subject chooses to fill up its constitutive gap.

Hegel (1807) demonstrates that the slave is limited in the natural world of objects; it creates a relationship to the objects around it in order to feel secure in the hostile world that surrounds it. Nevertheless, this sense-certainty, this perception and understanding is not valid; this is not real knowing. Real knowing, according to Hegel, can be found beyond the appearance. Following Gadamer (1976), Hegel at this point agrees with Plato on the following: “there now opens up for the first time a super-sensible world as the true world above the appearing world” (p.40); the universal of the understanding and not that of the sensuous in its appearing otherness. So, Hegel (1807) defines two worlds: the sensuous and the super-sensuous, along with the way that man should transcend the first in favour of the second. The sensuous world is that of actual appearance and the super-sensuous is for itself, which is the opposite of what we perceive; so we are unable to explain what we perceive. That is why Hegel talks about “consciousness of itself in its otherness” (§132-165). But, the difference between Plato and Hegel is that the former situates God beyond the world of appearances while Hegel talks about this beyond as pure appearance. It is an appearance devoid of any fixed determination that corresponds to another appearance; following Gadamer (1976), “it is not appearance as opposed to reality, but rather appearance as the real itself” (p.114).

According to Gadamer’s reading of Hegel, the particular and the universal are the splitting in two that should become one/identical with each other. Everything alive is bound to its “other”, the world around it, in the constant exchange of assimilation and secretion (p.58). So, the philosophic system of Hegel is a circular movement in the sense that once a thesis is confronted with its antithesis it results in a synthesis which is but a new thesis. In other words, the subject creates an object with which it is identified in order to be related to the Other constituting an Imaginary unification. When this object becomes autonomous, in the sense that the subject realises that this object supports the relationship because of a specific meaning attached to it, the object appears as able to support a variety of different significations. It is at this level that the subject comes to terms with the object’s death, the Hegelian idea of negation. So, according to Hegel, the subject attaches a new meaning to the object in order for its illusion of unification with the Other to be sustained. This process of the reinterpretation of the object in relation to the subject can be repeated eternally and can produce the illusion of the unification of the particular and the universal.

As Žižek (2000) argues,

It is not the case that consciousness relates to an external object as to another subject and that self-consciousness then internalises that relation. Self-Consciousness is not my capacity to internalise another subject, but my failure to internalise a resistant object. Hegelian reasoning is not a systematic advance towards the capturing of some truth; rather, it is the recording of a series of failures (pp.125 and 121).

This series of failures is what sets in motion the circular movement of the Hegelian philosophy. The negation of an object is but the subject's confrontation with death since it is through that object that it experiences life; if the object is dead so is the subject. That is why Hegel (1807) insists on the constitutive relationship to death: "In death man can realise his absolute independence and freedom for himself as absolutely negative consciousness" (§188). This confrontation with death, the feeling of terror and threat of death from the Master, is what mobilises the slave towards the creation of a new meaning for the object. So, death for Hegel is essentially negation and rebirth of the object. And if desire is the mobilising factor for this procedure, desire tends to nothingness, to the annihilation of the given object, to non-being. So, death is an "appearance" of negativity, which is the genuine motor of the dialectical movement. In other words, desire is the presence of an absence; it is like a gap, a "hole" in space: emptiness, nothingness. Furthermore, desire that is related to desire is related to nothing. Hence, desire is necessarily the desire to negate the real or present given. In other words, the reality of desire comes from the negation of the given reality. And if we accept that desire is but the obedience to the desire of the Master, or even if the slave's desire is but the identification with the desire of the Master, we have to pinpoint the idea that desire is a construction of the slave which tends to annihilate its given nature. So, the idea of death is attached to the realization of a desire that is but an agreeable construction; the making of a deal between the Master and the slave. Whenever the Master turns down the constructed object of desire, the slave comes to terms with its death and with the need of reconstructing it. Nevertheless, this process makes evident that human desire is based on a construction

that is defined within the limits of the relationship between the slave and the Master and which the slave has the power to formulate and to reconstruct as it wishes.

For it is by the autonomous acceptance of death that the slave “goes beyond” or “transcends” the given-being which it itself is, this “going beyond” being precisely the thought which “reveals” this being to itself and to others, by illuminating it as it were from outside and from the standpoint of a non-existent beyond. A prerequisite for the slave to feel the necessity to free itself is to feel the terror and the threat of death from the Master. According to Hegel (1807), it is only “in death that man can realise his absolute independence and freedom for himself as absolutely negative consciousness” (§188). So, the Master’s presence is absolutely necessary since he is the one who imposes the limits and without limits there is no need to fight for freedom, for getting rid of the limits and so of realising negativity in life. So, death is at the core of human desire; it is towards death that desire tends. And of course, this death, which is related to the idea of negativity, has the meaning of rebirth, of the reconstruction of the slave’s relationship to the Master, to the law that makes nature less frightening. It is in these terms of death and rebirth that Hegel defines the dialectic of the Master and the slave and it is through this that the slave achieves pleasure. The procedure of creating objects for the Master’s satisfaction offers to the slave a feeling of pleasure since it is in this way that the Master offers to the slave the recognition that the latter needs. Nevertheless, the Master will never allow the slave to be fully satisfied in the sense that he will always destroy the object in order for the slave to create a new one. Indeed, it is exactly this process that enables the slave both to transcend its given nature and that offers it pleasure.

Hegel defines the thing, the product of the slave, as autonomous. Following Hegel (1807), the slave dialectically overcomes its attachment to natural existence in all the particular and isolated constituent elements and it eliminates their existence by its work. By working, it becomes Master of nature and it frees itself from its own nature. In this way, it goes beyond itself and also beyond the Master who is tied to the intact given since he doesn’t work. In this way, the Master is fixed in his mastery; he cannot go beyond himself, change, and so progress. In contrast, the slave might be fixed in its determinations (constituting a basis for its belief about the possibilities of satisfying the Master), but it is capable of change; of transcending itself by negating its given state, by acting. In other words, the “raw” material becomes consumable being transformed as

pure negation of the object and as enjoyment for the Master. So, it is through the enjoyment of the Master that the slave achieves pleasure. And this is so because it has a positive ideal to attain; the ideal of autonomy, of being-for-itself (in opposition to the being-in-itself that it currently is) and of which it finds the incarnation at the very origin of its slavery, at the wholeness/autonomy of the Master. But, as we have already seen, there is no wholeness, the Master always lacks something. And even though pleasure is attained within the limits of constructing new objects in order to fill out this lack, to constitute the Master as whole, the slave always tends to come to terms with the autonomy of the thing, to deprive the Master of his fulfilment, to open up his void. And even though this fundamental tendency of the slave could open up a field beyond the limits of pleasure, for Hegel is but a necessary process for his philosophical system to sustain its circularity.

The circularity of the Hegelian philosophy is a never-ending procedure. The slave achieves pleasure by encircling the unsatisfied and enigmatic desire of the Master. Indeed, what the slave does is to try to attach content to this enigma that characterises the desire of the Master. It is in this sense that Hegel constituted the Master as dead and the slave as that one who struggles to keep him alive. This is the game that sets up the rules of pleasure for the slave. And in this sense, Hegel never believed that there is anything beyond this constitutive relationship. The human being will always remain the slave of the Master, offering him as many objects as are necessary in order to keep him alive. It is always in reference to the satisfaction of the Master's desire that the slave acts and it is in these same terms that it defines its desire as coinciding with the desire of the Master. The slave works for the satisfaction of the Master. It produces a number of objects which offer to the Master the possibility of enjoyment. Nevertheless, it is through this procedure that the slave also attains pleasure. So, pleasure is defined according to the demand of the Master for the satisfaction of its desire.

What makes things complicated in the Hegelian dialectic is that the slave is presented as trying to extinguish the limits of the pleasure attained. This means that the slave tends to keep the Master unsatisfied. Even though the slave experiences pleasure, it always tries to transgress its limits in order to redefine it in between these same limits. Through this process the slave comes to terms with death, with negativity, and it revitalises its relationship to the Master through the object. Indeed, it is exactly this process of negation

that offers to the slave the possibility of defining the limits of pleasure. Nevertheless, the limits of pleasure are triggered when the slave confronts the emptiness that defines the object; this confrontation with the Master's gap is what, following the thought of Hegel, vitalises the function of human desire to look for a different content for the object in order to hide the gap and to keep the Master whole.

The experience of negation, the transgression of the world of appearances, of the slave's given nature, is what determines the Hegelian idea of human desire and the pleasure attained by it. Hegel presents the dialectic relationship between the Master and the slave as the way that the subject achieves self-consciousness. Through this dialectic the subject builds, negates and re-builds his relationship to the Master/Other. But, if desire is the reason that sustains this relationship alive, what is the force that mobilises the subject to transgress its limits? If pleasure is the ideal outcome of this dialectic, why does the subject always attempt to extinguish the limits that the Master/Other imposes on pleasure? Why does the subject try to keep the desire of the Master/Other unsatisfied by being enslaved in a circular movement around the empty position of the object to which it attaches different contents in order to hide its lack? Arguing in favour of Žižek's (2000) argument that the Hegelian dialectic records a series of failures regarding the "failure to internalise a resistant object" (p.121), we will see how the Hegelian philosophy becomes the basis for instituting the field beyond the pleasure principle. In other words, if Hegel supports the importance of the dialectic between consciousness and the unconscious, he also makes obvious that the pleasure attained in between these limits of recognition is something that the subject is forced to negate. It is this force that Lacan, beginning from his Seminar on *Ethics*, will define as the source of desire and he will attempt to attach it to the dimension of the Real. Taking advantage of Hegel's ideas, Lacan will attempt to transgress the limits of the Master/Other by de-materialising the object that Symbolically constructs and Imaginarily sustains human desire in order to find its source.

2.3. Lacan following Hegel - the definition of human desire

Through the dialectic of the *Master and the slave*, Hegel has presented how the subject formulates its desire in its attempt to be recognised by the Other. The subject produces an object as the means for its relationship to the Other. This object is the answer to the

enigmatic desire of the Other. The subject offers the object to the lack of the Other by constituting it as whole. Nevertheless, this desire can never be satisfied since the Other will always reject the offer of the subject. Desire will never be satisfied because no object can answer it. This is how the function of the signifier becomes obvious in the Hegelian dialectic. One signifier always refers to another one in order to produce meaning; this is how Hegel explains the continuous change, the metonymy of the object's nature into the function of desire. The subject aims at the satisfaction of the Other and it is exactly through this process that it attains pleasure. The Master represents the law; it establishes the limits of the code where meaning is inscribed as pleasure. The Master represents the ideal of autonomy that the subject is supposed to reach through its continuous attempts to find the proper object that will allow it to be united with the Master/Other. At that level, the object of desire acquires the function of the link between the subject and the Other. It is through that object that any form of exchange is possible; and this exchange refers to the subject's recognition by the Other. So, the object, apart from the fact that it becomes the structural support of desire also functions as a mirror between the subject and the Other. It is through that object that the subject gets the recognition of the Other but also it is through it that the Other acquires substantiality.

However, what Hegel presents is not extinguished at the level of the signifier. Even though the pleasure attained by the inter-subjective relationship between the subject and the Other is defined within the limits of the signifier, Hegel also presents the self-invalidating function of the signifier through the function of desire. It is the function of desire that negates the object that offers satisfaction to the subject. Desire, defined as the product of this relationship, tends to invalidate/negate its function. Nevertheless, Hegel did not trouble about that remark; rather, he included it into the function of desire as an essential characteristic of it. Negation or death becomes for Hegel a necessary and vitalising force for human desire. But, Lacan does not stop at the level of the Hegelian phenomenology; he tries to define a field that lies beyond the Symbolic construction of desire that constitutes it as the desire of the Other. Lacan will introduce object *a* as the cause of desire, which through a disguise, a *semblant* in the world of the signifier constitutes the dimension of lack, of emptiness as the underlying power, as the essence of the human being and of desire itself. In what follows it will become clear how Lacan passes from the materiality of the object, from the signifier, to the field of the drive, to the death drive. This is where the transgression of the limits of the Other will meet *jouissance*

as that experience of the body where no signification can be attached to it, where the subject can choose whether the signifier will exercise control over its body or not.

2.3.1. The concept of desire as a function of the signifier

The concept of desire is central to Lacan's thought. Indeed, Lacan (1964) has adopted Spinoza's definition of desire as "the essence of man" (p.275). The Hegelian distinction between conscious (human) and unconscious (animal) desire does not hold for Lacan since for him desire is always unconscious. The Hegelian unconscious desire of the animal is for Lacan but a biological need. Rather, human desire, according to Lacan, is far beyond biology; it is oriented in the field of the Other and it is always unconscious. Whenever we attempt to bring desire into consciousness (to articulate it) we always lose something; and it is exactly this lost something, this leftover that Lacan calls desire. Following Lacan (1958b), we are limited in relation to how far we can articulate desire due to a fundamental "incompatibility between desire and speech" (p.275). In the "Signification of the Phallus" (1958a), Lacan distinguishes between three fundamental and interrelated concepts of psychoanalysis: desire, demand, and need. Need is a purely biological instinct, which tends to a material object in order to be satisfied. The human being is born in a state of helplessness and in order to satisfy its biological needs it has to articulate them in a form of demand. This demand is addressed to the mOther who is called in order to satisfy the needs of the infant. Nevertheless, the demand for the satisfaction of a need is not just limited to the material object since the presence of the Other becomes autonomous in the sense that it acquires an importance in itself. This special value of the Other symbolises the Other's love, which will allow the infant to be united with its mother constituting a whole, a One. So, the articulation of a demand tends as much to the satisfaction of a need as to a demand for love. But, even though the Other can offer the objects that would satisfy the biological needs of the infant, it cannot provide the unconditional love that the human being demands. The craving for absolute love remains unsatisfied and constitutes a leftover; this leftover is what Lacan calls human desire. "Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting" (ibid, p.287). It is in this sense that Lacan translates the Hegelian distinction between animal desire (need) and human (unconscious) desire. The

former tends to a natural object; the latter does not tend to be fulfilled but to remain unsatisfied since it tends toward something that the Other cannot offer to the subject; it is something beyond the Other. In difference to a need, human desire can never be satisfied; rather it remains eternal in its pressure for something that escapes the field of the Other, that is beyond the field of the Other even though it is partially articulated within the limits of the Other's field (ibid, pp.281-291).

Nevertheless, even though human desire is conscious for Hegel and unconscious for Lacan, the definitions they both give are underlined by the same idea. Desire is the product of the subject's relationship to the Other. It is in this sense that Lacan maintains strong links with Hegel on the definition of desire. For both of them human desire is the desire of/for the Other in the sense that it is constructed in order to answer the constitutive lack of the Other. In other words, desire is born in order to keep the Other whole, to hide the lack of the Other; to deny its inability to offer an unconditional love and to create an illusion referring to it. The subject's desire is identified with the desire of the Other and the object that is created in order to fill up the gap, to answer what the Other wants from it, determines the function of desire. This answer aims at the achievement of recognition by the Other but also at the recognition of the Other as a demanding Other. So, the subject manages to be recognised by the Other to the point that this relationship becomes inter-subjective; meaning that the subject recognises its own alterity in the Other. This process of inter-subjective recognition makes desire essential for the subject who now finds a way to create a sense of subjective reality; the subject offers meaning to the material world around it. Desire becomes the means to keep a meaningful relationship to the Other. In this way, the subject succeeds in having a role in the community trying to satisfy the Other by its work, by the production of "useful" objects. In this sense the rules of the game are set up by the Other who "obliges" the subject to work for his satisfaction who guarantees its recognition. So, desire offers to the subject the answer to how it is going to satisfy the Other who now becomes the legislator for the rules of this process.

For early Lacan, as for Hegel, human desire, even though it is partially realised on the level of the objects does not tend to a material object but to another human desire; it is a desire for recognition and it consists of the ongoing reproduction of desire as such. The realisation of desire on the level of objects is never complete since human desire tends to

something that the Other cannot offer; it always remains unsatisfied. In Hegelian terms, the “realisation” of desire is expressed as a negation; meaning that desire “pushes” to the negation of the object of desire to the point that the latter cannot support desire anymore. This is so because desire has no object, no object can fully support it. The negation of the object signals for Hegel the ‘rebirth’ of desire; it signals the object’s redefinition. What Lacan defines as desire is that unconscious and continuous force that keeps the subject looking among different objects in order to satisfy the Other. So, in both cases (Hegel and Lacan) desire is a desire of or/and for the Other and has a metonymic nature; the subject will always look for the proper object for the Other’s satisfaction. According to Lacan (1957), the subject “eternally stretches forth towards the desire for something else, [desire] of metonymy”, “the indestructibility of unconscious desire founds the chain that insists on reproducing itself... and which is the chain of dead desire” (p.167). This dead desire addresses the dead Master/Other. Accordingly, desire emerges as a metonymy, which tends to keep the dead Master/Other alive; it tends to formulate an illusion. And that is why Lacan defines human desire as oriented in the unconscious, in the field of the Other, and if the Other is dead so is desire. Following Lacan’s argument (1957),

The presence [of the Other] can be understood only at a second degree of otherness, which already places him in the position of mediating between me and the double of myself, as it were with my counterpart. If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, it is in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition (p.172).

So desire, apart from being a force for the subject’s acquisition of recognition by the Other, is also that mobilising force for the recognition of the Other. This is how Lacan defines Symbolic knowledge, which is an inter-subjective process. Desire becomes a force for the acquisition of Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*). The subject tries to discover the Other but also to discover itself through its own alterity; in this sense the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition. The subject tries to recognise its own alterity, that constitutive alterity of the subject hidden at the core of the subject itself and which it cannot reconcile with its conscious self. So, Lacan defines the split of the

subject within itself. In the seminar on *Ethics* Lacan borrows the words of Freud and he writes: “the Other is something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” and according to Lacan, this brings us to the fact that “at the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent” (p.71). However, desire is not the result of biology, the subject is not born along with a desire; rather desire is revealed as a construction in the dialectical relationship between the human being and the Other and it is in this sense that desire is that structure which represents the relationship between the subject and the Other. So, the means that the subject has at his disposal, in order to discover its desire, which attempts to bridge the split within itself, are but the means offered by the Other. In other words, for Lacan (1964), the subject is an empty locus which is signified by the Other. The Other becomes the reference point for the subject; the reference point of signification, of meaning. “The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present” (ibid, p.203). So, the means that the subject has at its disposal in order to investigate its lost Otherness are but the signifiers and their significations. And since there is a fundamental incompatibility between desire and the signifier, Lacan (1959-60) tells us that the subject’s adventure into the paths of desire “can only uncover the structure of a representation” (p.71). This is so because desire does not tend to an object, something that the Other can offer, but to something that eludes meaning, that is beyond the Other. It tends to something that the Other does not have. And this is exactly the revelation that Lacan makes by defining the Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) as the opposite of love that the subject looks for in the Other through its identification with the object that produces the illusion of Oneness.

Savoir is reached when the subject comes to terms with something that resists symbolisation, something that the Other cannot guarantee. So, the representation that desire represents is but a construction, a veil in front of the Other’s inability to engender wholeness; a veil in front of the Other’s lack. This is how the experience of Symbolic knowledge, of *savoir*, meets a limit which becomes the dichotomy between the human being and the Other; a dichotomy that is represented by the divided subject (\$) itself who seeks recognition of itself and its otherness. It is exactly in terms of this dichotomy that desire and subjectivity are simultaneously born, they are synonyms and they both represent the dimension of lack. A lack that the function of desire tends to fill up; it tends to hide the hole that is detected in the Other, or even more accurately to hide the hole that the Other represents in the subject itself. So, the *savoir* constitutes the knowledge of that

structure that becomes a veil in front of the chaotic and enigmatic gap in the Other, of the lack in the subject itself.

At this point we begin to detect a shift in the Lacanian theory of desire. Lacan leaves behind the phenomenology of desire's construction and focuses on what the latter unveils as its mobilising power. This is but the emptiness, the lack that determines the core of desire and so the basis for subjectivity. So, Lacan defines *savoir* as the end point of the signifier's virtuality. *Savoir* consists of coming to terms with what Lacan defines as the fundamental fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$), which is read: "the barred subject in relation to the object". In other words it is that constitutive structure that underlies the subjective world, the subject's relationship to the Other, human desire. The object to which the barred subject is related to is the object cause of desire that Lacan calls *object petit a* and not the material object towards which desire tends. The object cause of desire is dressed up with a variety of partial objects that motivate human desire towards a construction that enables the subject to cover up its fundamental division, the bar that defines the subject in terms of its lack. In this sense Lacan defines object *a* as an Imaginary part-object, an element which is imagined as separable from the rest of the body and is looked for in the other through a variety of partial objects. Object *a* can never be attained, it is the cause that sets desire in motion. It directs the subject towards a variety of objects but essentially it is related to a lack that constitutes every object as incompatible to the satisfaction of desire.

So, Lacan (1972-3) links object *a* to the concept of *semblant* (p.83). The term *semblant* is used in order to differentiate between the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders, between appearance and essence. Lacan (1959-60) states that "it is only he who escapes from false appearances [that] can achieve truth" (p.310). Truth for Lacan is the Symbolic knowledge, the *savoir*; the structure that defines Symbolic order and its relations to the Imaginary and the Real. And since truth is defined through the revelation of the structure that underlies the subjective constitution, *savoir* is found in between the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders. *Savoir* reveals a structure, as J-A Miller (1999) says, it reveals "the fundamental fantasy articulated as a scenario, as a signifying chain" (p.13). But, if the fundamental fantasy supports human desire (which escapes the field of the signifier) and its revelation constitutes *savoir* how are we going to perceive the object cause of desire as Imaginary, as a *semblant*? What does this *semblant* represent and how is it related to the

Real since in *Encore* (1972-3) Lacan has posited object *a* at the centre of the Borromean knot, at the place where the three orders (Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic) intersect?

In order to answer the above questions we have to point out two essential ideas of Lacan (1972-3). The first one is that the human being is hetero-defined, it is an empty locus subjected to the power of the Other, and the second one is that “object *a* is a *semblant* of being” (§85, p.92). The relationship of the human being to the Other is marked by a lack (*manque*). It is this lack of being (*manque-à-être*) that defines the subject by giving rise to desire, which takes the function of a *want-to-be*. This *want-to-be* that the cause of desire, object *a*, incarnates, is a *semblant*; a *semblant* which is built up into the world of significations. Object *a* can be dressed up with any material object that sets desire in motion but it is not a material object itself; it is the cause of desire and desire tends to a lack. So, object *a* has a dual function; it “stands” on the threshold of the Real offering itself to the function of the signifier dressing up the lack. Object *a* seals the gap that defines the human being. It is in this sense that it becomes a “*semblant* of being” holding an Imaginary nature. But, standing on this threshold, object *a* apart from participating in the Symbolic structure of the fantasy it also becomes part of the Real. So, if object *a*, dressed up by an Imaginary object, supports human desire through the Symbolic construction of the fundamental fantasy, it cannot but indicate the subject’s attempt to construct a veil in front of its constitutive lack. This lack underlies the signifier’s inability to attach meaning to everything. The signifier cannot reign everywhere and it tries to built up a strong wall hiding its inability, putting a curtain in front of the Real; this is where object *a* becomes the mask of the Real, a *semblant* that “imposes” on the subject the dimension of an illusory reality, which Lacan in 1973 defined as the “grimace of the Real” (p.6). Every sense of reality, of subjectivity is built upon the fundamental emptiness of being and this emptiness is what characterises the dimension of the Real. So, object *a*, standing at the centre of the subjective constitution, represents a representation (a *semblant*) of that dimension by which the signifier is marked as incomplete.

Nevertheless, this is one side of the coin. We have defined desire at the Symbolic level where metonymy reigns. Desire negates one object after the other indicating that its nature is limited to this process. One signification negates another one forming a desire that has no object. This is where the other side of the coin becomes evident differentiating

Lacan from Hegel. Apart from the function of desire as building up the unconscious, Lacan makes clear that desire has a cause and this cause finds its locus in the Real. For Hegel, the unavoidable negation of the object that the subject offers as a substitute to the lack of the Other becomes the motivating power for the circular movement of this dialectic, which has no end. So, the coming to terms with emptiness implies for Hegel the restoration of the illusion of wholeness. He accepts *a priori* the impossibility of human desire and limits the satisfaction of the subject and of the Other to the maintenance of the illusion of wholeness.

On the other hand, Lacan, through the introduction of the idea of object *a*, institutes a constitutive relationship between the unsatisfied and so metonymic desire and the underlying dimension of its essential lack, the Real. Throughout his theoretical elaborations, Lacan attempts to disengage the subject from the captivating relationship to the Master/Other by introducing the Real as that dimension of emptiness which supports desire. And even though, the Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) of that construction (desire) is presented as the end point of the signifier's capability, Lacan argues (1959-60) that "it also leaves us [the subject] in the end standing at the door" (p.21). So, what Lacan attempts to unveil is the illusion of every construction that tries to keep the door shut. He tries to familiarise the subject with that beyond which remains unknown and so enigmatic; he tries to break down the phantasms that oblige the subject to remain in an Imaginary relationship to the Other who becomes a defence against the terror that emptiness implies. Nevertheless, it is the function of desire, of the signifier itself that forces the subject to open up the door and to come to terms with the Real.

2.3.2. How is desire related to the Real?

Desire is an attempt to answer to everything that eludes symbolisation, to answer to the constitutive dimension of lack. Desire institutes the Symbolic order; it is a desire for recognition and so, it keeps the subject totally alienated from its kernel, from the Real. It is in this sense that the Real comes to the centre of our attention. Lacan, in the seminar on *Ethics*, defines desire as the desire for the mOther, for the primordial Other (p.67). This mythical primordial Other does not lack anything, it is the mOther who can offer everything to the human being; it is the Other who, apart from the material objects that

satisfy human needs, is supposed to offer an unconditional love. Of course, there is no such Other, it is just a myth. Nevertheless, the birth of desire indicates the subject's attempt to find it again and whenever this attempt confronts its vanity, the subject redirects its efforts towards another object that would sustain the illusion of itself as part of the mOther's wholeness. So, the Real is that dimension of lack which determines the construction of desire which in its turn builds up and sustains an illusion of wholeness, of the subject's Oneness with the Other. However, even though desire is presented through the construction (fantasy) that "orders" the subject to close its eyes in front of the sight of its split between itself and its otherness, the introduction of the cause of desire becomes the power that keeps desire unsatisfied, that negates every object that is meant to become its *semblant* and that it makes things complicated. In other words, it is object *a*, the dimension of the Real, that introduces the signifier as a self-invalidating function and brings the Real to the centre of this thesis' inquiry.

In the seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan differentiates the material object towards which desire tends from the Freudian idea of the 'Thing, *das Ding*, which he locates at the heart of the Real and it has almost the function of the object cause of desire, object *a*, an idea that Lacan will introduce some years later from the *Ethics* Seminar but of which we can detect the "birth" in this seminar. The Thing and object *a* signal for Lacan the same idea only if we sustain the differentiation between the object cause of desire and its *semblant*; only if we sustain the double nature of object *a*, its Real orientation and its possibility of being "read" in Imaginary terms through the idea of a *semblant*. The Thing, as object *a*, can never be attained rather it is that cause which underlies the representation of a lost object that the subject tries to recapture in vain. This becomes evident since as object *a* is defined as the cause of desire, the Thing, in the Seminar on *Ethics*, is described as the "cause of the most fundamental human passion" (p.97), which is desire, according to Lacan. Even though both (Thing and object *a*) are beyond any possibility of symbolisation, Lacan through the idea of the *semblant*, presents object *a* as capable of offering a link between the Real and the world of the signifier, as being situated on a threshold. So, it is only in its Real locus that object *a* coincides the reading of the Thing. Its Real nature makes it unapproachable since the Real is defined as impossible to the function of the signifier; the Real is beyond the effect of the signifier and in this sense it is traumatic. It is only through the introduction of the idea of a *semblant*, the Imaginary nature of object *a*, that a link between the three fundamental orders can be succeeded and

bring object *a* at the centre of the Borromean knot. Object *a* is dressed up with a variety of material objects that tend to fill up the lack of the Other, the lack that the lost object inaugurates at the heart of the signifier. To be more specific, object *a* takes up the form of a material object which supports the Symbolic construction of desire (fantasy) which determines the Imaginary relationships between the subject and the other. In other words, object *a*, through its impact on different objects, becomes the representative of the Real in the world of the signifier; it becomes a cover although it actualises emptiness. The function of object *a* could not be better described than Žižek (2000) did in terms of the subject's failure to internalise a resistant object; an object that does not exist.

In other words, whatever *semblant* is chosen to cover up the Real nature of the Thing, of object *a*, would never be able to do so. Even though Lacan, in the *Ethics* Seminar defined the Real as ex-centric to the function of the signifier, through this double dimension of object *a* we can see that the Real is but at the core of the signifier, it is around it that the signifier searches for meaning. So, the Real is a definitive and motivating power for the function of the signifier. According to Žižek (1993),

the Lacanian Real is the gap which separates the [Hegelian] particular from the universal, the gap which prevents us from completing the gesture of universalisation, blocking our jump from the premise that every particular element is particular (p.129).

In *Ethics*, the Thing, object *a*, is that part of our self that we cannot signify; it is that thing that is always missing. According to Lacan, “*das Ding* is the element that is initially isolated by the subject in its experience of the Other as being by its very nature alien” (p.52); this constitutes the fundamental alterity of the subject in relation to the Other. So, it is the Thing, object *a*, that constitutes the subject's fundamental division within itself. The Thing is what the Other lacks. The subject accentuates the other as the “holder” of this lost object and constructs a desire which seeks this lost object. It is this lost object that mobilises the subject towards the other who now becomes the place where the subject looks for the lost object. This is how human desire is born. It is a desire that tends to capture this lost object, which the subject is always looking for in the other. This lost object, *das Ding*, is at the core of our being and, according to Lacan, is expressed only

through the lack of representation in the Symbolic order since it is in this way that we “meet it”, as a void, a lack at the core of our being. Hence, it is the inability of the signifier to represent everything that brings this core emptiness to light. In this sense Lacan, in the seminar on *Ethics*, defines the Real and so the Thing as that field which is beyond the function of the signifier (p.54), even though it is at the heart of it.

According to Žižek (1993),

desire is constituted by ‘symbolic castration’, the original loss of the Thing; the void of this loss is filled out by the [IMAGINARY] object (a), the fantasy-object; this loss occurs on account of our being ‘embedded’ in the symbolic universe which derails the ‘natural’ circuit of our needs (p.3).

This is how the differentiation between the Real (Thing) and the Imaginary (*semblant*) nature of object *a* becomes evident. Nevertheless, if object *a* finds its origin in the Real how is it possible to support a construction that tries to put an obstacle in front of its source, the Real? Through this reading, the cause of desire does not attempt to hide its origin rather it is through the function of the *semblant* that it constitutes it as the heart of the subjective constitution. In other words, a *semblant* has the function of the representative of the representation of the Thing, of object *a*. But, even though object *a*, the Thing, is beyond the signifier it is always at the core of our being and we are always looking for it. This makes Lacan (1958-9) introduce the idea of *extimacy* (p.139) in order to explain the object cause of desire as it is located at the heart of the Real: a position of internal exclusion of the object; a position beyond the power of the signifier even though underlying it. If the cause of desire is a *semblant* of being and supports a Symbolic construction with Imaginary dimensions, the Real becomes an excluded field; and this is so because it resists symbolisation. According to Lacan, the lost object is excluded in the interior of the subject. The lost object, the Thing, cannot be stated; it is a lost object. But, although it is essentially a question of finding it again, the object indeed has never been lost (ibid, p.58). Rather, Lacan argues, “it is in its nature that the object as such is lost. It will never be found again. Something is there while one waits for something better or worse, but which one wants” (ibid, p.52). And he goes on,

Das Ding [object a] is at the centre of the subjective world only in the sense that it is excluded. It has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that it is impossible to forget – the Other whose primacy of position Freud affirms in the form of something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me, something that on the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent (ibid, p.71)

Lacan describes the Real as both internal and external to the subject; as external in the internal. The Thing is the centre of this topos; it is that excluded Thing at the heart of the subject, meaning that it is that excluded interior which is excluded in the interior. According to Lacan, that ideational elementarity is in brief the truth of the atomism [individuality] involved (ibid, p.102). So, object *a* becomes part of the signifier's construction in order to bring the Real to the centre of this construction and not in order to built a wall against it. And this is so because the Real is actualised through the power of the signifier; in this sense, at the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent it. It is the power of the Symbolic order that can create the link between the subject (as constructed by the signifier) and its "isolated" kernel. So, the Real is defined as the effect of negativity in the illusory "certainty" that the function of the signifier offers to the subject. The Real is according to Lacan (1953-4) "that which resists symbolisation absolutely" (p.66) and so it is excluded from the function of the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders even though it is at the heart of them. If the subject constructs desire in order to defend itself against the constitutive emptiness, the Real is presented as something external. But there is nothing external that the subject fights with; rather the Real becomes an acanthus at the heart of the Symbolic. Whenever it is presented at the level of the signifier it is in order to indicate the vanity of any attempt to avoid or to approximate it.

The Real, following Žižek (1993), designates a substantial hard kernel that precedes and resists symbolization and at the same time it substantiates the left over that is produced by symbolization itself (p.36). Object *a* substantiates desire through a *semblant* in the realm of the signifier. So, every symbolisation embodies this fundamental lack of the Real expressed in the Thing. In other words, object *a* incarnates the failure of symbolisation. The "internal" inability of the Symbolic is the frame of the "external"

Real. Hence, the Symbolic order is exemplified by its evident inherent failure. According to Kay (2003), Žižek argues that the Lacanian Real is strictly internal to the Symbolic: “it is nothing but its inherent limitation, the impossibility of the Symbolic fully ‘to become itself’ ...precisely as real, ...it is its point of inherent failure” (p.93). So, it is at the core of the Symbolic that the Real is situated. This point makes evident the great difference between Hegel and Lacan, the former attributes to the Absolute a duality at its core (universal + particular), while the latter shows the hole at the core of the Symbolic, which is the Lacanian Real. This is the borderline of the subject’s relationship to the Thing. The subject, even though it is determined by its fundamental relationship to the Thing, is obliged to keep a distance from it and this makes necessary the relationship to the Other as a defence against the painful experience of the Real. So, the subject’s relationship to the Other sustains the illusion of wholeness, which is necessary in order to keep the subject away from the limit that will make it confront its essential Being, nothingness. In other words, we could say that the signifier is obliged by the Thing to posit the subject in a fundamental but also unique relationship to a *semblant* in order to sustain a distance of safety from the Thing. This relationship indicates continuous circuitous movements around the object of desire. This object, according to Lacan, is always looked for in the other. Since the Thing is “designated” as external, but is also fundamentally veiled and suffering from the signifier since it is beyond it, the subject has to look for the lost object in the other. It is the signifier that will follow the “orders” of the Thing in order to enable the subject to formulate its desire. It is the construction of desire that brings the object, the *semblant*, to the position of veiling the Thing, the object cause of desire.

Up until this point we have explored the function of the signifier in the limits of human desire. We have shown how the signifier builds up an illusory protection from the Real even though it represents it as its essential core through the idea of object *a*. But since we have presented the human being as an empty locus that succumbs to the power of the Other, we have also to show how the human body becomes autonomous in relation to the effect of the Real on it. The human body is what is involved when the effect of the Real paralyzes the function of the signifier. Any avoidance of the Real is presented as a defence against the unpleasurable sensation that the body experiences when it is confronted with it. The drives, defined as the partial manifestations of desire, are the manifestations of the signifier’s effect on the human body. Being at the service of the signifier, the drives aim to protect the body from the effect of the Real. Nevertheless, the

drives cannot fully protect the subject from the experience of *jouissance*, which is defined as the painful experience of the Real. In the following section we will see how the function of the drives allows the subject to be protected from the Real. Furthermore, we will see how the experience of *jouissance* reveals the impossibility of the drives to fully protect the subject from its encountering with the Real. So, on the one hand we will see how the drives, by encircling different contents (*semblants*) of the object cause of desire become the route toward satisfaction and on the other hand, we will detect their function as quitting from this encircling movement and so as leaving the human body prey to the painful experience of *jouissance*. It is in relation to the second possibility of the drives' functioning that Lacan, in the *Ethics* seminar, will attempt to present the transgression of the signifier's limits wishing to define it as the ethical act, an act that destroys the possibility of sustaining the myth of Oneness. It is through the drives' quittance from pleasure that object *a* will be presented as devoid of any *semblant*, making the subject to face the emptiness that constitutes its core. It is after the unmasking of the object's *semblant* that human body will be presented as divided between a Symbolic (pleasure) and a Real (suffering-*jouissance*) status.

2.3.3. The fading out of the signifier. The difference between the Real and the Symbolic body

The introduction of the drive to the discussion of desire aims at differentiating between two distinct but also inter-related fields, the field of the signifier and that of the human body. Until that point we have seen how object *a*, the object cause of desire, participates in the Symbolic construction of desire. So, at a first level, object *a* becomes a tool for the construction of a relationship between the subject and the Other. But, what is the reason for this construction? Desire aims at the protection of the subject from the meeting with its unsignified part, the Real. What we have to determine now is how desire manifests itself. The process of its manifestation becomes obvious through a number of partial drives that originate in the field of the subject and are of an Imaginary nature. So, in this section we are going to establish the Imaginary nature of object *a* through the function of the drives. Furthermore, the function of the drives will be presented as aiming at attaining satisfaction through the avoidance of any transgression of their limits. The drives, functioning according to the pleasure principle that is under the aegis of the signifier are

supposed to keep a distance from object *a* in order to restrain the subject within the limits of pleasure, within the limits of the signifier. Nevertheless, what we will see is that the function of the drives is the only way through which the subject can transgress the limits of pleasure and come to terms with *jouissance*, with that painful experience of the body that opens up the gap of the Symbolic order revealing the power of the Real and its consequences. *Jouissance*, the effect of the Real on the Symbolic, reveals a dichotomy to the experience of the body: the signifier constitutes the body as Symbolic (making the drive to circle around a *semblant*) and *jouissance* (attained by the transgression of the signifier's limits) reveals the Real body as experiencing the paradoxical satisfaction of the *semblant*'s dematerialisation.

The drives are partial manifestations of desire and their aim is to attain satisfaction which is manifested on the erotogenic zones of the body. Following Lacan (1959-60), since desire is constituted in terms of the subject's relationship to an object, the drives function at the level of object relations (p.90). Like desire, the function of the drives is regulated by the pleasure principle; it obeys to the law of the signifier. Nevertheless, in contrast to the unsatisfied nature of desire, for Lacan (1964) the drives attain satisfaction by circling repetitively around the object of desire. It is exactly through this repetitive circular path that they attain enjoyment (pp.168-9). The signifier dresses up the object cause of desire with a variety of different contents that the drive circles around and through this process attains satisfaction. This is so because the signifier, through the construction of desire, has already set up the limits to the attainment of pleasure. So, the drives, as desire, are cultural and Symbolic constructs. In relation to the construction of desire, Žižek (1993) argues that "this loss [of the oneness with the Other] occurs on account of our being 'embedded' in the Symbolic universe which derails the 'natural' circuit of our needs (p.3). In other words, the mythical experience of full satisfaction before the human being's submission to the regulation of the signifier is forever lost and any experience of pleasure achieved through the function of the drives is constituted as hallucinatory and deceptive.

Freud (1911) first talked about human organism as designed not to satisfy need, but to hallucinate such satisfaction by sustaining a state of unpleasure. In this sense, he called the pleasure principle, the function of the signifier, the unpleasure principle (pp.36-40). The pleasure principle tries to reduce the quantities of excitation and this is done with the

cooperation of the reality principle, which modifies the pleasure principle and forces the subject to take more circuitous routes to satisfaction. The reality principle safeguards the pleasure principle, according to Freud; nevertheless, their aim is the same: to satisfy the drives (ibid, pp.40-41). Lacan (1959-60), on the other hand, believed that “reality is not the simple dialectical correlative of the pleasure principle”; “reality isn’t just there so that we bump our heads up against the false paths along which the functioning of the pleasure principle leads us”. According to Lacan, “we make reality out of pleasure” (p.225). So, the reality principle is governed by the pleasure principle; indeed, it is the result of the latter. And in this way, it is the pleasure principle, the signifier that limits the function of the drives in relation to enjoyment and which derails the satisfaction of our needs constituting pleasure a hallucinatory experience.

According to Lacan (1964), the drives represent the dimension of enjoyment (p.203-4). Their satisfaction is expressed within the limits of their aim which is exactly this repetitive process that the pleasure principle “orders”. In other words, the drives attain satisfaction by playing with the different faces of the signifier. So, following Lacan (1959-60),

The function of the pleasure principle is, in effect, to lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at as low a level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus (p.119).

So, according to Lacan, the “pleasure principle is nothing else than the dominance of the signifier” (ibid, p.134). But, what does the signifier regulate? Lacan says that it regulates the tension that governs the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus. That tension is but the libido which, regulated by the signifier, governs the psychic apparatus. So, the drives become the regulators between the signifier and libido which is that tension of the Real that overwhelms the subject if the signifier does not regulate it in terms of its law, the pleasure principle. For Lacan (1964),

The libido is the essential organ in understanding the nature of the drive. This organ is unreal. Unreal is not imaginary. The unreal is defined by articulating itself on the real in a way that eludes us, and it

is precisely this that requires that its representation should be mythical, as I have made it. But the fact that it is unreal does not prevent an organ from embodying itself (p.205).

The human body is full of libido; this is how Freud (1905) defined the sexual energy that the pleasure principle tries to regulate. It does so by “commanding” the subject “to enjoy as little as possible”. This is accomplished through the birth of the superego by the castration complex. The subject is “obliged” to renounce its libido being “seduced” by the signifier which “promises” to the subject that it will find it again in its relationship to the Other. Nevertheless, this is not possible and that is why Freud named the pleasure principle the unpleasure principle. Libido, experienced as an unconditioned enjoyment by the human being before its obedience to the signifier, cannot be found again. It is in this sense that desire is constituted as unsatisfied. The drives, partial manifestations of desire, do not content themselves with the *semblant* of object *a* and so they pass from one signifier to the other in order to remain enslaved into this metonymic process where the signifier cannot avoid the uncovering of its inherent inability.

Following that, the drives cannot but renounce every single object that is meant to offer that unconditional enjoyment to the body. It is in this sense that Lacan defines every drive as a death drive since the drives tend to transgress the limits of the pleasure principle in their desperate need to find the lost object that “promises” the full satisfaction of libido. The death drive tends to bring the subject closer to oneness but it never succeeds doing so since every attempt results in failure, bringing finally the subject closer to the signifier’s lack, to death. In this sense, for Lacan (1964b) the drive in the service of the signifier, is excessive, repetitive, and ultimately destructive (p.848). Of course, the function of the death drive is to follow its aim which is to encircle object *a* and not to confront it; it attains pleasure by returning to its circular path, to the repetitive movement of this closed circuit. In other words, the drive, functioning under the aegis of the pleasure principle, avoids confronting the Real since the law of the pleasure principle “orders” the drive to keep a distance from object *a*; it orders it to circle around its Imaginary content in order to avoid any closeness to the Real.

Žižek (1993) elaborates the nature of the Symbolic order in relation to the Real:

The symbolic order 'stands for death' in the precise sense of 'mortifying' the real of the body, of subordinating it to a foreign automatism, of perturbing its 'natural', instinctual rhythm, thereby producing the surplus of desire, i.e., desire as a surplus: the very symbolic machine which mortifies the living body produces by the same token the opposite of mortification, the immortal desire, the real of 'pure life' which eludes symbolisation (p.179).

Žižek's reading of the signifier's relationship to the Real can be challenged if we revise Lacan's phrase that "the word kills the thing". Whenever we attach a word to the thing, whenever we try to represent the cause of our desire through an object, it is the function of the death drive that illuminates the inability of the word to fully mortify the thing. In other words, it is the inability of the drive to attain full satisfaction from the object that every kind of content attached to it constitutes the thing much more powerful than the word which attempts to represent it. Human body is mortified by the power of the signifier in the sense that the pleasure it can bear is limited; nevertheless, it is the repetitive function of the drive and so the metonymic character of desire that constitutes the drive as the only means for the subject to transgress the limits of the pleasure principle. For Žižek (1993), the Symbolic order introduces death as its constitutive element and by its enforcement into the human body it transforms the drive into an "unquenchable longing which can find solace only in death" (p.180). The partial mortification of the Real, enforced by the Symbolic, destines the divided subject to vacillate between life and death. The untamed Real is there, behind the curtain that the signifier places in front of it (desire). The death drive challenges this covering by revealing the inappropriateness of every *semblant* to offer enjoyment to the divided subject. The drive renders death/destruction as the only solution to any attempt of desire to attach content to the Real, to the object cause of desire. And in this way, the death drive involves the subject in repetition through which it pursues its own extinction. This extinction of the drive indicates its attempt at breaking the chains that the pleasure principle struggles to impose on the Real. It is exactly this process that renders desire and so the function of the drive as immortal. The "thing", the surplus that eludes signification becomes the force that keeps the drive on its repetitive and immortal route for a mythical satisfaction.

In this sense death and life change roles in the function of the drive. We could say that if “the word kills the thing”, it is also the opposite that the function of the drive makes evident: the thing can kill the word. The Imaginary representation, the *semblant* of object *a*, around which the drive achieves satisfaction, becomes the mediator between the subject of the signifier and its Real body. Here, we can define the difference between the Symbolic body (regulated by the signifier) and the Real body, which resists the taming of the pleasure principle and “obliges” the drive to extinguish the limits of the satisfaction that the Symbolic body can afford. We have already indicated that the drive’s role is to sustain the distance between the subject and the object cause of desire. Regulated by the pleasure principle, the drive encircles the object in its attempt to attain pleasure by avoiding it (life) and to dematerialise its content in order to constitute it as insufficient for offering absolute enjoyment (death) “obliging” it to find another object and to continue its repetitive function. It is the breaking up of this fundamental Imaginary relationship of the subject to the object that gives the drive the ability of unveiling the dysfunction of the signifier by opening up the gap that renders the Real as an intruder to the “harmony” of signification, as the killer of the word. So, the effort of the drive to transgress the limits of the signifier in order to reach the absolute enjoyment of its beyond, of the Real, brings the subject to terms with the confrontation with the leftover product of signification that cannot be articulated constituting the drive as a mortifying force. This leftover threatens the protection that the Symbolic order offers to the subject and this is the reason that whatever tends to the Real is driven by the tendency of annihilation. The drive encircles object *a*, which “loses” materiality, because it eludes signification; the filling up of object *a* always tends to represent something else. In other words, the function of the drive implies the possibility of object’s *a* uncovering of its *semblant*; the drive’s abortiveness of every *semblant* to support the function of desire brings the subject to the limit of the Real. It is the function of the drive that avoids the Real but can also bring the subject to a confrontation with the Real.

The confrontation with the Real implies the meeting with the void, with the unsignified part of the subject. This is how the experience of meaning’s death is explained. So, the “meeting” with the Real exceeds the limits of the pleasure principle that “safeguards” meaning and that is why it is characterised by unpleasure, suffering. Suffering is strictly related to the death of meaning since what makes the subject suffer is its inability to signify something that eludes “signifierisation”, something that it is beyond the signifier.

As Miller argues “the signifierisation of the Real is never adequate to the Real” (1998, p.21). This is how the object cause of desire is defined; as Lacan (1959-60) says “at the level of representation, [object *a*] is not nothing, but literally is not; it is characterised by its absence, its strangeness” (p.63). For, according to the function of the pleasure principle, the signifier projects into this beyond something of its Imaginary function and this leads to failure since object *a* cannot be represented. So, it is this paralysing effect of object *a*, of the Real on the signifier that makes the subject suffer and that is why it avoids any proximity to it. Whenever this avoidance is impossible the subject comes to terms with what Lacan names *jouissance*, which is but another word for the function of the death drive. *Jouissance* is that painful experience that results in the deconstruction of any myth that sustained the drive in its repetitive function offering pleasure to the Symbolic body and which reveals the Real body as the support of the pain experienced by the transgression of the pleasure principle’s limits, by the effect of the death drive on the human body.

2.4. The experience of *surplus jouissance*

The idea of *jouissance* was inspired by Marx’s *surplus value* which Lacan “translated” as “plus du jouir”. It indicates more pleasure than that which the subject can afford. It is a paradoxical satisfaction produced by the painful encounter with the object cause of desire, the void that brings the Real at the heart of the Symbolic. *Jouissance* is experienced as the disturbance of the equilibrium that the pleasure principle is meant to sustain for the subject. The pleasure principle, the signifier sets up the limits, which are imposed on the experience of pleasure and so its surplus, what is not regulated, is defined as *jouissance*. Nevertheless, it is the limit of the pleasure principle that gives birth to the need for transgression, because without a limit there is no need for transgression. Without transgression there is no access to *jouissance*; so, *jouissance* is produced precisely by the function of the signifier itself. The subject tends to transgress this limit of the pleasure principle, and what it is confronted with, when it does so, is pain, suffering, the meaning’s death.

Jouissance is what characterises the dimension of the Real. It is beyond the power of the signifier which tries to reach the unforgettable point of Oneness through the function of

the drive. Following Lacan (1959-60), “the Real is surrounded by a barrier which makes access to it difficult for the subject to the point of inaccessibility, because *jouissance* appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as that of a drive” (p.209). Nevertheless, we have seen that the drive is satisfied by encircling the object cause of desire and always tends to negate its Imaginary nature in order to substitute it by another one searching for the mythical point of Oneness. So, the function of the drive is described in terms of negation and rebirth; rather *jouissance* appears as a satisfaction achieved only by negation, by destruction, by death. Death refers to the destruction of the barrier that Lacan situates around the Real which is no other than the barrier of the signifier. So, *jouissance* is painful to the point that this barrier opens up, to the point that the signifier is destroyed and emptiness, the gap is what is revealed. Of course, even though the drive tends to find another signifier and to replace the destroyed one, it becomes obvious that desire is never satisfied; rather it remains enslaved within the limits of the pleasure principle. What coming to terms with *jouissance* means is the destruction of the Imaginary grimace of the Real; so, the function of the drive supports *jouissance* to the point that the vanity of its function to find another signifier is revealed.

According to Lacan (1959-60), “the pain [the experience of *jouissance*] should be conceived as a field which in the realm of existence, opens precisely onto that limit where a living being has no possibility of escape” (p.60). However, at this chronological period Lacan proposed that the subject takes refuge in the repetition compulsion in order to avoid the experience of pain. In other words, pain is the result of the collapse of the signifier that sustained an illusion of pleasure and another signifier is invoked in order for the drive to return to the same distance from object *a*. Nevertheless, at the moment of this experience there is no distance of safety from the Real, from that dimension that defeats every Symbolic construction that sustained a limit of possibly attained pleasure. In this sense, the subject is left alone in front of the collapse of everything that constituted its subjective reality. So, *jouissance* is painful because the subject stands alone and betrayed by everything on which it had invested its life (the Aristotelian definition of the hero in ancient Greek tragedy refers to loneliness and betrayal). Lacan quoting Freud states, “the reaction of pain derives from the fact that the motor reaction, the flight reaction, is impossible. And the reason for this is that the stimulation, excitation, comes from within” (ibid, p.59). At that point, where the subject freezes, being confronted by the collapse of what so thoroughly had built up, there is no possibility of addressing the Other since it is

he who “betrayed” the subject. Rather, *jouissance* illuminates the transgression of the illusion of the Other as a whole by destroying every protective construction around the Real.

The idea of *jouissance* is the epitome of Lacan’s attempt to dematerialise the Imaginary object that supports the subject’s relationship to the Other. The idea that a *semblant* covers the void of the object cause of desire constitutes every object that is meant to represent object *a* an obstacle to the experience of *jouissance*. The transgression of the pleasure principle’s limits indicates the dematerialisation of the *semblant* to the point that the painful experience of emptiness is revealed. So, *jouissance* signals the deconstruction of that scenario that attached meaning to the subject’s relationship to the Other. Since that relationship defines the limits of the possibly attained pleasure, its destruction indicates pain, the experience of *jouissance*. So, *jouissance* is exactly the opposite experience from pleasure in the sense that it goes beyond its limits. Since pleasure is defined in terms of the signifier’s law, under the aegis of the pleasure principle, *jouissance* is a transgressive experience. *Jouissance* is experienced after the subject surmounts the limit of the oedipal law.

Jouissance cannot be signified; rather it becomes an experience of the body. That body cannot be the body that is tamed by the signifier; because in that case we would talk about an experience of pleasure. So, the body that succumbs to the law of the signifier is the Symbolic body and the support of that experience that exceeds the limits of that law becomes the Real body, that body which resists or eludes the possibility of being tamed by the pleasure principle. It is extremely important to differentiate between the Symbolic and the Real body otherwise we will be trapped in the idea which Miller (1999) expresses that “the signifier introduces a split between the body and *jouissance*” (p.24). This can be avoided if we define the signifier as introducing a split to the human body itself revealing its inability to tame it whole; some part of the body resists symbolisation and it is exactly that part that we define as Real body. So, the signifier does not impose a dichotomy between *jouissance* and the body; rather it presents itself as inscribed to the body constituting an open ended dialectic between the two. *Jouissance* is produced exactly by the inability of the signifier to signify everything, leaving the signifier’s constitutive gap opened. In other words, *jouissance* is the product of the signifier since the latter constitutes an agency of negation tending to unveil its gap; tending to the Real. So, the

experience of *jouissance* reveals the transgression of the limit that the signifier imposes on the Real body transforming it to a Symbolic one. In other words, if the signifier “orders” the Symbolic body to enjoy in a specific way, *jouissance* (as an idea of surplus enjoyment) indicates that something eludes symbolisation and this realisation paralyses the effect of the signifier on the body revealing the dimension of a Real body that experiences pain.

Following Miller (1999), we can see how Lacan deals with the issue of *jouissance* in relation to the signifier. At the beginning of his elaborations on the issue, Lacan defined *jouissance* as Imaginary. Following the Hegelian dialectic, which refers to the satisfaction of recognition that the subject achieves through its relationship to the Other, Lacan defines the object of desire as the source of *jouissance*. In this period of his teaching all *jouissance* is Imaginary in the sense that he attaches all the investments of the libido (drives, fantasy, superego) to the subject’s constitutive relationship to the object. In this paradigm everything turns around narcissism and the idea of the object’s image. It is in this sense that the function of the object is magnified to the point that all the libidinal dynamism is concentrated on it and the dialectic of the subject and the Other becomes the only channel of the libido and so the only source of *jouissance*. Some years later (Seminars V and VI) Lacan will attach *jouissance* to the signifier indicating a displacement of the Imaginary nature of *jouissance* to the Symbolic order presenting the Imaginary as included in the Symbolic and not as external to it. In other words, all terms that qualify *jouissance* in the Imaginary are transferred to the Symbolic (ego libidinal investments). So, following Miller, Lacan in this second example inscribes *jouissance* to the signifier arguing that “libido is nothing more than the signified running under an unconscious chain of signifiers” (ibid, p.15). So, in this example, Lacan presents libido as totally tamed by the signifier. Nevertheless, the question that comes up through the reading of *jouissance* as Imaginary and Symbolic is how the drive achieves *jouissance* and how is this experience different from pleasure. In the case of the Imaginary *jouissance* the drive is satisfied through the object of desire. In the case of Symbolic *jouissance*, the drive achieves satisfaction by circling around a *semblant* of object *a*. Nevertheless, the drive is characterised by its repetitive function; obeying to the pleasure principle, the drive cannot but keep a distance from whatever might unsettle the equilibrium that the pleasure principle inflicts on the Symbolic body. In other words, Lacan, through these paradigms, presents *jouissance* as a synonym of pleasure since the

function of the drive is exactly to offer pleasure to the Symbolic body. Nevertheless, it is only the drive that can have access to *jouissance* and this cannot be done if it continues to circle around a *semblant*; something else must be inscribed to its possible function.

It is not until Lacan makes a definite differentiation between pleasure and *jouissance* that the latter acquires a transgressive character and signals a shift in his theory. In the seminar of the *Ethics* (1959-60), *jouissance* is defined as transgressive, which Miller (1999) calls the impossible *jouissance* (p.15). Passing from its Imaginary (object) to a Symbolic (signifier) nature, *jouissance* now finds its source in the Real. As an experience, *jouissance* now becomes painful since it is found beyond the realm of the signifier that defines the limits of pleasure. According to Miller, to define *jouissance* as what is outside symbolisation results in the thesis that all of the Symbolic and all of the Imaginary are constructed against *jouissance* – to keep *jouissance* outside. So, all of the Symbolic constitutes a defence against the experience of *jouissance*. Following again Miller, when *jouissance* is assigned to the Real, it is outside a system, and that is why it takes an absolute value that constitutes it impossible. And it is the absolute value of *das Ding* (the Thing) that is constitutive of its *jouissance* value (ibid, pp.16-17). Nevertheless, by adopting the position that *jouissance* is impossible in this reading of Lacan we present the function of the signifier as successful in constructing an absolute defence against the Real. Returning to Lacan's idea of *extimacy* exposed in the same Seminar, the Real is described as excluded in the internal. But, by being excluded in the internal, the Real is not outside a system; rather, it is at the heart of it. And this is not something different than the constitutive gap of the signifier itself, which asks for an object to fill it up. Yet, we have seen that the signifier constitutively lacks something that cannot be represented and every attempt of doing so leads the drive to a repetitive function and desire to a metonymic status. So, we can see that Lacan's definition of the Real as excluded in the internal refers exactly to this constitutive gap which by being at the heart of the Symbolic it constantly mobilises its function by defeating every attempt of the latter to represent it. So, through the idea of *extimacy*, the Real and so *jouissance* signal the necessity of the Symbolic deconstruction in order for someone to come to terms with what is excluded in the interior. Lacan (1959-60) proposes that *jouissance* has a transgressive character not in order to imply that it is impossible to be experienced but just in order to indicate that the transgression of the realm of appearances (p.310) is necessary in order for someone to experience it.

Nevertheless, the problem of *jouissance*'s definition as transgressive is that Lacan has not yet ascribed to object *a* its Real nature; rather it is presented as holding an Imaginary status. But, object *a* stands on the threshold between the Symbolic and the Real. By facing the Real, object *a* holds the absolute value of the Thing and in order to support the Symbolic construction, it is dressed up with a *semblant* that ascribes to it an Imaginary nature. Even though Lacan does not deal with the Thing in such a way in Seminar VII, he has already made obvious that the lack of the signifier has the same function as the Thing has in the context of this Seminar. In other words, it is clear that the Thing is excluded from the function of the signifier but, at the same time it is presented as that "something" which mobilises the function of the signifier since it is at the heart of it. So, the idea of the signifier's transgression underlines the possibility and not the impossibility of *jouissance*'s experience. And this is so, because the drive is already presented as having a double function, as negating but also as giving birth to the Imaginary object. The transgressive nature of *jouissance* is attached to the negating function of the drive. When a construction, a *semblant* is dematerialised, *jouissance* indicates a transgression and it is exactly this mortification of the object's Imaginary status that is experienced as painful. It is specifically the Imaginary content of the object cause of desire that creates a link between the Real and the Symbolic and so the destruction of that link brings the subject at the limit of pain, at the experience of *jouissance*.

Lacan, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, while he defines the experience of *jouissance* as transgressive, as that experience that the subject achieves through the overcoming of the pleasure principle's limits, he does not manage to define a process that can lead to this transgression. This is so because Lacan excludes the field of the Real from that of the signifier; he presents the cause of desire as unapproachable for the function of desire, for the signifier itself. In other words, the subject has no means to transgress the effect of the signifier in order to reach the Real. It is only if we define the Real as the core of the signifier that we can understand desire as tending to its cause through its own function. And this is nothing else than the function of the drive itself. In other words, if desire is determined by its inability to be satisfied, by the inappropriateness of every object to fill up the lack of the Other, the drive is characterised by its state of satisfaction around every object that it places in this lack. So, desire tends to support the illusion of Oneness (between the subject and the Other through the mediation, the dressing up of the object cause of desire) and so it remains unsatisfied; rather, the drive enjoys through the

autonomous object cause of desire, by taking it out of any structure in a sense that it tends to constitute the Other as lacking, as not-One. It is by constituting the object of desire as autonomous that the drive can trigger the limits of *jouissance*. It is by facing the lack of the partial object of desire that the drive can come to terms with *jouissance*. In order to define the way through which the subject would be able to have an experience beyond pleasure we have to follow the drive as this transgresses the limits of desire, the limits of the pleasure principle. It is in this route of the drive that we can estimate a transgression.

2.5. Conclusion

It is the function of the drive that can become a bridge between the signifier, the function of desire and the Real. It is when the subject confronts the partial object, the *semblant* that tends to represent the object cause of its desire, the Thing, that it comes to terms with Symbolic knowledge, *savoir*. Through this object, this *semblant* the subject realises the limits imposed on its pleasure's experience. The transgression of the signifier's limits opens up a field of "freedom" where the subject has a second chance in order to decide upon its life (the first time being that of answering to the demand of the Other through the construction of desire and so through the human being's subjectivisation to the signifier). This field of "freedom" indicates two possibilities; either the subject will reconstruct its fundamental fantasy holding nevertheless a Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) following the Hegelian philosophy and Lacan's definition of desire as metonymic, or it will reply negatively to the Other leading itself to the absolute choice of abandoning the materiality of the object and its circular movement around it. In other words, either the subject will build again a fantasy of Oneness with the Other, or it will move to that space where object *a* institutes a lack. In other words, either the Symbolic body will retain its superiority over the Real one accepting to enjoy the way that the signifier orders it to or the Real body will paralyse the effect of the signifier on it.

It is in terms of this dilemma that Lacan will try to define a context for the field of ethics in psychoanalysis. The idea of an ethical law holding a universal value will be sacrificed to the altar of libidinal subjectivity. The experience of *jouissance* will be a leader factor to Lacan's attempts to formulate a theory on ethics. In order for that to happen, *jouissance* should be totally differentiated from the experience of pleasure. By attempting

of doing such a differentiation, Lacan will pose the questions whether traditional morality (the morality of goods) can coincide with psychoanalytic ethics, or how is an ethical act defined and finally if the experience of *jouissance* can be related to an ethical act. Chapter III will present Lacan's next step towards this direction. We will see how Lacan takes advantage of the Kantian ethics in order to present *jouissance*, though unsuccessfully, as a transgressive experience defining the ethical act.

CHAPTER

III

**The Kantian moral law and the
redefinition of Lacan's
psychoanalytic ethics**

3.1. Introduction

Lacan, in his Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), attempts to define the ethical act as underlining the subject's movement towards the source of its desire. This movement is supported by *pure desire*, a term that Lacan borrows from Kant, which as we will see is nothing other than the death drive related to the idea of *jouissance*. In order to define the route towards the Real, Lacan differentiates between the law of the signifier, the oedipal law and the Law of the Thing. The subject should transgress the limit of the first law in order to reach the limit of the second one where it has the possibility of acting ethically. The law of the signifier defines the metonymic function of desire which restricts the subject to a search for the proper object that would satisfy the desire of the Other; the subject's desire is identified with the desire of the Other. The transgression of the oedipal law indicates the transgression of the field of the goods, of the Imaginary order. In other words, the subject has to renounce the materiality of the object of its desire. Through this renunciation the subject reaches the limit of the Law of the Thing which constitutes every attempt of the subject to answer the desire of the Other as impossible. The Law of the Thing prohibits access to the Real as that mythical state of absolute enjoyment. The Law of the Thing is another word for the experience of *jouissance* to which the subject tends through its attempt to realise its desire believing that it would experience the lost and absolute pleasure, but it comes to terms with the painful experience of *jouissance*. So, Lacan by differentiating between the oedipal law and the Law of the Thing attempts to devalue the materiality of the object of desire in order to indicate the lack that its cause inaugurates at the heart of the signifier; this is what the source of one's desire signals. The Thing, being located at the heart of the Real indicates the emptiness to which pure desire tends. The lost Thing, which the subject tries to recapture in vain in its relationship with the other, indicates a void and in order for the subject to reach it, it has to be purified from the Imaginary order, it has to dematerialise the Imaginary content of the object of its desire. In other words, the renunciation of the Imaginary order is a necessary step towards the Real; it is part of the process that leads the subject to the ethical act. But how is the ethical act defined in terms of the lack that the object cause of desire indicates?

Lacan follows Kant in his elaborations on the issue of ethics and argues that a prerequisite for the ethical act is the subject's purification from the Imaginary order. In

Kantian terms, the transgression of the level of goods corresponds to the process of desire's purification from all pathological objects that are imposed on human desire through the subject's natural inclinations defined by Nature/the Other. This is what pure desire means for both Kant and Lacan. It is after this purification that the subject can come to terms with the Kantian idea of the moral law. Kant proposes two different readings of the moral law. On the one hand, the moral law acquires the status of a void that eludes the possibility of being represented and so gives rise to the feeling of sublimity experienced in terms of fear and awe by the subject. Kant defines the experience of sublimity in terms of the subject's confrontation with the lack of form that might define an object. It is the transgression of the limits of the materiality of an object that creates the experience of the sublime. So, it is the total lack of materiality but also the disappearance of the form of the object that results in the experience of the sublime; this is what the moral law read as a void means. Nevertheless, Kant proposes that sublimity is a first stage which is followed by a beautiful construction which is the subject's answer to the terror that it feels in front the all-powerful Nature. What Kant believes is that the experience of the sublime forces the subject to act "synthetically", meaning to ascribe to the lack a content that will define its moral law. On the other hand, Kant presents the moral law as the voice of conscience which transmits to the subject a specific and prescribed "order", which gives birth to the feeling of respect and the necessity of obedience to it. It is in reference to this option of the moral law that Kant, as we will see, passes from the idea of sublimity to that of beauty. In other words, after experiencing sublimity in terms of the terrifying and incomprehensible moral law of Nature, the subject takes refuge to the definition of a law which relieves the subject from terror and so is defined in terms of beauty. In this perspective the moral law is represented through one object which might elude the possibility of being understood but it constitutes Nature as the creator of it. So, beauty is related to an object that represents the moral law which is imposed on the subject by the force of Nature which knows something more than the subject does.

The field of aesthetics have always been proven a very good rescue for all the impasses of philosophy. Even though Kant recognised the possibility of lack at the level of the moral law he didn't hesitate to fill it up with a beautiful content. The lack is always a problem for theorisation. Nevertheless, it is exactly in this lack that Lacan got interested through Kant's idea of the sublime and he wished to define the ethical act in terms of

meaning's transgression. But his wish was not enough since the lure of aesthetics is always powerful. Lacan fell in the same trap as Kant did. Instead of fulfilling his intention to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the signifier's transgression, he ends up formulating psychoanalytic ethics around the "screen" of the fundamental fantasy, around the idea of the voice of conscience, which is no other than the Freudian idea of the superego.

Even though Lacan defines the ethical act as bringing the subject to terms with the experience of *jouissance*, the process which he proposes for that is *sublimation*; defined as to "raise an object to the dignity of the Thing" (Ethics, p.112). It is exactly this process that constitutes the whole reading of Lacan's Seminar on *Ethics* as problematic since sublimation signals the redefinition of the fundamental fantasy and not its transgression. To raise an object to the dignity of the lost Thing indicates the relocation of the object of desire to a scenario that answers the mythic state of the Other as whole. It is in this sense that Lacan relates sublimation to the effect of beauty. For him, sublimation results in a beautiful image and this is so since the reformulation of one's fantasy hides the lack of the Other once more. Such a redefinition cannot signal the ethical act as a transgression of the signifier's limits. This makes the experience of *jouissance* impossible and so does the wish of Lacan to define the ethical act experienced in terms of *jouissance*.

Even though Kant differentiates between the sublime and the beautiful object Lacan proposes a combination of them. For Lacan sublimation is the process that results in the construction of a beautiful object. He follows Kant on the idea that in order for the subject to experience sublimity it has to be protected in a safe place; according to Lacan, this safety is offered to the subject by its fundamental fantasy. The subject comes to terms with the devastating power of Nature (the Other) and experiences its inability to protect itself from this power. By being in a safe place, the subject has the ability to deal with this devastating power of Nature. This is done in terms of sublimation which is experienced as the ability of the subject to tame Nature, to tame the Other. As it is obvious Lacan defines a process that allows the subject to create a new defence against the Real by representing the Thing. This representation becomes for Lacan a beautiful object. Even though for Kant the idea of sublimity refers to the object's disappearance, Lacan relates it to the effect of beauty which for Kant indicates the disappearance of the object's materiality but not of its form. In other words, Lacan combines these ideas in

order to propose an ethics where the subject comes to terms with the devaluation of the object's materiality and necessarily with its immediate filling up. Even though, the process of sublimation is for Lacan the way through which the subject can transgress the limits of its fundamental fantasy, the effect of beauty does not testify for such a transgression. So, the beautiful object that results from this process cannot but indicate the experience of pleasure and not that of *jouissance*.

The reason that Lacan cannot escape the impasse of the signifier's law is that he constitutes the Law of the Thing, *jouissance* as outside the function of the signifier. At this point of Lacan's teaching (seminar on *Ethics*), the death drive has the function of devaluing an object just in order to create another one *ex nihilo*. In other words, the Hegelian idea of the signifier's circular movement is catalytic for Lacan's thinking. The vital necessity of the subject to sustain the level of pleasure offered by the function of the signifier does not allow for a definition of the signifier's limits' transgression. That is why Lacan cannot define psychoanalytic ethics differently than in terms of sublimation. It is in relation to the creation of a *semblant* of object *a* that Lacan defines the ethical act. It is not until that *semblant* proves incompatible with desire's satisfaction that another one is created in order to take up its place, to fill up the lack in a way that reproduces this process continuously. However, as we have seen, object *a*, devoid of any *semblant*, is what characterises the dimension of the Real; it is what resists symbolisation and actually defines the limits that the Real imposes to the signifier. And even though satisfaction/pleasure is the result of the signifier's function since it is attained within its limits, the drive always tends to transgress its limits; it always tends beyond the pleasure principle. In other words, the demystification of the object's materiality which had supported the illusion of a meaningful relationship to the Other, leads the subject to the painful experience of *jouissance*. So, the experience of *jouissance* is related to the lack of meaning, to the destruction of that relationship that supported pleasure. And the protagonist of that scenario is the death drive. On the one hand, we have the oedipal law as a function of covering up object *a* by a *semblant* and on the other hand the Law of the Real, the death drive as that force that mobilises the metonymic nature of desire to the point of its confrontation with the lack of meaning. It is in this sense that the drive can support the transgression of the limits of the not-whole signifier, the lacking Other, aiming at its lack. So, we can say that on the one hand the desire of the Other is supported by a *semblant* of object *a* and on the other hand in pure desire, the death drive enforces

the disappearance of every mask in front of the void that object *a* establishes at the core of the Symbolic, at the core of the signifier.

So, it is the concept of the object cause of desire, which we analysed in the previous chapter that allows us to reformulate the Kantian ethics following Lacan's wish to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the signifier's transgression. According to Zupančič's (2000) Lacanian reading of Kant, the subject's confrontation with the void, that the object cause of one's desire inaugurates at the heart of the fundamental fantasy, offers to it two possibilities: it will either ascribe to the object another content; a process that will constitute the Other as knowing how the subject should answer his desire in order to keep him whole or it will come to terms with the lack of the Other denying to fill up his lack with another content. The first reading corresponds to the Lacanian definition of the process of sublimation which results in the redefinition of the subject's fundamental fantasy and the effect of beauty and the second one corresponds to the transgression of the signifier's limits and the experience of *jouissance* as this is presented by the Kantian idea of the sublime.

The redefinition of the Kantian ethics is supported by Lacan's ideas on Seminar XX, *Encore* (1972-3), where he differentiates between the phallic and the Other *jouissance*. The phallic or autoerotic *jouissance* is related to the male position where the subject achieves satisfaction through a partial object. The Other or feminine *jouissance* is related to the autonomous object cause of desire that constitutes the Other as not-whole. In the first case the function of sublimation, as this is defined by Lacan, is necessary. In Kantian terms, it is through admiring the *beauty* of a tree (partial object) that the subject can come to terms with pleasure and not with an experience that is characterised by pain since it transgresses the limits of the signifier. So, in order to define *jouissance* as a transgressive experience, we have to keep in mind Lacan's indication that the repudiation of the Imaginary order is necessary in order for desire to reach its pure status, in order for it to reach the Real. So, this chapter proposes that *jouissance*, in the context of ethics should be defined in terms of a transgression of the phallic *jouissance* leading the subject to the Other *jouissance*. In other words, the ethical act should be in accordance with a will to leave the gap of the Other open to the point that the Other disappears. The dematerialisation of any *semblant* destroys the illusion of the Other's wholeness and

brings the subject to the painful experience of its confrontation with the lack of the Other, absolute nothingness that characterises the Real.

It is the function of the signifier, as this is presented through the death drive, that offers a redefinition of psychoanalytic ethics. At this point the death drive does not redirect its satisfaction to another *semblant* of object *a* and the experience of *jouissance* now differentiates psychoanalytic ethics from the morality of the Master, bringing the human body to the centre of ethical inquiry. For Kant satisfaction is at the pathological level; but he does not explain how it is renounced and where it goes. For late Lacan it returns from the Real, it becomes a remainder – object *a*. So, in order for the subject to “move” towards the source of its desire, it has to deal with this remainder; not in terms of pleasure which indicates the materialisation of this remainder but by leaving it there as an indication of its inability to offer a bridge between the signifier and its empty core. This is what the experience of *jouissance* indicates; the rupture between pleasure and the Real. Of course, this is not an attempt to define psychoanalytic ethics as tending to the Real; rather this chapter attempts to show that the ethical act is determined by the dimension of the Real revealing the emptiness at the core of the human being indicating an excessive and painful experience that might have two outcomes: either the subject will return to the field of the signifier holding a second knowledge (this is how the analytic process can result in an ethical act), or it will choose to make an heroic exodus from it (an option that allows us to follow Lacan’s reading of tragedy by elevating the possibility of the ethical act to an absolute choice, to a choice of freedom from the chains of the Other).

3.2. Kant’s theory on ethics

Kant (1785) defines the field of ethics as pure and differentiates it from everyday life which he defines as pathological. At the level of every day life, Kant constitutes the subject as being in relation to a material object, which results from the subject’s desire/incentive. Human desire becomes a force of nature that tends to ascribe content to an object; in this way the subject builds up its sensual subjective world motivated by its natural incentives. The subject’s relationship to its object of desire defines the limits of the possibly attained pleasure based on the process of *understanding*, of attaching meaning to the world around it. The process of attaching content to the object of desire is

the result of a natural drive, a will for life. The opposite process, meaning the dematerialisation of the object's pathological content defines the force of a different drive, a *pure will* which renounces every kind of pleasure constituting it as pathological and which results in an ethical act. In contrast to everyday pathological acts which derive their orientation from the law of nature that tends to sustain a level of satisfaction for the subject, the ethical act becomes the result of the subject's will to follow the moral Law, the Law of *Reason* that tends to *universality* inspiring the feeling of respect and which presupposes the *freedom* and *autonomy* of the subject's will in relation to the law of nature.

So, on the one hand, we have life (the law of nature), and on the other hand, we have the moral law and in between them we have an object, the *transcendental object*, according to Kant. The *transcendental object* is situated in a space where the subject has the ability to act ethically, in terms of freedom and autonomy, through its *synthetic* capacity of making the two fields, which these two laws define, coincide. The *transcendental object* is an empty object standing in between the moral law and the law of nature. Throughout the unfolding of Kant's thinking on the issue of ethics we will detect two possible different readings of the status of the moral law in relation to the *transcendental object*. On the one hand, the moral law is defined as a void which has no possibility of being represented. In this case the transcendental object is defined in terms of sublimity and the subject experiences fear and devastation since its mental capacities are ineffective. Nevertheless, Kant proposes a way out of this stage by means of the subject's capacity to act synthetically; this means that the subject should ascribe to the void of the moral law a content that results in the sublime object's transformation/anamorphosis to a beautiful object. On the other hand, the moral law is expressed through an imperative which takes the form of the voice of conscience and orders the subject to succumb to the power of Nature. In this reading, the moral law acquires the status of a prescribed law to which the subject is passively and absolutely subjected. The Kantian ideas of the transcendental object's *sublimity* and *beauty* epitomise this reading. Hence, in this context, the ideas of freedom and autonomy of the will are defined in terms of the subject's attempt to understand anew the prescribed moral law. In this reading the ethical act is the result of a dialectic between the subject and a prescribed moral law identified with the transcendental object.

Following Zupančič's (2000) reading of Kant, in the case where the moral law is defined as a void, the *transcendental object* can be understood as a part of the subject which it freely abstracts from itself in order to autonomously define it as its own moral law (pp.166-7). This reading constitutes the ethical act as a separation of an object from the subject itself. Through this act the subject can meet the ideas of freedom and autonomy by substantiating a moral law which defines the subject's will towards life, human desire. In other words, the ethical act substantiates the moral law and not the other way around. Nevertheless, this reading might constitute the birth of desire as an ethical act but it excludes the possibility of acting ethically within the limits of desire; it is like the subject having just one possibility of acting ethically and this is defined in terms of its desire's construction. In order to overcome this difficulty this chapter will follow again Zupančič in order to argue that the Kantian idea of sublimity offers to the subject another possible experience than the one proposed above. More specifically, the experience of the sublime object "urges" the subject to act in terms of ascribing content to that object avoiding in this way the absolute and all-powerful Nature. Nevertheless, another option would be the exactly opposite process. In other words, instead of identifying an object with an Imaginary moral law leaving no space for itself, the subject has the ability of separating the object from the moral law leaving it lacking. The dematerialisation of the object's pathological content can lead the subject to the realisation of itself as the author of the moral law. This process can open up at least two different possibilities for the subject: either it will take another chance of "throwing the dice" once again (a process about which Kant has doubts as to whether it can be accomplished on a totally pure basis – the elimination of the pathological content cannot be reduced to zero) or it will quit the possibility of succumbing once more to an illusion that the subject itself has created and imposed on itself. This possibility indicates the destruction of the material object and so the mortification of human desire; it indicates the absolute choice of desire's death. Indeed, this is the only way through which the dematerialisation of the pathological object's content can be verified.

In the following pages we will see how Kant deploys his thoughts on ethics and how his ideas support the differentiation between the two readings of the moral law articulated above. The ethical act will be either defined as the subject's *synthetic* capacity where the transcendental object actualises a prescribed moral law (an idea that Kant defined in terms of sublimity as a stage before beauty) or it will be constituted as the subject's

capacity to negate every possible content of the transcendental object thus accentuating the constitutive emptiness of the object and of the moral law itself (this is how we intent to define the experience of sublimity following the first reading of Kant's moral law).

3.2.1. Human desire as an obstacle to the ethical act

Kant defines the ethical act as driven by a force different from that which forces the subject towards pathological acts. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (CPrR) (1788), he defines the field of ethics as deriving from:

A respect for something entirely different from life, in comparison and contrast to which life and its enjoyment have absolutely no worth. [Man] lives only because it is his duty, not because he has the least taste for living. Such is the nature of the genuine drive [echte Triebfeder] of pure practical reason (p.92).

So, on the one hand we have a drive that "leads" the subject to the routes of life which define subjectivity and frames the experience of pleasure and on the other hand we have the genuine drive that supports pure practical reason which tends to universality devoid of any pathological effect. The former is defined as the *faculty of desire* and the latter as a force that tends to the subject's purification of its desire that constitutively tends to pathological objects. In other words, in contrast to Lacan who defines ethics around the idea of desire, Kant draws a strict line between the pathological structure of desire and the field of ethics. Furthermore, he argues:

Life is the faculty of a being by which it acts according to the laws of the faculty of desire. The faculty of desire is the faculty such a being has of causing, through its representations, the reality of the objects of these representations. Pleasure is the representation of the agreement of an object or an action with the subjective conditions of life, i.e. with

the faculty through which a representation causes the reality of its object (CPrR, pp. 9-10).

Life, experienced by the human being as a subjective reality, is determined by the laws of the faculty of desire. The action, within the limits of life, obeys the faculty of desire and tends to a sum of object representations that constitute reality as subjective. This process, according to Kant in the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals* (FPMM, 1785), defines one aspect of rational knowledge, the material one, the other one being formal rational knowledge, which leads to pure practical reason. The material part of rational knowledge considers some object and defines the empirical part of knowledge, which deals with the content, the materiality of this object. This sort of knowledge follows the laws of desire, which, according to Kant, depends on sensations and indicates a want (FPMM, p.36). Desire, for Kant, is the product of inclinations that reside in the senses and it is exactly this that Kant names “pathological”. So, life, constituting through representations the basis for material rational knowledge, stands for a pathological frame in which the subject is enslaved in a very limited and Imaginary subjective reality of sensual inclinations. The sum of these inclinations is combined in one total, which represents the strongest and most intimate inclination of the human being to happiness (FPMM, p.17). Thus, following Kant, “happiness is an ideal of imagination, resting solely on empirical grounds, and so its possibilities are endless” (FPMM, p.43). It is in this sense that Kant renounces as pathological the feelings and the sum of actions that tend to happiness and excludes them from the field of ethics. In other words,

Our existence has a different and far nobler end, for which, and not for happiness, reason is properly intended, and which must, therefore, be regarded as the supreme condition to which the private ends of man must, for the most part, be postponed (FPMM, pp.13-4) and furthermore, *The more a cultivated reason applies itself with deliberate purpose to the enjoyment of life and happiness, so much the more does the man fail of true satisfaction* (ibid, p.13).

So, on the one hand we have empirical (content-material) knowledge and the inclination to happiness and on the other hand, we have the formal rational knowledge which is

concerned only with the form of understanding and of reason itself, and with the universal laws of thought in general without distinction as to its objects. The science of this latter sort of knowledge defines, according to Kant, *Ethics* or pure philosophy that, in contrast to the empirical philosophy mentioned above (based on grounds of experience) delivers its doctrines from *a priori* principles alone constituting laws according to which everything ought to happen (FPMM, pp.1-2). Following Kant, not only are moral laws with their principles essentially distinguished from every other kind of practical knowledge in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part. When applied to man it does not borrow the least thing from the knowledge of man himself, but gives laws *a priori* to him as a rational being (ibid, p.4-5). In contrast to the faculty of desire which is based on the attribution of content to the objects, at the ethical level we have pure will (defined in terms of its form and not of its content) as the mobilising force towards an ethical act. Pure will should be determined solely from *a priori* principles without any empirical motives-inclinations (ibid, p.6). So, a pathological act is the product of a will determined by the object's content and the ethical act results from a will based on the object's form and more specifically on its pure form.

The pathological act is the result of an inclination; the ethical act rather is the result of duty which is different from inclination. According to Kant, *duty* is the necessity of acting from *respect* for the law. The necessity of acting from pure respect for the practical law is what defines duty, to which every other motive (that tends to satisfaction/pleasure) must give place, because it is the condition of a will being good in itself, and the worth of such a will is above everything (ibid, p.23). The good will characterises the field of the ethical and is distinguished from the will that aims at pleasure. The aim of pleasure influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this or that one, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for everyone (ibid, p.36). According to Kant, nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a Good Will. So, the true destination of nature must be to produce a will, not merely good as a means to something else, but good in itself, for which reason was absolutely necessary (ibid, p.14). So, in order to have moral worth, an action must be done from duty; it should lie in the principle of the will without regard to the ends which can be attained by the action. In other words, an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it (which is satisfaction), but from the maxim by which it is

determined, and therefore does not depend on the realisation of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire. So, an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law. The respect is an effect of the law on the subject and not the cause of it or the object of a common feeling as inclination and fear are. The object of respect is the law only, and that the law which the subject imposes on itself and yet recognises as necessary in itself; it is the result of its will (ibid, pp.18-21).

3.2.2. The moral law and the ethical act

The determination of pure will according to objective laws results in an obligation whose formula Kant called an *Imperative* and is expressed by the word “ought” (or “shall”) indicating the relation of an objective law of reason to a will. Imperatives are only formulae to express the relation of objective laws of all volition to the nevertheless subjective imperfection of the will of all rational beings, e.g. the human will. So, the famous *categorical imperative* of Kant would be that which indicates an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end; it is objectively necessary. If the action is conceived as good in itself and consequently as being necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, it constitutes the imperative as categorical, which is indifferent to any other purpose than being itself a principle of which it is itself a result. In difference to a *law*, which only involves the conception of an unconditional and objective necessity that is consequently universally valid; the categorical imperative is a *command* understood as a law that must be obeyed, that is, must be followed, even in opposition to inclination. The unconditional command leaves the will no liberty to choose the opposite; consequently it alone carries with it that necessity which is required in a law (FPMM, pp.35-44).

The ethical act is commanded by the categorical imperative “act according to a maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law” (ibid, p.66). It constitutes a duty and presupposes a pure will which is good in itself. Pure will has two crucial and absolutely necessary characteristics, freedom and autonomy. Following Kant, “the categorical imperative must be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly

free from its inclinations” (ibid, p.55). So, freedom would be this property of pure will that it can be efficient, independently of foreign causes determining it (ibid, p.78). Nevertheless, Kant was never convinced that freedom (as an ideal conception of Reason) can represent an objective reality since the subject cannot claim any example of its experience; in contrast to nature, which is a concept of understanding and must necessarily prove its reality in examples of experience. This, of course leads to a contradiction since a free subject cannot assume itself to be at the same time subject to the law of nature. So, Kant proposes that we must think of both (reason and nature) as necessarily united in the same subject (ibid, pp.91-92). This is how Kant unfolds his thought:

A thing in appearance (belonging to the world of senses) is subject to certain laws, on which the very same as a thing or being in itself is independent; this rests on the consciousness of himself as an object affected through the senses, and to the consciousness of himself as an intelligence, as independent on sensible impressions in the employment of his reason (p.93).

So, Kant goes on, “behind the appearances there must also lie at their root (although hidden) the things in themselves, and that we cannot expect the laws of these to be the same as those that govern their appearances” (ibid, p.96). But, how is the proposal for these two laws to be united in the subject possible? Kant answers in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793),

The freedom of the will is of a wholly unique nature in that an incentive can determine the will to an action only so far as the individual has incorporated it into his maxim (has made it the general rule in accordance with which he will conduct himself); only thus can an incentive, whatever it may be, co-exist with the absolute spontaneity of the will (i.e. freedom) (quoted in Zupančič, 2000, p.33).

According to Zupančič, we have to “look” for freedom of the will at the level of the law’s constitution and of its necessity, since we cannot be certain about the nature of the

motives/incentives that led a subject to an action (they might have been pathological). Zupančič follows Kant's doubt whether a subject can be purified of the pathological realm of its desire, and defines the freedom of will in relation to the birth of desire.

One has to discover the point where the subject itself plays an active part in lawful causal necessity; the point where the subject itself is already inscribed in advance in what appear to be laws of causality independent of the subject (p.33).

In other words, Zupančič reads Kant's idea of the freedom of will as this is exercised by the subject in relation to the constitution of its own moral law. There is a moment when the subject responds to Nature/Other by formulating its own reaction to it, its own moral law. From that time the subject experiences itself as alien to this law. So, the moral law is determined by the subject itself. Nevertheless, it is through the ideas of *freedom* and *autonomy* that Kant attempts to institute a space between the subject and the moral law where he can be able to define the ethical act as beyond the power of the subject's inclination, as a space where the subject can become once more the legislator/author of its own moral law. Kant (FPMM) wonders: "What else can freedom of the will be but autonomy, that is the property of the will to be a law to itself?" (p.79). So, the will to act becomes a law in itself and this is the point where the subject becomes legislator of the will that determines its acts. In other words, according to Zupančič, there is a relationship of cause and effect between the subject and its will (p.34); the subject is the cause and its will becomes the effect. According to Kant, "the will is not subject simply to the law, but to the subject that it must be regarded as itself giving the law, and on this ground only, subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author) (ibid, p.59). This is where we meet what Kant called the level of *pure reason*, the form of an object as distinct from its content that is related to understanding. The subject's pure reason gives birth to its moral law. In other words, it is the subject that ascribes content to an object and this is what constitutes its moral law. Kant (FPMM) writes,

the will is in every action a law to itself, only expresses the principle, to act on no other maxim than that which can also have as an object

itself as a universal law; the subject must regard itself as the author of its principles independent on foreign influences (p.79-81).

Indeed, this is how Kant defines *autonomy*, “freedom and self-legislation of will are both autonomy” (ibid, p.83). Autonomy indicates the will’s independence from any property of the objects of desire; autonomy at the level of the will as a law to itself (the intercourse of objects of desire indicate heteronomy, which we meet at the level of understanding). So, autonomy and freedom of the will constitute the subject as the carrier of the responsibility for a decision that constructs a law which determines all of his possible ethical actions around its constitution. So, we have the point where the subject acts as the legislator of its law and we have the application of the will determined by this law to the demands of desire/inclinations. The ethical act consists in the freedom that the subject experiences in front of its ability to become the author of its own law that determines its pure/ethical will. What this ethical act indicates is but the creation *ex nihilo* of a new subjective reality; it indicates the emptying out of content of that law that used to determine the subject’s will. So, there is a first time for an autonomous and free act taken upon legislative ground and every other act that brings the subject to this same experience is defined by Kant as ethical act accomplished by a good/pure will, which acts on maxims that have themselves for their object as universal laws of nature. Nevertheless, Kant is not so sure if an ethical act is totally devoid of every pathological inclination; “what the subject morally “ought” is then what he necessarily “would” as a member of the world of the understanding, and is conceived by him as an “ought” only inasmuch as he likewise considers himself as a member of the world of sense (ibid, p.90). In other words, an ethical act, which is objectively recognised as necessary, is always subjectively contingent. In this sense, it is a contradiction that comes up since pure will should be applied to life (pathological field) in order to be defined as ethical. So, Kant wonders: “who can prove by experience the non-existence of a cause when all that experience tells us is that we do not perceive it”? (ibid, p.90).

Nobody can prove that there is no cause of the cause. In the theory of Kant, we can detect, on a first level, the subject and the object in a relationship of cause and effect where the subject decides upon its actions and thinks of itself as free (conscious subject). On a second level, we can see the subject as being prey to the power of an inclination, the

power of its desire that constitutes it as heteronomous, the cause of its inclination coming from nature (subject of the unconscious). Finally, on a third level, we have the subject as freely choosing upon this inclination/incentive and it is there that Kant estimates the ethical level of acting. At that level, Kant talks about freedom and autonomy as two elements that characterise the ethical act indicating the *synthetic capacity* of the subject in a *transcendental schema*. This is the place where reason (this is what Kant calls “categories” referring to the *a priori* concepts of the understanding) and understanding (application of these concepts to the objects of experience as appearances) are united in a third element, the *transcendental subject*. So, the ethical level implies the synthetic act of reason and understanding in a *transcendental schema* where categories are applied to appearances, where forms are filled up with contents. This is where Kant locates the birth of the cause that supports the subject’s inclinations and so constitutes the subject as the cause of its will to determine its actions. The subject chooses the way that its reason and understanding will be united in one schema. According to Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) (1781),

‘The schema’ is in itself always a product of imagination. Since, however, the synthesis of imagination aims at no special intuition, but only at unity in the determination of sensibility, the schema has to be distinguished from the image (p.182).

This schema, according to Kant, is “the schema of a law itself” (CPR, p.72). In other words, the schema is but the categorical imperative that Kant calls the type of the moral law. So, the schema is just a form, a space that allows the subject to act freely choosing content for it. The schema is an empty space into the limits of which content becomes applicable. It is in this sense that the content refers to an image and not the schema. This content is the result of an act. So, the act is what actualises the moral law; it is the act that gives content to this schema. Following Zupančič, the categorical imperative is a “half-said” that expresses the moral law which is a “half-law” (p.163). The categorical imperative has to be supplemented with an actual act by the subject in order to actualise a law. So, the moral law is not already there waiting for the subject to submit itself to it; rather it is the act of the subject that defines the law. The moral law is not determinable in any way prior to the subject’s act; it is the subject that “answers” to the law’s empty form

and gives it a consistency. The moral law, according to Zupančič, “has the structure of an ‘enunciation without a statement’, it has the structure of an enigma or an oracle” (p.164). An enigma has to be supplemented with an act in order to result in a law; it is not a statement that orders the way that the subject ought to act in order to comply with its demand; that is why it is not an image.

Nevertheless, what Kant presents is that once the subject has answered this schema, ascribing to it content, is unable to be totally purified from the realm of appearances, from the pathological objects. In other words, if pure will asks for the subject’s purification from the pathological objects, from the realm of the image, in order to reach the level of the empty schema, there is no possibility of the subject to transgress the level of the image. This is so because the initial alienation of the subject from its own being cannot be bridged over. According to Kant (FPMM), “the categorical imperative cannot be proven just like the will of freedom cannot either since they both don’t follow the laws of nature”, and he goes on “where determination according to laws of nature ceases, there all explanation ceases also and nothing remains but defence” (p.96). This defence is not just the possible declaration that there is no freedom behind the will for an ethical act (that there is always some pathological residue), but the mediation of a schema, a categorical imperative, between the moral law (Law) and the law of Nature (law). In other words, the categorical imperative, this transcendental schema becomes a defence against the infinite possibilities of the moral law’s determination. According to Kant, “the moral law is a supreme law of freedom of which we can only comprehend its incomprehensibility” (ibid, pp.101-2). So, the categorical imperative becomes a defence against this chaotic incomprehensibility. It is in this sense that Kant claimed a few lines above that this schema is the product of imagination. We could add that the moral law ‘offers’ its empty ‘body’ to an object (transcendental object) devoid of any sensible/pathological content allowing for a transcendental schematisation to take place. The subject, through its synthetic capacity, offers a pathological content to this void in order to ‘answer’ the incomprehensibility, the lack of the Law.

The content that the subject ascribes to the schema is a defence against incomprehensibility. It is through this thinking that Kant abandoned the idea of the moral law as a void and replaced it with a prescribed moral law. On the one hand we have the idea that the moral law does not exist before the subject’s act and on the other hand we

have Kant's idea of the subject's answer to a prescribed law as the subject's defence against it. In this sense Kant refers to the transcendental schema as defining a law that answers another Law. The moral Law is imposed to the transcendental law as an impossibility to represent it. According to Kant (CPR), the schema's filling out with content indicates a defence, it indicates the subject's "striving to lighten the burden" that the feeling of respect, which the moral Law inspires, lies upon it (p.81). Respect refers to the incomprehensibility that the moral Law inspires in the subject; that is why a defence is necessary. Nevertheless, incomprehensibility is not necessary that which corresponds to something substantial; rather, we would say that respect is not inspired by a definitive moral Law, by a specific cause, but that it is the moral Law's absence that inspires the necessity of substantiating this lack with something that inspires respect in the subject. Hence, we can see that the moral Law becomes for Kant unapproachable and so the ethical act underlines the "uncovering" of that schema that frames a categorical imperative which tends to protect the subject from the burden of that Law. In other words, there is a mediator between the subject and the moral Law; this is the transcendental object through which the subject creates its Imaginary defence. So, the ideas of freedom and autonomy meet at that "space" of the transcendental schema where the subject is offered the ability to create its defence once again *ex nihilo*. Hence, the freedom and autonomy of will do not coincide with the level of the moral Law; rather, in the Kantian ethics, they acquire status at the level of the transcendental schema.

The transcendental schema, through which Kant presents the synthetic capacity of the subject, is that space where an ethical act can take place. In other words, the ethical act for Kant becomes now the free and autonomous will of the subject to answer to a prescribed moral Law. Kant defines the ethical act as the subject's capacity to unite, to create a synthesis between the unapproachable field of the moral Law and the pathological realm of life. This synthesis takes place at a transcendental level where an object becomes the representation of the moral Law. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that Kant first argued for the dematerialisation of the object of desire to the point that he constituted the moral Law as a void to which the subject tries to attach content in vain. Every attempt to substantiate the moral Law was unsuccessful. So, following Zupančič's (2000) argument, we can define two different readings of the transcendental schema. On the one hand, we have a void at the place of the moral Law and every attempt to fulfil it is constituted as a failure which leads to continuous efforts, and on the other

hand we have a transcendental schema through which the subject attempts to answer a prescribed moral Law. In the second reading, the moral Law takes the form of the superego where the subject remains powerless in front of an all powerful Law and the transcendental schema becomes a defence against it. Here, the subject, after experiencing the sublimity of the all-powerful moral Law, takes refuge to a beautiful content that it places to the transcendental schema in order not to feel this terror again. In the first case, where the moral Law indicates a void, the transcendental object appears as autonomous (devoid of any pathological influence). It is in relation to this object that the subject can become the free and autonomous legislator of its own moral Law. It is exactly the manipulation of the transcendental object of this same schema that will allow us to detect the emptiness of the moral Law that lies beyond it. According to Kant, in this situation the subject is confronted with the emptiness of the moral Law which gives rise to the experience of the sublime but nevertheless the subject's freedom and autonomy is defined in terms of the moral Law's redefinition.

Following the argument of Kant that the object of desire should be purified from its pathological content in order to be redefined through the same means actualising an ethical act, we will detect another possibility deriving from this argument. The dematerialisation of the object of desire confronts the subject with the emptiness that characterises the transcendental object and the free and autonomous will consists in abstaining from any attempt to play the same game again. In order to read differently Kant's ideas on ethics we should introduce his ideas referring to the object's relationship to the effect of beauty and the experience of the sublime.

3.2.3. The transcendental object through the ideas of beauty and sublimity

In this section we will begin with the second reading of the moral Law as a prescribed one which is characterised by the effect of beauty and we will move on to the reading of the moral Law as a void which corresponds to the idea of sublimity. Passing from beauty to sublimity, it will become obvious how the subject can experience the emptying out of the beautiful content that constitutes the transcendental schema as a defence against the experience of the all-powerful Nature/Other. Kant proposes that these ideas are differentiated in terms of the object's utility. Beauty resides in the form of the object, in the limits of its definition. The transcendental schema is offered as a space where the

subject can attach the content that it wishes; this schema results in a beautiful object; this is the reading of the prescribed moral Law. On the other hand, sublimity becomes the experience of the formless, the undefined object. The subject comes to terms with the disappearance of the object and the destruction of the limits that might support the definition of an object as a representation of the moral Law. In this case the moral Law represents a void. Nevertheless, the precondition that the subject should experience sublimity being in a safe place indicates that it has the possibility of the object's redefinition. It is this idea that makes Lacan to combine beauty and sublimity. Nevertheless, this thesis proposes that we shall examine another possibility of the experience of sublimity. Instead of attaching to the transcendental object content once more and so redefining a moral Law, the subject can deny that possibility. It can choose not to re-enter the game of the signifier realising that the Other as the guarantor of a moral Law does not exist.

The Kantian ethical act resides in removing all sensible content from the object of desire. This process results in the subject's confrontation with an object, with the transcendental object, which, in a first reading represents a prescribed moral Law and inspires respect. In this sense, the transcendental object answers the moral Law, which represents an objective reality. Nevertheless, it is the subject's capacity to attach to it sensible content that constitutes it as the moral Law which on its turn defines the application of the law of desire to everyday life. The idea of Kant that the moral Law is objective creates the necessity to constitute the moral Law as pre-existing the subject's capacity to represent it. In other words, if the transcendental object is a representation of the moral Law it is only through the subject's capacity of understanding (filling it with sensible content) that this representation can be accomplished. So, the transcendental object mediates the moral Law and the subject. Nevertheless, as we have already detected in Kantian ethics, the respect that this object-representation inspires to the subject is the result of the incomprehensibility that whatever lies beyond the subject's capacity to understand brings about. Hence the Kantian idea that the moral Law is objective becomes problematic. Rather what becomes clear is that the only objective characteristic that this object (that represents the moral Law) might have is that it is empty before the subject's act of filling it up with a sensible content. This is so because what resists understanding cannot take the form of a representation which is why Kant claimed that the transcendental schema is a product of imagination. So, the transcendental object appears as an empty object which

becomes the ground for building up meaning (filling up the object). It is constitutively “empty”, devoid of any positive, intuitive or “objective” content; it is an object which is in its entirety transcendently “posited” by the subject.

Nevertheless, the emptiness of the object does not eliminate the possibility of a pre-existing and objective moral Law. Rather, in Kantian ethics, the transcendental object takes up the role of the subject’s means to eternally and unsatisfactorily guess the content of that moral Law, which remains there in an unattached beyond of the subject’s power of understanding it. This is actually how the ethical act is defined by Kant: as the attempt to create *ex nihilo* a new meaning for it. So, the synthetic ability of the subject results in a categorical imperative that makes clear, through the representation of the moral Law in an object, what the moral Law orders. But Kant does not stop at this untouchable and unspecified beyond; in the *Critique of Practical Reason* the representation of the moral Law is ascribed the fearful characteristics of voice and gaze,

In the boundless esteem for the pure moral law...whose voice makes even the boldest sinner tremble and forces him to hide himself from its gaze, there is something so singular that we cannot wonder at finding this influence of a merely intellectual Idea on feeling to be inexplicable to speculative reason (p.83).

This law that speaks and watches the subject does not inspire respect anymore; it is fear that replaces respect now. This voice, which is expressed through the imperative “act” by which the categorical imperative begins, can be read as the Freudian superego. The moral Law identified with the idea of the superego results in the subject’s submission to the commands of a personified substance that creates a frame for what an ethical act might imply. This personified substance is situated “within the subject”; in other words, it incarnates the subject’s internal division that constitutes the subject as alien to itself. The transcendental object that substantiates this command represents a fearful moral Law to which the subject has no other alternative than succumbing to it. The moral Law becomes a fearful agent, a voice or a gaze that obliges the subject to answer its demand. It is really peculiar that the synthetic capacity of the subject results in the creation of a schema that terrifies it. In other words, the freedom and autonomy of the will towards an ethical act

creates a law which enforces fear to the subject. This fear corresponds to an all-powerful Law that dominates the subject's life and transforms respect to wonder and awe. Kant (CPrR) writes: "two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (p.169).

This argument of Kant concerning the fearful and all powerful moral Law is related to the idea of the sublime which becomes a step before the creation of a beautiful cover in front of that fearful experience. In the *Critique of Judgment* (CJ) (1790), Kant differentiates between the experience of the beautiful and the sublime object. It is interesting to comment on this differentiation since the idea of beauty is attached to the process of filling up the transcendental object creating a defence against the fearful moral Law and the idea of sublimity refers to the object's resistance of being limited to the sensual world, to the world of understanding. In other words, sublimity underlines the inability of the transcendental schema to protect the subject from the all powerful moral Law. Nevertheless, the idea of sublimity offers the possibility of two different readings; on the one hand, Kant defines it as a two step process where the subject first experiences fear in front of the image of an all powerful Nature and then it is the subject's synthetic capacity that transforms fear to a beautiful representation of Nature itself. On the other hand, sublimity can be read as an experience which can make the subject quit its synthetic capacity. In other words, sublimity, as the revelation of the object's emptiness can result in the subject's withdrawal from any illusory attempt of redefining this lack. After the realisation of the lack the subject can either accept to redefine this pleasurable illusion (passage from sublimity to beauty) or it will quit this process (sublimity).

Kant defines beauty as the effect of the subject's inability to understand. Following Kant's reading of the beautiful object in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), we come up with the idea that the experience of beauty arises from a certain kind of frustration of the "understanding", of our cognitive ability to make sense of the world, referring to the process through which we categorise a particular object as belonging to a general class. Kant contrasts the beautiful with the agreeable (personal preference for a particular object) and the good (instrumental, useful object for obtaining some goal). The appreciation of the beautiful involves disinterestedness in the object, meaning that the object is not valued for its utility nor for its actual existence (as far as it appears). Based

on this latter point, Kant formulates the objectivity of the experience of beauty. What he thinks is that since the beautiful is not the agreeable, and since disinterested contemplation makes personal aims irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic pleasure must spring from what is common in all minds. He bases this objectivity on a certain reaction to the beautiful; this is a reaction described as sensing that there is something to be understood which eludes us. The beautiful object is presented to us through an image of a perfectly comprehensible world, but the meaning is then paralysed, it cannot be specified, the order cannot be fully codified. This process obliges us to give up understanding; we cannot specify the content of the object and we keep on circling around it to the point that we are fascinated by that process and we don't bother about the object itself; the object "disappears". The aesthetic experience of beauty is summed up by Kant in three main characteristics: the specificity of the object, its internal cohesion, and the sense of the depth of meaning (even though we cannot reach it). So, beauty cannot be defined rather it is a matter of the experience of excitation and has nothing to do with any specific concept of the object. By devaluing the materiality of the object, Kant (CJ) talks about a specific and universal state of inability to understand which is not restricted to the definitive quality of a specific object but to the feeling of **pleasure** that its form excites in the subject (§17, pp.79-84).

What makes a natural formation beautiful is the fact that it extinguishes our capacity to understand. Nevertheless, following Zupančič, since the beautiful object is apprehended through an image of a totally comprehensible representation of the world, we do not doubt its comprehensibility; rather we ascribe the possibility of understanding to something beyond us. We attach to the "starry heavens above us", to Nature a knowledge that eludes us. In this sense, according to Zupancic, the beautiful object is but the indication that the all-powerful Nature/Other has the ability to control our understanding and we attach to Nature/Other the characteristic of full knowledge (p.156-7). As we have seen, the experience of beauty is related, according to Kant, to pleasure. So, beauty follows the laws of nature and so the faculty of desire. In other words, if the faculty of desire aims at ascribing content to an object in order to sustain a level of pleasure in life, beauty is the characteristic of the object of desire. An object that allows the subject to sustain a distance from the incomprehensibility of that law of Nature that regulates the subject's incentives is beautiful. Hence, beauty is the characteristic of the transcendental object's content that formulates a defence against the endless possibilities of Nature's

understanding. Therefore, whatever object participates to the formation of a categorical imperative that “protects” the subject from the aggressive character of the moral Law is beautiful.

Sublimity, on the other hand, is defined by Kant as the inability to reason (mental faculty that fits concepts together to make a whole seeking to understand the totality of the world’s experience). So, sublimity transcends every standard of sense indicating that nothing which can be an object of the senses is to be termed sublime. All sublimity involves vast magnitude, and nature, Kant (CJ) says, is most sublime in its “chaos”, in its “wildest and most rule less disarray and devastation” (pp.99-100). In contrast to the beautiful object that sustains its form, the object related to sublimity inspires awe and this is so because it is devoid of form; it represents limitlessness and requires greatness in its size. Accordingly, the feeling that the sublime object inspires is a **negative pleasure**, indicating admiration and respect that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. So, Kant defines two stages for the experience of the sublime; the first one refers to the powerlessness and discomfort (unpleasure) that the subject feels in front of a terrifying spectacle of nature (hurricane, storm, earthquake, etc., or the starry sky above us); the second one refers to a shift that follows the first stage. After feeling terrified by the power of nature, the subject becomes aware of the power of reason that it has constituting it as capable of raising itself even above Nature (the moral Law inside me). According to Kant (CJ), “the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature” (§28, p.121). This feeling is based on “the subject’s own inability [which] uncovers in him the consciousness of an unlimited ability, which is also his and that the mind can judge this ability aesthetically only by that inability” (ibid, §27, p.116). So, the experience of sublimity rests on

The logical estimation of magnitude, the impossibility of ever arriving at absolute totality by measuring the things in the world of sense progressively, in time and space, was cognised as objective, as an impossibility of thinking the infinite as given, and not as merely subjective, as an inability to take it in (§27, p.116).

According to Kant (CJ), the inability to generate the idea of the absolute whole results in the realisation of the aesthetic comprehension as small, “and the object is apprehended as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure” (§27, p.117). Displeasure is of course the result of the subject’s inability to constitute the transcendental object as the linchpin between the sensual world and that which might lie beyond it. Displeasure expresses the exactly opposite feeling from pleasure, which is attained within the limits of life, of understanding and so of beauty. So, displeasure results in the challenging of life’s, desire’s limits. In other words, if beauty corresponds to the pleasure that the subject experiences through the illusion of an understandable world around it, sublimity refers to the degradation of whatever constituted life as worthy of living it. According to Kant (CJ),

If in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us], to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we regard nature’s might (to which we are indeed subjected in these [natural concerns] as yet not having such dominance over us, as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them (§28, p.121).

This devaluation of life’s interests is the result of the subject’s internal division. Through the experience of sublimity, the subject comes to terms with a part of itself that resists its slavery to the law of nature, its submission to the faculty of desire. The subject challenges all those concerns (property, health, etc.) that are no other than the different possible contents which it ascribed to the transcendental object in order to sustain the frame of understanding in life. So, sublimity is the experience of the abolition of that frame and it is in this sense that it is experienced as un-pleasurable. In other words, since Kant claimed that the transcendental schema, the categorical imperative is the product of imagination, sublimity is the experience of coming to terms with the illusion that this construction inflicts on the experience of life. This realisation results in a state where the

subject can uphold all these “highest principles” but it is also ready to abandon them and even life. Kant introduces a prerequisite for the experience of sublimity as necessary and this is the existence of life’s frames. In other words, without the Imaginary construction of an imperative that limits the possibilities of applying the law of nature upon human desire, there is no possibility of experiencing the abolition of these limits. It is in this sense that Kant (CJ) tells us that the feeling of the sublime has one absolutely necessary condition: as spectators of a fascinating spectacle of Nature, we ourselves have to be somewhere safe, out of immediate danger, otherwise the feeling that we will experience is horror and fear (§23-24, pp.97-101). This place of safety is no other than the transcendental schema itself. It is the synthetic capacity of the subject that allows it to become disjunctive. If the transcendental schema is a necessary defence against the subject’s confrontation with the all powerful Nature, the un-pleasurable experience of sublimity involves the challenging of that defence.

In contrast to the effect of beauty deriving from an object in which Nature is presented as holding a knowledge which the subject eludes, sublimity renders an object as devoid of any content and form. The beautiful object sustains its form even though its content does not matter so much. Beauty is the characteristic of that object which becomes miraculously enough the answer to what Nature lacks in order to be constituted as whole. In other words, the beautiful object is the transcendental object that fulfils its role in the transcendental schema. This fulfilment consists in leaving no doubt in respect to how Nature constitutes a whole. It is in this sense that the beautiful object participates in the subject’s defence against the terrifying power of Nature. The beautiful object renders the subject’s relationship to Nature harmonic. On the other hand, the sublime object uncovers the inability of the representations’ field to represent the wholeness of nature constituting the subject’s synthetic capacity as the only possibility to construct an illusion of wholeness. Actually, this is the second stage of the process of sublimity according to Kant; the subject identifies the sublime object to its admirable capacity of offering meaning to Nature that constitutively eludes this possibility by itself. In other words, according to Žižek (1993), the sublime object presents the transcendental object as an “irrepresentable surplus which adds itself to the series of sensible features; it is precisely the “thing-of-thought”: it bears witness to the fact that the object’s unity does not reside within it, but is the result of the subject’s synthetic activity” (pp. 150-1). It is in this sense that in the experience of sublimity the subject feels more powerful in comparison to

Nature. Following again the argument of Žižek (1993), what we experience as the positive sublime content (the moral law in ourselves, the dignity of the free will) is of a strictly secondary nature; it is something which merely fills out the original void opened up by the breakdown of the field of representations (p.37). In the experience of the sublime, phenomena prove unfit to render the Idea – results from a kind of perspective-illusion. What actually breaks down in the experience of the sublime is the very notion that, behind the field of phenomena, lays some inaccessible positive, substantial Thing. It is in order for the subject not to accept this fact that, in the reading of Kant, the sublime object must result in a beautiful object through the second stage of the process.

In order to create a different reading of the sublime object we have to think of the first stage of the sublimity's process as the only one. The subject experiences an object as sublime through its resistance to be signified, through its paralysing effect on the process of understanding and reasoning. What results from this experience should be linked to the demolishing of the illusion that sustained the level of pleasure, the frame of meaning in life; it is in this sense that sublimity is related to displeasure. The subject's confrontation to the absence of any legality beyond itself involves the awe of the subject in relation to itself. What the subject understood as an internal voice of conscience becomes, through this reading of the sublime object, the realisation of its internal division. This division refers to that part of the subject that it renounced in order to define it as its moral law. So, instead of defining the sublime object in terms of that process that allows the subject to identify an object with its capacity of legislation, we define it as that effect of the emptiness of the object on the subject who realises its limited capacity on representing Nature as a whole. In other words, the fear that the subject experiences, at the first stage of sublimity, corresponds to its minimisation in front of the all powerful Nature, and is followed by the elimination of fear through the subject's synthetic capacity in the second stage resulting in a beautiful object of understanding. On the other hand, what we propose here is that the experience of sublimity results in no fear; the realisation of the void in the place of the internal voice of conscience results in the subject's acceptance of its inability to constitute Nature/Other as whole. It is in this sense that this reading proposes two choices as an outcome of this process: the subject will either sustain the frame of its life applying once again a beautiful object to the void of Nature or it will deny this process abandoning all of its concerns in life. The feeling of displeasure, which the sublime object enforces to the subject, corresponds to the not-whole Nature; it corresponds to the

subject's inability of constituting Nature as whole. It is the lack on both parts (the subject and Nature) that remains open in the proposed effect of the sublime object on the subject.

3.2.4. The two readings of the moral Law

As a result of this elaboration on Kant's ideas, we can define two different ethics resulting from Kant's conception of the moral Law in relation to the transcendental object. We can either ascribe to the moral Law the status of a prescribed message that the subject attempts to reveal/guess through the different sensible contents that it ascribes to the transcendental object, or we can define the moral Law as empty of content and the ethical act as the creation/birth of that Law or its destruction. These two readings are totally distinct; the former defines ethics as turning around an unapproachable prescribed Law and the latter constitutes ethics as circling around the idea of emptiness which orders a creation ex nihilo or the retreat from any such attempt. The unsuccessful attempts of the subject to guess what the enigmatic content of the moral Law might implicate for it becomes evident through the idea of beauty which maintains the subject in a state of passivity vis-à-vis the all-powerful moral Law. The second option of the status of the moral Law suggests the opposite argument; the dematerialisation of the transcendental object confronts the subject with emptiness, with the void that it so insistently tried to hide. This is how Kant deals with the idea of sublimity. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the idea of sublimity might result in two different outcomes concerning the possibility of the ethical act. Since the subject is supposed to experience sublimity through a safe place, it will either decide to remain in that frame applying its synthetic capacity to a beautiful object that corresponds to the materialisation of the moral Law or it will choose to leave that safety after the realisation of the vanity that characterises every attempt to sustain it.

In what follows we will see how Lacan attempts to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the second reading of Kantian ethics, of the moral Law as a void. However, we will see that he is unsuccessful in this. Even though, Lacan will link the ethical act to the renunciation of the effect of the Imaginary order, we will see that the linking of the ideas of beauty and sublimity does not allow him to define the ethical act in terms of a transgression which leads beyond the pleasure principle, to *jouissance*. Lacan, in the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, fails to constitute ethics as an experience of the Real even

though in his later work he offers the necessary tools for doing so. This is the aim of the chapter: to use Kantian ethics in order to define psychoanalytic ethics in relation to the Real through the introduction of the Other *jouissance* as that experience that signals the dematerialisation of the object cause of desire to the point that the lack of the Other becomes obvious and the subject is offered the possibility of the free choice not to fill it up again.

3.3. Lacan's theory on psychoanalytic ethics

In order for Lacan to define psychoanalytic ethics, he introduces the idea that the subject should transgress two different laws in order to commit an ethical act. These are the oedipal law and the Law of the Thing which coincide with the two different readings of the Kantian moral law. The transgression of the oedipal law refers to desire's purification from all Imaginary content, all those goods/*semblants* that hide the Real nature of the object cause of desire. The superego, defined as the source of materiality for the object of desire, should be transgressed in order for the subject to reach the level of the Law of the Thing which constitutes the representation of a substantial moral law as impossible. After renouncing the ideals of the Other, which restrains the subject in an endless search for the content of the object that would answer the demand of the Other, the subject comes to terms with its fundamental fantasy, the Kantian transcendental schema, where it confronts the emptiness that the object cause of desire represents. It confronts the emptiness of the object that supports this schema and which reveals the void of the moral Law, the Law of the Thing, ascribing vanity to every attempt of filling out the lack of the Other. At this state of confronting the emptiness of the moral Law, when the subject comes to terms with the vacillation of the limits of its fundamental fantasy, its defence (transcendental schema) against the Real, the subject is, according to Lacan, experiencing fear and anxiety. In order to get rid of these feelings, the subject makes a "passage à l'acte"; it follows the process of sublimation being identified to the object that answers the desire of the Other. This is how Lacan meets Kant referring to the state of feelings of the subject who confronts the all-powerful Nature/Other and its synthetic capacity.

So, even though, Lacan insists on the definition of the ethical act as a transgression of the limits of the signifier, he proposes that the possibility of doing so rests on the process of

sublimation, a process that, as we will see, leads the subject to protect itself once more from this transgression, from its confrontation with the Real. The subject has to “raise an object to the dignity of the Thing”; this is Lacan’s definition of sublimation. It is precisely this definition that constitutes the transgression of the fundamental fantasy as impossible and limits psychoanalytic ethics to the superegoic reading of the Kantian moral Law. In other words, “to raise an object to the dignity of the Thing” indicates the necessity of a representation. The subject attempts to represent the Thing, its moral Law, by an object, a *semblant*. The Thing, in the context of the *Ethics* Seminar represents the Sovereign Good for every subject, being differentiated from the goods that the Other offers to the subject in order to remain as far as possible from its Sovereign Good, the cause of its desire. Lacan defines the source of desire as pure indicating the lack of materiality at the Real, and he constitutes the subject’s approach to its source of desire as impossible. But in order to define the ethical act he had to find a way in order to approach that kernel of human desire. So, he proposes that a representation of this Good by means of an everyday/pathological good could accomplish that process. This is what the process of sublimation indicates. This idea is further supported by the fact that even though Lacan constitutes the emptiness of the object as a necessary characteristic of sublimation, he also links it to the effect of beauty. He argues that the object of sublimation is necessarily a beautiful object. In other words, Lacan relates the Kantian ideas of beauty and sublimity tending to a reading of sublimation as that process where a beautiful object replies to the demand of the Other, relieving the subject from fear and anxiety. Hence, the Sovereign Good is represented by a good that offers to the subject the illusion of a substantiated moral Law. So, sublimation, read in this way, cannot result in the transgression of the fundamental fantasy; rather, it tends to the fantasy’s reorganisation around its object. So fear and anxiety help the subject to avoid its confrontation with the dimension of the Real and so the reconstruction of the fundamental fantasy as a defence against it becomes necessary.

After surmounting the level of pleasure (the level of the Other), the subject experiences fear and anxiety, feelings which inhibit the subject’s possibility of transgressing the limits of its fundamental fantasy and so its coming to terms with the dimension of the Real which is signalled by the painful experience of *jouissance*. This is what Lacan presents in his Seminar on *Ethics* and it coincides with the Kantian idea of the moral Law as the Freudian superego. But we must note that Lacan insists on pointing out that the ethical

act shows its effect on the human body. In other words, the ethical act signals, for Lacan, the experience of *jouissance*. As we have seen, it is the function of the drive that offers the possibility of enjoyment to the subject but also the possibility of transgressing its limits. In Kantian terms, sublimity offers a discomfort, an experience of unpleasure which the subject tends to inhibit immediately. It is around one partial object that the subject experiences the pleasure of hiding the lack of the Other. It is when this object is slightly “moved” from this lack that the subject experiences fear and anxiety and immediately relocates it in the “proper” place. This is exactly how Lacan follows Kant through the idea of sublimation. The subject comes to terms with the lack of the Other but it immediately restores it. Nevertheless, we should point out that Lacan (1959-60) implies the possibility of a different outcome of this process.

Sublimate as much as you like; you have to pay for it with something. And this something is called jouissance. I have to pay for that mystical operation with a pound of flesh. That's the object, the good that one pays for the satisfaction of one's desire (p.322).

So, even though the idea of sublimation defines a process in which the subject circles around an object/good that represents its Sovereign Good and in this way it attains pleasure, the ethical act which is mobilised by *jouissance*, according to Zupančič, calls for the sacrifice of this specific object (p.244). Since the satisfaction of desire is constituted as impossible, the reference of Lacan to this satisfaction cannot but indicate another possibility that he does not include in his Seminar on *Ethics*. This possibility refers to the transgression of desire's limits and it is exactly that which Lacan wished to define in this seminar though unsuccessfully. It is only after he wrote Seminar XX, *Encore* that he returned to this idea and he defined it in terms of the Other *jouissance*. In what follows we will see how the experience of the Other *jouissance* can result from the transgression of the limits of phallic *jouissance* that, according to this thesis, is defined in terms of sublimation as Lacan defines it in the *Ethics* Seminar. If phallic *jouissance*, which according to this thesis is experienced at the limit of pleasure, is attained by the drive which within the limits of the fundamental fantasy's frame circles around an object that constitutes the Other as whole, the Other *jouissance* becomes that experience of the lack of that object, leaving the Other lacking to the point that it disappears. Phallic *jouissance*

refers to the subject's confrontation with the frame that limits its possibilities of experiencing pleasure. The Other *jouissance* indicates the transgression of the limits that the Other imposes on human desire and so the transgression of desire itself. So, if sublimation signals the filling up of the lack by an object that is raised to the dignity of the Thing, the Other *jouissance* indicates the sacrifice/destruction of this object and the withdrawal of every attempt to hide the lack of the Other once more; it indicates the subject's renunciation of the illusion of pleasure. This is how the object cause of desire becomes autonomous and the subject's will free from the ideals of the Other.

3.3.1. The oedipal law and the Law of the Thing

Bernard Baas (1987), in his analysis of Kant's influence on the ethics' theory of Lacan, created a diagram (Figure 3.1), which presents Lacan's differentiation between the oedipal law and the Law of the Thing resulting in the possibility of defining two different ethical acts which are in accordance with Kant's differentiation between his two moral laws.

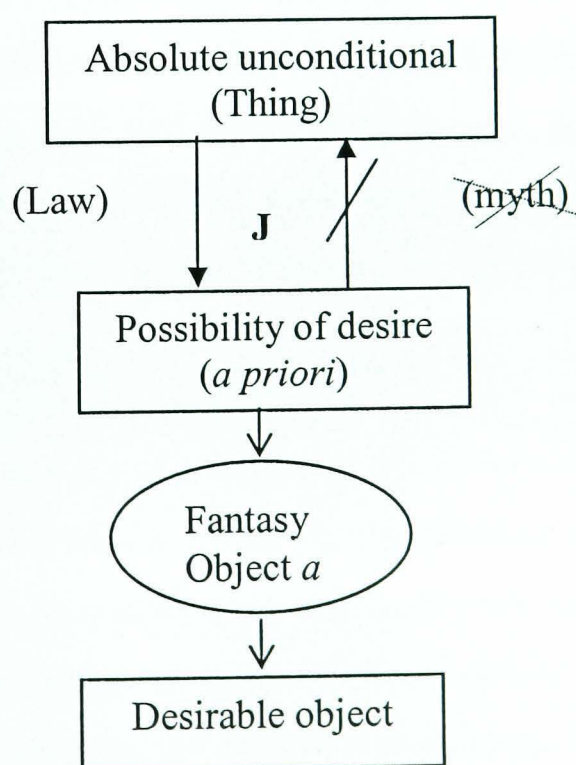


Figure 3.1. Kant's influence on Lacan's ethics theory by Bernard Baas

The diagram presented in Figure 3.1 prints in two different directions (pictured by the two arrows on the upper level of the schema); one is that of the subject's attempt to "move" towards the Thing by trying to represent it, though unsuccessfully, and the other one presents the Law of the Thing as the catalytic effect on the subject's ability to formulate a relationship with the Other instituting an unapproachable lack between them (desire). This is how we can present two different readings of a theory of ethics. The direction towards the Thing illustrates an ethics of Oneness, an ethics of fantasy where the subject constructs an illusory scenario trying to answer the demand of the Other; this is how the ethics of the Master is defined. In Lacan's Seminar on *Ethics* human desire is on a first level the desire of/for the Other (following the Kantian superegoic moral law) and in a second one it is constituted as pure, as devoid of the Other's influence (following the Kantian moral law defined as a void). Even though this second reading of ethics is implied by Lacan, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, he focuses on the definition of ethics around the idea of a myth's construction, around the necessity of sustaining the subject's vital relationship to the Other. According to Lacan (1959-60), desire is the price that the subject pays in order to keep itself at a safe distance from the Real. This price refers to the limits that the subject "accepts" on its pleasure. It is in this sense that Lacan defines human desire as the "place" where accounts are kept; it represents an incommensurable measure, an infinite measure (p.316-7). It is a desire that insistently demands the debt of the subject to the Other to be paid and keeps coming back, constituting the subject enslaved to its structure; it makes the subject return again and again trying to pay its debt. The means which support the relationship between the subject and the Other is the oedipal law, the law of the superego that continuously offers different answers/objects in order for the debt to be paid. This debt concerns the subject's relationship to the Other since it is the subject's 'duty' to keep him whole, to fill up its constitutive gap. And this filling up is what guarantees pleasure for the subject. So, human desire, the pact between the subject and the Other is what constitutes the law as that which "orders" the subject to look for pleasure within the limits of this structure, within the limits of desire's construction which constantly asks for the payment of the debt which is never enough. This is actually what the morality of the Master holds as its emblem: the pursuit of satisfaction within the limits that the Other has imposed on pleasure.

The oedipal law is what underlines the morality of the Master/Other; it is from this morality that Lacan wants to pull out, to differentiate psychoanalytic ethics by

introducing the Law of the Thing, the Law that orders the purification of desire from the effect of the Other. Nevertheless, according to Lacan (1959-60), the subject's ethical act consists of "counting the vote relative to his own law" (p.300). In other words, the subject should be purified from the Imaginary order in order to come to terms with the knowledge of how it deals with the demands of the Other and in order to be able to "vote" in relation to it once more, to be able to have the responsibility of this relationship. Reaching the level of its fundamental fantasy, the subject can decide once more in relation to this structure. Nevertheless, the fact that the subject deals with the object of its desire once more, knowing that it does so in a specific context (that of its fantasy), does not indicate the transgression of the Imaginary order since the object does not disappear. The object is dressed up by different *semblants* which nevertheless cannot answer the desire of the Other. The Law of the Thing constitutes the law of desire as insufficient to satisfy the Other, it erects a wall against the experience of transgressing the signifier's limits. According to Lacan, the law of desire is subjective since every subject answers differently to the Other; "desire does not have the character of a universal law, but on the contrary, of the most particular of laws – even if it is universal that this particular is to be found in every human being" (ibid, p.24). So the Law of the Thing can be regarded as universal since it appeals to all subjective oedipal laws. The Law of the Thing is that which aborts the law of the signifier; whenever the subject realises its inability to satisfy the desire of the Other, it comes to terms with the Law of the Thing, which offers to the subject a second knowledge, the *savoir* of how its fantasy "orders" it to enjoy but also that its fantasy is but an attempt to answer the desire of the Other which nevertheless has no answer, that what the subject is struggling to answer does not exist. The Law of the Thing is an absolute limit which constitutes the desire of the Other as a product of imagination, as a necessary construction/defence against the experience of pain.

3.3.2. The Imaginary good versus the Sovereign Good

In order for Lacan to emphasise the difference between the oedipal law and the Law of the Thing he proposes that the former refers to the Imaginary goods, the *semblants*, and that the Law of the Thing reveals a Sovereign Good that supports human desire. In other words, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, he attempts to differentiate between the Imaginary and the Real nature of the object cause of desire. The oedipal law offers to the subject a

variety of Imaginary goods in order to define its desire, to attach meaning to the lack of the Other. But the good is not just at the level of the use of the object; rather, it indicates that a subject has it at its disposal. In other words, the domain of the good is the birth of power, which indicates the significance of the control over the good. To exercise control over one's goods is to have the right to deprive others of them. What is meant by depriving the other of the good is to defend it in the sense of forbidding oneself from enjoying it; to keep it unimpaired and show to the other its lack of it. So, the true nature of the good, its profound duplicity, has to do with the fact that it isn't purely and simply a natural good, the response to a need, but possible power, the power to satisfy. According to Lacan (1959-60), the relation of man to the world of goods is organised relative to the power of the other, the Imaginary other, to deprive him of it (p.234). This relationship is Imaginary. The depriving agent is an Imaginary function in the sense that there is nothing to deprive the other of and in these terms the sphere of the good erects a strong wall across the path of our desire (ibid, pp.225-230). Nevertheless, according to Lacan, it is in the irreducible margin as well as at the limit of his own good that the subject reveals itself in the never entirely resolved mystery of the nature of its desire (ibid, p.237). This is so because the subject needs to fill out the empty object which lies beyond its possibility of acquiring the status of a good. This need is based on its fundamental relationship to the Other, which offers pleasure to the subject through the creative process of attaching to its lack content, through answering his desire.

It is exactly this process that constitutes the illusion of satisfaction. This illusion does not hold for long. The object, this good, cannot satisfy the desire of the Other. So when that object proves insufficient, another one is produced to answer the enigma. This process can go on eternally, leaving the subject in a movement from one possible alternative to another, leaving the subject prey to the pathological realm of its desire. But, what is the power that constitutes every material object, every good as insufficient? What is the power that makes oedipal law, the pleasure principle vacillate? Lacan (1959-60) deals with the issue of the Sovereign Good in order to answer this question. The Sovereign Good is not universal in the sense that it doesn't tend to the ideal of happiness, or of God, or whatever Imaginary content we can attach to this object. The Sovereign Good is another word for *das Ding*, the Thing, "the cause of the most fundamental human passion" (p.97), the cause of desire itself. In the Seminar on *Ethics*, the cause of desire is an absolute value, a hidden secret and enigma that characterises the Real and constitutes

the subjective Sovereign Good which takes the “form” of the Law of the Thing to which the oedipal law struggles to deny access. This is so because oedipal law imposes but also safeguards the limits of pleasure for the subject. When the subject triggers these limits it is because the content that it had chosen to attach to the Thing, the *semblant* that it had chosen for object *a* does not hold any more and this can only imply the experience of lack of satisfaction in terms of un-pleasure.

If the oedipal law defines a form of legality how is it possible that the Law of the Thing enforces another form of legality? Lacan had often stated that there is no Other of the Other. So what is the status of the Law of the Thing? Certainly, it cannot be a law in the sense that the oedipal law imposes limitations. The Law of the Thing, which Lacan identifies with the Sovereign Good, is exactly the inability of the oedipal law to enforce itself in an absolute way; it is the abolition of the oedipal law’s limits. In other words, it is the oedipal law that uncovers the Law of the Thing as that force which pushes desire to transgress the limits of pleasure; it forces the drive to disengage itself from any relationship to the object. It is in this sense that desire appears as “obeying” a Sovereign Good that lacks materiality and has nothing to do with the pleasure principle. According to Lacan (1959-60), “the moral law, the moral command, the presence of the moral agency in our activity, insofar as it is structured by the Symbolic, is that through which the Real is actualised” and of course, “the moral law affirms itself in opposition to pleasure” (p.20). So, the Law of the Thing is but what is revealed through the gap that the oedipal law opens up for the subject. According to Lacan, it is about a gap that is inherent in human experience and is manifested in the distance between man’s articulation of a wish and what occurs when his desire sets out on the path of its realisation (ibid, p.41). So, the Sovereign Good is the void that the Law of the Thing inaugurates at the function of the oedipal law.

This gap of the oedipal law, which opens up whenever an object/good proves incompatible with the satisfaction of desire, presents the object (good) towards which desire tends as an obstacle to the route of desire. A good (a *semblant*) inhibits the path towards the pure nature of desire. In other words, the object/*semblant* of the cause of desire cannot but become the veil in front of the pure nature of desire itself, in front of the Real, which nevertheless exhibits a mortifying power over the good. It is in this sense that Lacan renounces the function of the good at the process of desire’s unveiling.

Different goods obscure desire as a defence for the frightening unknown on the other side of the signifier's limit. So, the sum of the goods that the Other offers to the subject in order to sustain its defence, its fundamental fantasy, should be constituted as unable to sustain this construction in order for the law of the Thing to "appear" as a threat for the limits of pleasure.

In this sense, the field of the Real, as this is defined by the Law of the Thing, is approached operationally. It concerns the elucidation of what might be the mobilising force for the construction of the desire of the Other. The field of the Thing is obscure due to the lack of a sufficient organization of its register, or better due to the lack at its core. So, it is exactly this lack that determines the function of the signifier in terms of a construction that tends to hide this lack. Nevertheless, it is this lack that mobilises human desire. And if desire tends to create but also to sustain a level of pleasure for the subject, it also tends to destroy this limit and this is where the Thing appears as an absolute value, as the Law of lack. So, the Thing is beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the oedipal law and it is that which in life might prefer death, according to Lacan (1959-60) (p.104) who goes on

Beyond the pleasure principle we encounter that opaque surface which to some has seemed so obscure that is the antinomy of all thought – not just biological but scientific in general – the surface that is known as the death instinct (p.21)

This brings us closer to how the function of the drive can actualise both laws; both directions presented in Baas' diagram (Figure 3.1). The one tends to sustain the myth of the satisfaction of the desire of the Other and the other tends to destroy it by revealing the lack at its core. Human desire is the desire of the Other to the point that it constitutes him as lacking. Desire, as a construction of the oedipal law, uses an object in order to protect the subject from the Real, but at the same time it negates its function by remaining unsatisfied; it mortifies the materiality of the object, uncovering its pure nature. This pureness is achieved through the abolition of every materiality of the object that supports desire; this is the function of the death drive. So, at some point, the object disappears. The

Real, as the source of human desire, is not approached just through the modulation of the signifying chain (the metonymic function of desire). Following Lacan (1959-60),

The channel in which desire is located is not simply that of the modulation of the signifying chain, but that which flows beneath it as well; that is, properly speaking, what we are as well as what we are not, our being and our non-being - that which is signified in an act passes from one signifier of the chain to another beneath all the significations (p.321-2).

In order for Lacan to define the ethical act, he links it to the transgression of the signifier's limits. This is what the Law of the Real indicates. And this transgression cannot but indicate the death of meaning, the death of the object's signification. According to Lacan, the Law of the Thing lies beyond the signifying chain and constitutes this chain as "the battlefield of our experience" (ibid, p.203). This battlefield is where life and death clash and this is exactly how Lacan illustrates desire in relation to the death drive. On the one hand, it builds up a defence against death (fundamental fantasy) and on the other hand it brings death at the heart of life (*jouissance*). This is a matter of the object with which the drive deals; either it attaches content to it or it dematerialises it.

The carrier of desire's function is the drive. The drive would either encircle an object in order to achieve pleasure or it will dematerialise it facing the limits imposed on pleasure by the structure of desire. So, in contrast to Lacan's differentiation between the law of the signifier and the Law of the Thing in the seminar on *Ethics*, we claim that both laws are embodied in the function of the drive, in the function of the signifier. The achievement of pleasure is accomplished through a substantiated object and the subject's confrontation with pain is realised through the mortifying power of the drive over the object of desire. In other words, the theory of desire in this Seminar illuminates the impossibility of human desire's satisfaction, which defines the impasse where the subject is trapped. Man tries to satisfy the Other through all the different goods that it situates in front of the

Real/pure source of its desire, and this is just a defence; a defence against the impossibility of the Other's satisfaction. In other words, the price that the subject pays in order to constitute the Other as desiring is exactly its alienation from the Real source of its desire. The subject enters the world of the signifier, it enters a relationship with the Other, having left something behind; this is the debt that Lacan refers to when he says that the subject struggles not to pay since in order to do so he has to pay with his life, that pound of flesh that Lacan names *jouissance*.

When we read Lacan's ethical command "do not give ground relative to your desire" (p.321), we are confused about what exactly he means. In other words, not to give ground relative to one's desire might mean to follow the oedipal law, it might mean to insist on looking for the lost Thing in the Other. Nevertheless, Lacan argues that the ethical act is defined in terms of the transgression of the Imaginary order; so we might think that the moral law indicates the end point of the desire of the Other and the coming to terms with the revealing of a desire that tends to the signifier's death. What Lacan means exactly will be clarified by the process that he defines as the proper one for the commitment of an ethical act. If we follow his argument we can see that there is no such Thing which can support the desire of the Other and it is exactly this realisation that invokes pain by destroying the support of fantasy, by destroying the *semblant* of the Thing, the cover of object *a*. It is in this sense that he relates the ethical act to the experience of *jouissance*. Nevertheless, Lacan is not consistent in this argument; rather he argues contradictory enough that the ethical act supports the subject's good,

[The subject's] good [das Ding] is already pointed out to him as the significant result of a signifying composition that is called up at the unconscious level, or at a level where he has no mastery over the system of directions and investments that regulate his behaviour in depth (p.72).

So, the subject's Sovereign Good is defined in terms of its unconscious scenario, in terms of the subject's fundamental fantasy. And so Lacan's ethical command "not to give ground relative to one's desire" indicates the perseverance of that scenario. Hence the ethical act is strictly related to the desire of the Other and most importantly to its

possibility of being redefined in relation to this Good. This is actually what Lacan means by pointing out that the function of desire must remain in a fundamental relationship to death (ibid, p.303). Death becomes the prerequisite of rebirth; this is the ideal outcome of the ethical act. Hence it now becomes explicit that Lacan follows the Hegelian circularity of human desire and that is why he comes up with *sublimation* as that process that aims at the wholeness of the Other. This is how Lacan follows Kant on his definition of sublimity as a necessary step before beauty. In other words, even though Lacan claims that the subject should escape the field of appearances in order to achieve the pure nature of its desire, the redefinition of its relationship to the Other cannot but correspond to the construction of another set of appearances and the subject becomes once more the victim of the pursuit for some mythical truth about the desire of the Other. So, in the schema (Figure 3.1) that Baas formulated for Lacan's ethics' theory the subject meets the impossibility of sustaining the myth of its desire just in order to create a new one. Of course, the reconstruction of the fundamental fantasy indicates a state where it was first destroyed. At that state, we can say that the subject might experience the abolition of the signifier's law and so *jouissance*. Nevertheless, as we will see this is what Lacan defines as phallic *jouissance* in which a good, an object is necessary in order to reach its aim, meaning satisfaction around one partial object. In this sense phallic *jouissance* is not outside the limit of pleasure; it is exactly upon that limit. In what follows we will see that even though Lacan defines the ethical act in terms of transgression, it actually manifests the subject's attempt to perpetuate the myth of the Other's wholeness; this is done through the process of sublimation which supports the experience of the phallic *jouissance*; the realization of pleasure's limit, the frame of the fantasy makes the subject to step back and reorganize that scenario in order to avoid the possible transgression of that limit. Nevertheless, a different reading of the ethical act can satisfy the wish of Lacan to define it in terms of a transgression. The confrontation of the subject with the void that the Thing inaugurates at the heart of the signifier allows the subject to transgress the limits of its fantasy, to retreat from the process of redefining the object and thus to experience the Other *jouissance* that Lacan will define in his Seminar *Encore*, many years after his Seminar on *Ethics* in order to say something more about the ethical act.

3.3.3. The idea of sublimation in relation to beauty

According to Lacan (1959-60), the ethical act indicates the subject's coming to terms with the realisation of its debt to the Other. This is a debt that the subject has accepted as something that began to be articulated before him in previous generations (p.300). This is what the coming to terms with the subject's moral law means for Lacan. In other words, the moral law, identified to the Law of the Thing, does not indicate a void for Lacan. Rather it is substantiated with a content that the subject inherits from previous generations. The subject, after renouncing the sum of the ideals of the Other, comes to terms with the revelation of that content/message that underlines its fundamental fantasy (*savoir*). One single object represents the cause of this structure and it is in relation to it that the subject has the possibility of taking a "free and autonomous" second chance of answering it/redefining it.

According to Lacan in *Ethics*, the ethical act is defined in terms of sublimation, a process that asks for "raising an object to the dignity of the Thing" (p.112). Defining the Thing as the cause of desire, Lacan proposes that sublimation results in the subject's confrontation with one single object that represents the cause of its desire. It is the process of Imaginary purification that allows the subject to reach the level of its fundamental fantasy and to isolate one object that represents the cause of it. This is how the acquisition of a second knowledge, of *savoir* is possible. At that point, when the subject confronts the cause of its desire, it has the possibility of acting ethically. The ethical act indicates for Lacan the redefinition of this object in the limits of the subject's fundamental fantasy. The aim of this redefinition is the subject's achievement of a better dealing with its libidinal demands. In other words, sublimation allows for the realisation of the cause of one's desire and the possibility of answering differently to it. Nevertheless, this choice cannot be a free and autonomous one since the subject deals with a specific message, a specific Thing. It is always in relation to it that it has to redefine its relationship to the Other.

Sublimation is a process based on Imaginary material since it calls for a representation. The revelation of that object that represents the subject's moral law results, according to Lacan, in a beautiful image. Even though this beautiful object/*semblant* actualises the subject's meeting with its cause of desire, Lacan claims that this is the last veil in front of the Real, the source of one's desire. In other words, the subject has to transgress it in order to come to terms with the Real and the painful experience of *jouissance*. But, by

attaching to this object the quality of beauty, this transgression is constituted as impossible. This object acquires an extreme and powerful beauty; a beauty that has a paralysing effect on the subject. So, we have to point out that this beautiful object cannot be anything else than a *semblant* of the object cause of desire, of object *a*. According to Lacan, the subject is purified from the Imaginary order by the effect of one beautiful image that has the power to paralyse the signifier. The paralysing effect of beauty on the signifier confers on the object an anamorphic quality which indicates the change of the object's content, the destruction and rebirth of the object's materiality.

Sublimation, read in terms of beauty, indicates a creative process in terms of the object's materiality, its anamorphosis. According to Lacan in *Ethics*,

the true barrier that holds the subject back in front of the unspeakable field of pure desire that is the field of absolute destruction, of destruction beyond putrefaction, is properly speaking the aesthetic phenomenon which is presented as the experience of beauty (pp.216-7).

So, even though Lacan attempts to differentiate between the function of beauty and that of the good, he concludes with an ambiguity in reference to their relationship with desire. According to Lacan, the function of the good is bound up with the structure of desire, with that prohibition, that reservation, which defines the nature of the signifier itself. The pleasure principle uses good as the subject's alibi and it is in this sense that it keeps it a long way from its *jouissance*, from the experience of the Real (ibid, p.185). In the name of the good, the pleasure principle uses all the facilitations that control the distribution of libidinal investments in order not to exceed a certain limit of excitation. On the other hand, the effect of beauty is presented by Lacan as strange and ambiguous in relation to desire. According to Lacan,

Beauty, in its strange function with relation to desire, doesn't take us in, as opposed to the function of the good. It keeps us awake and perhaps helps us adjust to desire insofar as it is itself linked to the structure of the lure (p.239).

The structure of the lure is the fundamental fantasy and beauty is linked to it by characterising the object that supports it. It keeps us awake because it indicates that this structure keeps us to a safe distance from the Real. This is done through one object among others. According to Lacan, “if there is a good that mustn’t be touched... the fantasm is a beauty that mustn’t be touched” and he goes on “beauty is the cloak of all possible fantasms of human desire” (ibid, p.239). In this sense, beauty becomes the characteristic of the Master signifier. It radiates the power of all the different and possible meanings that human desire can accumulate. So, beauty, as a characteristic of the fantasy, protects the subject from the pain that its meeting with the Real provokes. In other words, the effect of beauty resides in the function of the signifier, in the function of the pleasure principle and so Lacan claims that the “pain along with the pleasure principle prevents us from entering the Real since it is pain that governs this field”. In other words, beauty helps us adjust to desire because it indicates the protective role of the fantasy. Beauty is the effect of the fundamental fantasy that keeps us away from pain.

Beauty shows us the limits of the possibilities of our desire, of the signifier itself since beauty is defined as the characteristic of the Good, the Master signifier that defines all possibilities of desiring. So, beauty refers to the multiplicity of opportunities that a subject has in relation to its desire. According to Lacan, after this realisation the subject can choose another object, another *semblant* for its desire. He relates the effect of beauty to the process of sublimation since the latter is defined in terms of the possibility of the object’s anamorphosis, the redefinition of the fundamental fantasy. According to Lacan, on the one hand, it seems that the horizon of desire may be eliminated from the register of the beautiful since beauty has the effect of suspending, lowering, disarming desire; the beautiful can intimidate and stop the function of desire and on the other hand, it is the appearance of beauty that strengthens the power of desire, as a relieving annihilation of pain. But, the possibility of disarming desire doesn’t happen at all times. It is on certain occasions that beauty is joined to desire, and this is done in a mysterious way, in a form that bears within it the structure of the crossing of some invisible line, the limit of the signifier (ibid, p.238). The crossing of the signifier’s limit indicates, according to Lacan, the anamorphosis of the object involved in the aesthetic form of the beautiful. This anamorphosis “reveals to us the site of man’s relationship to his own death, it reveals it to us only in a blinding flash” (ibid, p.295). The anamorphic effect of sublimation on the object of desire results in the effect of beauty through a blinding flash. Anamorphosis

indicates the redefinition of the object of desire *ex nihilo*, the change of the *semblant* in front of the Other's lack.

The paradigm of courtly love will help us to understand the above point by relating the effect of beauty to the process of sublimation. According to Lacan, the poetry of courtly love was addressed to living beings, people with names, but who were not present in their fleshly and historical reality. They were there in their being as reason, as signifiers (ibid, p.214). Courtly love deals with the Lady which is transformed into a Symbolic function, devoid of its Imaginary characteristics (death of materiality), in order for someone to be able to speak of her in the crudest terms (ibid, p.149), to attach on that image whatever characteristics the subject wishes to. According to Lacan, this object (the Lady) goes through an anamorphosis, and it will enable us to be precise about this narcissistic function (p.149). The Lady actualises a frame offered to the different contents that might be attached on her. The empty form of the Lady is attached a new content, a content that results in an anamorphosis, in an idealised new object. In this sense, sublimation results in a narcissistic process. The element of idealizing exaltation that sublimation involves is expressly sought in the ideology of courtly love. This idea brings us closer to Kant's definition of beauty in which the content of the object is indifferent only at the point that the form of the object is sustained. The object is there as a form, as a Symbolic function; devoid of any content. It is in this sense that Lacan claims that in every form of sublimation, emptiness is determinant (Ethics, pp.129-130).

The idealised woman, the Lady, who is in the position of the Other and of the object finds herself suddenly and brutally positing, in a place knowingly constructed out of the most refined of signifiers, the emptiness of a thing in all its crudity, a thing that reveals itself in its nudity to be the thing, her thing, the one that is to be found at her very heart in its cruel emptiness (ibid, p.163).

Nevertheless, the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it. This is, according to Lacan, the level at which the problem of sublimation is located (ibid, p.125). This problem indicates the inability of Lacan to find a process which would disengage the object of desire from its materiality. This is so because beauty necessarily

results in the function of a good. Lacan does not succeed in giving the object relief from the effect of the signifier. Even though he relates sublimation's function to the emptiness of the object, from the obstacles that the Imaginary order imposes on it, he nonetheless admits that in this process the object does not lose its Imaginary nature. It keeps its Imaginary status in order to offer relief.

At the level of sublimation the object is inseparable from imaginary and especially cultural elaborations. It is not just that the collectivity recognises in them useful objects; it finds rather a space of relaxation where it may in way delude itself on the subject of das Ding, colonise the field of das Ding with imaginary schemes (p.99).

If the materiality of the object indicates the first barrier in front of desire, beauty does not indicate anything different. It is still the radiance of the *materiality* of a beautiful image in front of the Thing. Beauty is a characteristic of the good that keeps the subject away from the experience of the Real. Through sublimation the subject does not attempt to recover an object, rather he tries to hide its absence and it succeeds in doing so; it succeeds in deluding itself on the subject of das Ding that is why it finds a space of relaxation.

This point presents the paradox of sublimation as a creative process; the strangeness that the subject experiences in front of its ability to manipulate the signifier. Sublimation results in the beauty of the object and makes the subject experience a paralysing effect relative to its own capacities. It is in this sense that Lacan in *Ethics*, follows Freud, and defines the "death drive as creationist sublimation" (p.212). So, every attempt of the death drive to transgress the limits of the signifier results in the drive's return to the same path; the path which tends to the preservation of a myth; the preservation of the illusion that the subject can answer the desire of the Other.

Lacan defines the ethical act in terms of sublimation. The ideal end of analysis must address a subject that is responsible for the way that it experiences pleasure. The subject should be able to know how it relates with the Other and so how it enjoys this

relationship. In other words, sublimation makes the subject confront its law which is no other than the oedipal law and makes it vote once more in relation to it. So, by reaching the point of realising the structure of its fundamental fantasy, the subject acquires a second knowledge (*savoir*) of that scenario. The possibility of sublimation underlines the subject's ability to interfere in that structure and this is a gain that psychoanalysis can promise. Nevertheless, Lacan (1959-60) suggests that "the promise of analysis grants no other" (p.301). But how is it possible for the subject to experience pleasure without the other?

This thesis argues that sublimation defines an act in the limits of the other, in the limits of pleasure. The only way for analysis to promise no other and still keep sublimation as the process which can reach that state is to take beauty out of its definition. Let's consider this point by returning to Kant's idea of the sublime. One might argue that "to raise an object to the dignity of the Thing" can result in the dematerialisation of one's desire. And this can happen only if we define the Thing as a void. The subject can raise the Thing to the dignity of the Real, to the lack of the Other. It can renounce the possibility of choosing another *semblant* offered by the Other. It can come to terms with the lack of the Other and commit an autonomous and free act. This is how the promise of analysis can grand no other. To summarise: in the case where sublimation leads the subject to a Symbolic re-construction, the drive aims at dealing with the object of desire as a creation *ex nihilo* constituting *jouissance* as an experience that the body cannot afford and avoids through another *semblant*. In the case where sublimation is defined as a process that enables the transgression of the fundamental fantasy, the drive deals with emptiness and constitutes every *semblant* as unable to support the illusion of satisfaction; the Real body experiences pain which signals death at the level of the Other and the absolute choice of death appears as redemptory, as cathartic for the subject who now disengages itself from the Other. So, an ethical act can be accomplished at the moment when the realisation of the *semblant* of the cause of desire brings about its dematerialisation and not its redefinition. The ethical act can result in a radical emptying, an evacuation of desire's support. What is evacuated and left empty is the locus of the Supreme Good, of the Thing and the void of absolute negativity gives rise to the experience of pain/*jouissance*. This is what the possibility of transgressing the limits of pleasure, the limits of the signifier implies. This idea can be supported further by the ideas of late Lacan where he differentiates between the phallic and the Other *jouissance*.

3.4. Redefining the ethical act in terms of the Other *jouissance*

Lacan, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, defines the experience of *jouissance* as transgressive. Nevertheless, he does not manage to define a process that can lead to this transgression; to the overcoming of the pleasure principle's limits. Sublimation, in this context refers to the avoidance of any transgression and the strengthening of the relationship between the subject and the Other, the strengthening of human desire. Desire (life) tends to support the illusion of Oneness (between the subject and the Other through the mediation, the dressing up of the object cause of desire) the death drive, on the other hand, tends to destroy the harmony of this relationship. The drive does not "work" for the Oneness of the subject with the Other, rather it enjoys through the autonomous object of desire, by taking it out of any structure in a sense that it tends to constitute the Other as lacking, as not-One. Nevertheless, it is only the obedience to the myth of Oneness that offers pleasure. In order to define the way through which the subject would be able to have an experience beyond pleasure we have to follow the drive as this transgresses the limits of desire, the limits of the pleasure principle. It is in this route of the drive that we can estimate a transgression. This possibility is offered through the differentiation that Lacan makes between the phallic and the Other *jouissance* in his twentieth Seminar *Encore* (1972-3).

In *Encore*, Lacan differentiates between phallic *jouissance* and the Other *jouissance*. Phallic *jouissance* extinguish the limits in which the function of desire takes place. Nevertheless, the frame that desire constructs is not decomposed; rather the moment of phallic *jouissance* reinforces the subject's tendency to Oneness as an avoidance of the pain that another choice would bring about. In other words, phallic *jouissance* does not transgress the limit of pleasure even though it reaches the point of its vacillation. The Other *jouissance* is related to the function of the drive to the point that it reveals the not-whole Other, it reveals the lack in the Other. The Other *jouissance* uncovers the lack of the Other by coming to terms with the object that sustained the subject's fantasy but most importantly by sacrificing it on the altar of pleasure's vanity. In other words, if phallic *jouissance* results in the subject's confrontation with the object around which the structure of fantasy is organised, leading to its perseverance since it does not exceed this limit, the Other *jouissance* results from its destruction, from the realisation of the lack as the cause of this structure. By nullifying the sum of the different *semblants* that covered

up the one and absolute mask of the cause of desire, drive reaches the level of the Other *jouissance* resulting, according to Zupančič (2000), in the sacrifice of this one mask that supported the metonymic function of desire (the phallus) (p.243). This is what the transgression of the fundamental fantasy indicates in terms of pure desire. So, it is in relation to the Other *jouissance* that the ethical act can be defined as free and autonomous of the Other's influence.

According to this thesis, phallic *jouissance* ($J\phi$) is another word for pleasure's unsuccessful pursuit. Related to Hegel's idea of desire's circular movement, phallic *jouissance* "defines" the state of pleasure's failure and the drive's redirection to another object. Phallic *jouissance* characterises the male part ($\$$), it is autoerotic and is defined as sexual in the sense that it is related to the experience of glorifying the sexual object and identifying it with the human body as the place of pleasure; according to Lacan (1972-3), it is "the *jouissance* [the enjoyment] of the organ" (p.7). In sexual enjoyment man does not look for a woman, but for a partial object. He is evidently not with another person but with a partial object that merely completes him. In this sense it is not related to the Other (ibid, p.9); rather it is beyond the lack of the Other tending to the subject's identification with the object cause of desire creating the illusion of Oneness. So, according to Lacan, phallic *jouissance*, which is achieved in the Symbolic universe, is the product of a closed circuit that reduces everything to the function of the One where a *semblant* is necessary in order to hide the gap of the Other. In other words, phallic *jouissance* is the result of the function of desire which tends to the fulfilment, to the attachment of meaning to the gap of the Other and in this sense it is identified with the Freudian notion of the libido, which is strictly related to the satisfaction of the sexual instinct. Nevertheless, the sexual impulses are constitutively unsatisfied since they owe their satisfaction to the function of the signifier, which struggles to bridge the gap between desire and its cause. It is through the illusion of pleasure that the overvalued sexual object offers, by answering the lack of the Other, the Other's wholeness. However, it is the constitutive lack of the Other that constitutes phallic *jouissance* as incomplete, as desiring something more, leading us to the idea that phallic *jouissance* can be another word for the failure of pleasure's achievement.

On the other hand, the *jouissance* of the Other ($J\mathcal{A}$), the feminine *jouissance* is defined as being experienced beyond the phallus, beyond the Master signifier which holds the

essence of an exception, of a not-whole, not-one since the master signifier does not refer to another one, it is outside the sum of the signifiers; it is the one and absolute mask of the lack of the Other. So, the Other *jouissance* is the result of the subject's confrontation with that object that "sums up" all the different possibilities of desiring an object and most importantly it is the result of its transgression. In this sense, Lacan states that the Other *jouissance* ex-sists within phallic *jouissance*. The woman first has access to phallic *jouissance* and then to the Other one. According to Verhaeghe (2002), the Other *jouissance* is achieved in terms of the Real, presenting an open-ended, endless universe where "exceptions belong to the order of the not-whole, [the not-One]" (p.127). The disappearance of the signifier's limit on the possibilities of desiring indicates a transgression to the field of the Real. So, the Other *jouissance* is achieved through the abolition of the limit of that exception that constituted the Other as whole; in other words, the signified being faces its lack and all the different desiring object that might mobilise desire. Feminine sexual enjoyment includes the Other. The Other in feminine *jouissance* can be experienced as unlimited, whereas male *jouissance* is limited (to an organ). So, the *jouissance* that Lacan named the Other one is seen, according to Verhaeghe (2002), as unlimited in the body, not limited to the organ (p.127). That means that unlimited *jouissance* includes the sum of the signifiers, the Other. That's why Lacan said that the woman has this link to the Other to which she can introduce the man. Far from encircling the *semblant* of object *a* through which the subject achieves autoerotic, phallic *jouissance*, in the *jouissance* of the Other the object *a* loses its Imaginary envelope by introducing itself as a dimension of the Real. According to Lacan (1972-3), this is how the not-whole is revealed as a negative instance which serves no purpose (p.3). The *jouissance* of the Other devalues any Imaginary element of the function of desire which tends to Oneness.

The idea of the Other *jouissance* reminds us of the first stage that the subject experiences through the Kantian description of the sublime. There the subject experiences terror and awe watching the ability of Nature to destroy everything around including the subject itself. According to Zupančič (2000), the feeling of nothingness that the subject experiences in front the all-powerful Nature constitutes the latter as enjoying (p.157). After this state of the subject's inability, its sensible powerlessness and mortality, Kant proposes that the subject can raise its mental abilities above the dimension of Nature's enjoyment and tame it once more. This is the outcome of sublimity in the Kantian

perspective. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this is not the only possible outcome. Instead of revitalising the possibility of offering an object to the satisfaction of Nature/Other in order to avoid its destructive power (constituting the Other as enjoying through the subject), the subject can be identified with the Other holding the knowledge that there is no pleasure except on the basis of an illusion. The Other *jouissance* can be related to the experience of the signifier's fading to the point that no object can support its revitalisation. In this sense, the *jouissance* of the Other renders two possibilities of outcome: either the subject will feel terrified and will succumb to the power of the signifier once more holding nevertheless a second knowledge, or it will make the absolute choice of disengaging itself from its relationship to the Other. The sacrifice of the master signifier, the phallus, renders the subject unable to sustain the illusion of desire and brings it to the position of transgressing its fundamental fantasy. In other words, the knowledge of the Other as lacking is what the Other *jouissance* indicates and furthermore it is that knowledge that induces pain in the subject since it defeats the sum of its efforts to constitute the Other as whole. The knowledge of the Other as lacking can either sustain an illusion in terms of defence against pain or it can reinforce the absolute choice of not revitalising it.

So, it is not just that Imaginary purification can offer a knowledge of what one's fantasy's cause indicate, making the subject turn around it and achieving pleasure (phallic *jouissance*), there must be something else in order to link it to the experience of the Other *jouissance*. If sublimity indicates our encounter with the all-powerful Other, which demands everything from us and can actually take everything by destroying us, the construction of a beautiful object is but the necessary condition in order to avoid that possibility. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the possibility that it is also through that purification that the subject can feel the impossibility of answering that enigma; it is in this same process in which the subject may not decide to hide its incompatibility in reference to the demand of the Other. In order to come to terms with its inability to make the Other to desire, the subject faces the lack of the Other being unwilling to fill it up again. This indicates the mortification of the Other and so of the subject itself. Lacan, through his definition of sublimation, gives the solution for the restoration of this gap opened up in the signifying chain. Accordingly, sublimation for Lacan is but the reconstruction of an image, the reconstruction of the subject's fundamental fantasy which

prevents the subject from “meeting” the hole, the constitutive emptiness of the human being.

The Kantian prerequisite of watching the destructive power of the Other from a safe place offers the subject a sense of safety. Nevertheless, the experience of this destructive power indicates that the subject comes to terms with the realisation that it can also be prey to this power. What the subject comes to terms with is its mortality. The fact that the subject goes through this experience under the protection of its fantasy (the safe place) enables it to strengthen its relationship to the Other since this is its only means that it has in order to fight against that fearful experience of the Other’s lack. So, a kind of reconciliation is necessary, and this is how the creative process of sublimation answers to this threat. If the experience of sublimity makes our fantasy tremble in front of the all powerful Other, it also has the ability to make us realise that we have the power to deal differently with this effect and avoid the fearful feeling; we have the ability of re-building our fantasy as even much stronger. If the experience of the sublime object brings us closer to its disappearance, it also makes it obvious that it is within our capacity to redefine it in the structure leaving no possibility for what lies beyond it to appear and frighten us.

Nevertheless, this experience of the sublime object does not indicate any transgression. It is the subject’s “choice” to close its eyes to the possibility of coming to terms with the lack of the Other; this “choice” is but the triumph of the pleasure principle upon the effect of the signifier’s inability. In other words, the Symbolic body where pleasure reigns does not allow its Real part to emerge indicating the hallucination that the signifier imposes on it. According to Žižek (1993), “the sublime doesn’t involve the breakdown of the field of phenomena” (p.37); rather “the object, which we experience as ‘sublime’, its elevated glitter, shine, is a mere secondary positivisation of the ‘nothing’, the void, beyond the limit” (p.38). The idea of meeting with the lack in the Other makes the subject to close its eyes by reconstructing a stronger answer to it. So, sublimation as defined by Lacan, deals with the Imaginary object of the construction that constitutes a defence against the experience of *jouissance*. The object of desire is raised to the dignity of an absolute cover in front of the possibility of quitting from pleasure. The reformulation of the relationship between the signifier and the signified does not indicate any transgression of this relationship.

Nevertheless, there is another possible reading of the sublime object as disturbing the subject at the point of experiencing the threat to its flesh. This is based on the point that the object does not hold just an Imaginary nature; rather it is this same object that represents the lack in the Other. Behind its mask, the object appears as pure emptiness. It is not its Imaginary content that constitutes the lack in the Other as unapproachable; it is this same object that represents the lack in the Other. According to Zupančič (2000), the sublime object should not be defined in terms of beauty because it actualises the eruption of the image, it “appears as pure excess, as the eruption of an inexplicable “*jouissance*”, a pure waste” (p.157). If we focus on the effect of the sublime object (in terms of lack) on our body, we will see that the human body experiences a division; a part of it, that we ignored on a conscious level, appears as enjoying. Zupančič finds the idea of the sublime fascinating and relates it to the experience of the Other *jouissance*: the *jouissance* of the Other, a *jouissance* that does not serve any purpose since it is the Other who is presented as capable of enjoying through the destruction of everything that sustains libidinal harmony for the Symbolic body.

This is what the destruction of desire’s support indicates and this is how *jouissance* can be defined as a transgressive experience. It is only if we deal with the sublime object as offering the possibility of constituting the Other as not-whole that *jouissance* can signal the effect of the Real. So, instead of feeling fear in a state of powerlessness in the hands of the all powerful Other, the subject abolishes its core division and experiences the collapse of the signifier’s effect on its body. The experience of another part of our body as enjoying through the experience of the sublime makes possible the realisation that the pleasure attained by desire is an illusion; that the Imaginary object is but a cover of its lack.

3.5. Conclusion

If we follow Lacan, in his Seminar on *Ethics*, we have to conclude that sublimation, resulting in the effect of beauty through the anamorphosis of the object of desire, defines phallic *jouissance* which is nothing more than pleasure’s failure and redefinition. On the other hand, in order to be able to define the Other *jouissance* as transgressive we have to follow the Kantian definition of the sublime as that process that allows the subject to

nullify the sum of *semblants* and to come to terms with the lack at the level of the master signifier, the lack in the Other. The ethical act can then be the result of this transgressive experience. Of course, the autonomy and freedom that Lacan claims for the ethical subject do not coincide with the definition of *jouissance* as an experience that “obliges” the subject to return to the service of the Other, rather it strengthens the subject’s slavery in relation to the Other.

The redefinition of the psychoanalytic ethics is based on the idea that the *transgression* of the fundamental fantasy in terms of pure desire cannot be defined in terms of desire. To transgress the limits of one’s fantasy means to transgress the limits that the Other imposes onto the subject through its law. To be more specific, through this transgression, the subject confronts the emptiness of the law and simultaneously the fact that the Other does not exist separately from this law, in the sense that it is the subject who attaches content to the Other; it is the subject who defines this law. The subject’s transgression of the signifier demands giving up any attempt to formulate a relationship between the subject and an object in order to sustain a fantasy. The subject who transgresses its fantasy incarnates the position of the Other, which is an empty position and signals the pure nature of desire; a desire which desires to desire beyond the support of any object. The effect of negativity, as the other side of the drive’s function, the coming to terms with the signifier’s death, brings the painful experience of the Other *jouissance* onto the stage. It is the uncovering of object *a*’s Imaginary *semblants* that produces the effect of pain. It is the inability of the signifier to sustain any cover in front of object *a* that brings the subject to the direct and painful experience of its body; no mediator regulates any distance from object *a*. This is actually how Lacan (1959-60) defines the Freudian idea of the beyond the pleasure principle experience; it is an experience of suffering (p.184). This is the *jouissance* that the subject experiences being in the position of the Other.

It is around this idea of transgressing the limits of desire and coming to terms with the function of the death drive that psychoanalytic ethics can include in its field the reading of the ancient Greek tragedy. Lacan, in the Seminar on *Ethics*, presents the tragic figure of Antigone as a demonstration of his ideas about the ethical act. He claims that Antigone sacrifices every single good in order to preserve the Sovereign Good that she inherited from her family. Nevertheless, we will see that Antigone does not follow her desire merely to the point of reconstructing her fundamental fantasy; rather she exhibits the

transgression of the signifier's limits to the point that she confronts the power of the death drive. Antigone represents an example of the Other *jouissance* since she sacrifices exactly this Sovereign Good that Lacan wanted to substantiate and eternalise. It is through the reading of this tragedy that we will see how the introduction of object *a* as the representative of the Real at the core of the signifier can reformulate psychoanalytic ethics to the point that Antigone's act can be characterised as the absolute choice of death; an absolute and free choice resulting from the experience of the Other *jouissance*.

CHAPTER

IV

**Psychoanalysis and the Greek
Tragedy – Lacan and Antigone**

4.1. Introduction

In his essay “*The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious*” (Ecrits, 1960), which he has written in the same year with the Seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan epitomises *Antigone*’s analysis by arguing that the Greek tragedy exemplifies “the supreme narcissism of the Lost Cause” (p.358). Following Lacan in *Ethics*, Antigone raises the corpse of her brother to the dignity of their family’s Até. More specifically, he argues that Antigone has from the very beginning of the play renounced the sum of Imaginary goods by raising the object of her desire to the dignity of the Lost Thing and that she sacrifices the sum of her life’s interests in order to preserve the absoluteness of that object (her family’s Até) around which the desire of all family members is formulated. Lacan (1959-60) presents Antigone as eternalising her family’s Até (p.283). He reads Até (which etymologically means misfortune) as the limit of the Other, the limit of that message that underlines the subject’s destiny. Até refers to the subject’s history. It is at that limit that he attaches Antigone which sacrifices everything, even her life, in order to preserve the curse of Oedipus, the kingship of Labdakides as the Até of her family. The Até becomes that partial object in terms of which Antigone answers the demand of the Other and keeps him whole.

This is how Lacan applies the process of sublimation to the case of Antigone. Sublimation aims at the redefinition of the fundamental fantasy in terms of the Lost Cause. This is the subject’s attempt to create the illusion of Oneness with the Other. Referring to the diagram of Bernard Baas (1987) pictured in Figure 3.1, we can see that Lacan’s ethics’ theory refers to the maintenance of exactly this illusion. The ethics that Lacan defines are the ethics of desire, the ethics of fantasy where the subject will always attempt to create a myth in order to be protected from the lack of the Other; it will try to answer the lack of the signifier. Nevertheless, Lacan’s insistence that the ethical act should signal a form of transgression makes his theory inconsistent. If *savoir* is gained through the subject’s realization of its fantasy’s scenario, of that content that constitutes one object among others as the cause of it, and if at the same time *savoir* is a prerequisite of sublimation in terms of which is defined the ethical act, where can we locate the possibility of transgression?

Sublimation and *savoir* are related by Lacan to the effect of beauty which remains at the level of the image. We saw that even though Kant differentiates the ideas of beauty and

sublimity, Lacan combines them. For Lacan sublimation makes the subject confront a beautiful image; it makes it confront that scenario which defines its fundamental fantasy. The effect of beauty is related to the object of desire in the sense that an object is beautiful to the point that it fills up the gap of the Other, to the point that it protects the subject from coming to terms with the lack of the Other. The possibility of sublimation underlines the subject's ability to interfere in that structure. In other words, sublimation allows the subject to deal with the object of its desire in order to gain a different satisfaction for its libidinal demands. So, the object with which sublimation deals is but an object of desire, a good that masks the cause of desire by pretending to be exactly this; it is in this sense that it is constituted by Lacan as beautiful. So, sublimation cannot but indicate an obstacle to the possibility of the oedipal law's transgression.

Lacan attempts to differentiate psychoanalytic ethics from the Aristotelian morality of goods. Nevertheless, the idea of beauty that he attaches to Antigone, the ethical subject of psychoanalysis, does not get him far away from the field of goods. The sublime object is for Lacan a beautiful object since it constitutes the Other as whole preserving the myth of Oneness. In order for Lacan to support such a theoretical construction, he takes refuge in the function of ancient Greek tragedy. He proposes that the ethical act (sublimation) has as a prerequisite the transgression of the Imaginary order. So, he associates the subject's purification from the Imaginary order to the cathartic effect that tragedy is supposed to offer to the spectator. The idea of catharsis will be presented as holding a double function. On the one hand, it is meant to be actualised by the hero on stage and on the other hand is meant to affect the spectator who should ideally be identified with the hero. In this way, we come across two different processes; one refers to the hero and the other to the spectator. Both processes deal with the object of desire. According to Lacan, the hero raises one partial object to the dignity of the cause of its desire and is ready to sacrifice everything in order to preserve it. The poet creates a beautiful image for the hero in order for the spectator to be identified with him/her and so to raise its own object of desire to the dignity of this sublime/beautiful image. This chapter will present Lacan as focusing on the spectator's possibility of sublimation rather than that which he defines for the hero. For Lacan, Antigone identifies Polyneikes with the Até of her family and it is in the name of this object that she is ready to sacrifice everything. On the other hand, the spectator identifies with Antigone which represents the object of its desire. It is around

the beautiful image of Antigone that the spectator is about to achieve catharsis, the purification from the Imaginary order.

But while Lacan defines the subject's purification from the Imaginary order as a prerequisite for the ethical act, which refers to the transgression of the sum of the Other's ideals, at the same time he presents sublimation as its mechanism. Even though Lacan wished to define the transgression of the Imaginary order as resulting to the painful experience of *jouissance*, he comes up with sublimation as that process by which the subject is confronted with the Thing which does not indicate a void but a representation. It represents the Lost Cause of the subject's desire. This is a reading that we can attach to the spectator since it is confronted with the beautiful image of Antigone; but what about the heroine? There is no proof in the text which can support such an argument. Antigone does not confront any beautiful image.

The aim of this chapter is to present Lacan's analysis of *Antigone* as being limited to the effect that the beautiful image of the heroine has on the spectator. It is in terms of Antigone's beauty that the spectator can sublimate the object of its desire; it can redefine its fundamental fantasy. It is around this beautiful object that the spectator can come to terms with phallic *jouissance*, the limit of pleasure. Nevertheless, the hero opens up another dimension of dealing with him. Aristotle defines the hero as alone and betrayed. The hero is a man who fights against his destiny. He is a man who fights in order to transgress the limits of this destiny. He doesn't fight in order to change it; rather he fights for the impossible. That is why the limit that the hero meets in tragedy is death. The message of tragedy is that no one can overcome the limit of Até, the limit of destiny. And so the hero fights for the freedom that the transgression of his destiny's limits indicates. The aim of tragedy is the spectator's catharsis from the feelings of pity and fear for the hero. These feelings are raised by the hero and it is by being identified with him that the spectator is purified from them. The free and absolute choice of the hero cannot raise pity and fear for him anymore.

The diagram, appearing in Figure 1.1, presents the way that Lacan illustrates his theory on ethics through the analysis of *Antigone*. His analysis will be divided in four main sections: the zone between-two-deaths, the limit of Até, the beauty of Antigone and the lamentation of the heroine. Lacan defines two limits that the subject should overcome in order for its act to be defined as ethical. The first one is that of the Imaginary order and

the second one is that of the Other. This is what the zone between-two-deaths indicates. It is in that zone that Lacan believes that tragedy is played out and so Antigone is there from the very beginning of the play. In fact, Lacan is very controversial on that issue because he also claims that it is when her lamentation begins that the heroine enters that zone. Another controversial point is that Lacan defines the ethical act as the transgression of the second limit and even though he claims that Antigone does so he presents her attached on that limit. This limit is that of the *Até*, of the Symbolic construction that the scenario of the fundamental fantasy represents. It is by reaching the level of its fantasy that the subject comes to terms with its construction; this is what *savoir* means, the knowledge of the subject's relationship to the Other. It is that point that Antigone, according to Lacan, reaches. Attached on that limit, Antigone radiates beauty. It is in terms of this beautiful object that the spectator can come to terms with the process of sublimation. The ethical act for Lacan aims at preserving the myth of Oneness with the Other and this is what Antigone does in this analysis. Based on her lamentation, Lacan claims that Antigone is attached on that limit because community has denied her the possibility of desiring anything different than her death. So, the absolute choice of Antigone to preserve the *Até* of her family is the result of the impasse into which she finds herself.

In other words, Lacan's analysis of Antigone cannot support his argument that the heroine is free and autonomous from the effect of the Other, that she transgressed the second limit. It is in this sense that he presents her as a beautiful image. Antigone is presented as incarnating an image which illuminates the power of desire; she is presented as extracting through her eyelids the desire that mobilised her act (this is how Lacan reads the phrase *hymeros enarges* – desire made visible). This image is, according to Lacan's analysis, the possibility that tragedy offers to the spectator of being purified from the Imaginary order. The production of this image is, according to Lacan, the aim of tragedy which produces an internal limit around which the whole play turns. According to this thesis, sublimation is a process that might define the ideal procedure followed by the spectator of tragedy but it is not that which underlines the act of the hero. The hero experiences the inability of the signifier to support his choice of acting. It is the beyond of the pleasure principle that the act of the hero indicates. Like a spectator, Lacan might have been purified from the Imaginary order just by confronting the beautiful image of

Antigone. This is what Lacan's analysis illustrates but Antigone has nothing to do with that since it will be proven that she has transgressed the limit of the image.

4.2. The aim of tragedy: catharsis

Ancient Greek tragedy developed in the city of Athens at the end of the sixth century BC and was exhausted within a hundred years. It was contemporaneous with the birth of the City and its legal system which tried to overcome divine power by reducing it to its minimum. According to Vernant (1988), this can be extracted from every tragedy's theme since what is revealed is social thought and especially juridical thought in the very process of its elaboration. What Vernant argues is that in every tragedy the problem that is raised is a kind of division inbetween social and divine legality. So, we can understand the birth of tragedy as a voice of protest against the derangement of the equilibrium that the social and the divine powers so firmly held till that time. Nevertheless, the aim of tragedy was not to reformulate this equilibrium, rather what it exemplifies is the collapse of any human law in front of the power that the law of gods represent. And even though ancient Greek tragedy protested against the totalitarian civil legal system for just a hundred years, it remained in the history of arts as the most exemplary form of aesthetics. This is so because Aristotle argued that it presents a particular type of human experience - tragedy aims at *catharsis*. Aristotle was the first to formulate a definition of tragedy and he raised it to the pedestal of the greatest artistic forms. So tragedy remained alive as that kind of art that could offer to the spectator the possibility of catharsis.

Catharsis refers to the spectator's emotional purification of pity and fear through the experience of these same emotions. It is in these terms that in *Poetics* Aristotle defined tragedy and its aim:

Ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καί τελείας μέγεθος εχούσης, ηδυσμένω λόγω χωρίς εκάστω τῶν ειδῶν εν τοῖς μορίοις δρώντων και ου δι' απαγγελίας, δι' ελέου και φόβου περαίνουσα την τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (p.65).

A tragedy is an imitation of an act that is great and complete, in language that is pleasing (though in distinct ways in its different parts), enacted rather than narrated, culminating, by means of pity and fear, in the purification of these same passions.

Tragedy does not deal with characters and stories, but with the exemplification of an act, which the Chorus in *Antigone* admires as that through which a human being is characterised as mysterious inspiring wonder by passing beyond all boundaries that restrict it firmly to the limits of life (lines 334-373). This act is defined by Aristotle as great and whole, as being complete in the sense that it has a beginning, middle and end. It is therefore needful that tragedy imitates an act which does not begin from just anywhere at random, and it does not end just anywhere at random. So, in Lacanian terminology, the tragic act indicates the exhaustion of the limits that the signifier imposes to the hero's life in terms of a signifying chain. This act is the result of a sequence of events which happen contrary to expectation but in consequence of one another. The element of the unexpected is what raises the feelings of pity and fear in the spectator. These feelings are attached to the hero who is presented as suffering since, as we would say, it is about to commit an act which does not follow the law of meaning. The spectator, being identified with the hero, is purified of fear and pity since at the end of tragedy the act presented on stage exemplifies the absoluteness of a choice that leads the hero beyond the law of the signifier. It refers to an act that obeys a Law which eludes articulation and for that reason is attached even beyond the power of gods. This Law is an unwritten law and is identified with destiny; it is presented as distinct from human law, the law of the State, and also distinct from divine law. Nevertheless, the spectator leaves the ancient theatre knowing that it is the legitimacy of gods, the representatives of the supreme power, which "ordered" the hero to act such way and which inspired the emotions of pity and fear for him. The emotional purification, *catharsis*, is attained through the spectator's identification with the hero.

For Aristotle (in *Poetics*), tragedy, as a piece of art, transforms qualitatively the fear and pity and so purifies the soul of these unpleasant feelings (p.67). This is what he means by catharsis. Tragedy makes catharsis possible through the excitation of pity and fear in the audience; that is to say that the acts performed on stage make the audience feel fear and

pity for the hero. Nevertheless this is not possible for all people in audience since they are not all capable of catharsis. So, it is not just through this observation of feelings that people can experience catharsis rather they should come to terms with experiencing these feelings; they should accompany the feelings of the hero of the tragedy in the sense that catharsis, according to Binstock (1973), becomes a homeopathic curing of the passions (p.502). In other words catharsis is an experience that tragedy offers to the spectator who is able of identifying with the hero.

According to Aristotle, the hero of a tragedy is not a mythic figure; rather it is always an ordinary man with whom the spectator can identify. It is due to this identification that the spectator can feel pity and fear for the hero. As Aristotle says twice in the *Rhetoric*, what we pity in others we fear for ourselves (ch.26 and ch.27). Tragic fear, exactly like tragic pity, either preceding it or simultaneous with it, shows us what we are and what we are unwilling to lose. We are humans and we are unwilling to lose life. This is so because the suffering of the tragic figure displays the boundaries of what is human. When the tragic figure is destroyed it is a piece of ourselves that is lost. Yet, following Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, we never feel desolation at the end of a tragedy, because what is lost is also, by the very same means, found. So, it is not so strange that we learn the worth of something by losing it (p.27). What is astonishing, as it is presented in *Rhetoric*, is what the poets of tragedies are able to achieve by making use of that common experience of feelings. They lift this experience up into a state of wonder, of awe, not in terms of terror, but in those of fear and admiration (wonder, awe=δέος). This emotional lift is produced through the representation of the hero by means of a wonderful image (what Aristotle defines as “το θαυμαστό”, the admirable) (p.43). This definition brings us very close to what Kant defines as the process of passing from the sublime to beauty. The subject does not experience terror because it is protected in a safe place, what Lacan will “translate” as the subject’s protection in the fundamental fantasy.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle, first in chapter 9 and then in chapters 24 and 25, identifies the process of catharsis with the inspiration of wonder and the effect of beauty. What he argues first is that pity and fear arise most of all where wonder does (ch.9), and then he singles out wonder as the very aim of poetic art, with which the aim of tragedy merges. Throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle won’t exclude the possibility of the emergence of other feelings in relation to those of pity and fear. In chapters 6 and 7 he also refers to the

feeling of anger. So, the introduction of the idea of wonder is part of his attempt to include a variety of different feelings that tragedy might arouse in the spectator under the state of this powerful feeling which is inspired through the confrontation of the spectator with a beautiful image. The Aristotelian definition of wonder can be understood in terms of the Kantian definition of beauty, as that feeling that one experiences in front of a situation that eludes meaning but which nevertheless inspires admiration since the possibility of meaning can be attached to Nature/Other. It is in this sense that Aristotle relates the end of a tragedy to what comes with the sudden, unexpected appearance of something beautiful and he defines beauty as a common characteristic of all tragedies. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is not just a dramatic form in which some works are beautiful and others not; tragedy is itself a species of beauty. In the *Poetics* Aristotle further argues that a tragedy must be whole and one, because only in that way can it be beautiful (chapter 26). So, beauty, according to Aristotle, resides in “size and order”, in the oneness and wholeness of the beautiful which is present all at once in contemplation.

What we can extract from the reading of the *Poetics* is that beauty always produces wonder, and the sense of wonder always sees beauty. And of course the way that Aristotle defines catharsis refers to the production of the feeling of wonder that makes the spectator admire the hero's beauty. What this means is that beauty is presented as a defence against the wonder that a situation might arouse. Nevertheless, what Aristotle tries to enforce through his definition is that beauty resides on the wholeness of the tragedy as a completed act. In other words, we can read Aristotle as claiming that beauty is an effect created when any kind of division is annihilated. So catharsis, being related to the effect of beauty, refers to the purification of the feelings that are presented as obstacles in front of the apprehension of an image that tends to represent a great and complete act. And this act is exemplary because it is committed by a fearless and pitiless hero; by a man who is already purified from the obstacles of these feelings. That is why Aristotle relates catharsis to wonder and beauty; a man purified of the effect of feelings experiences wonder. This is where beauty takes up its necessary role in the sense that a beautiful image is created as an attempt to seal the gap that is opened up in man's capacity of understanding. This is how we can read Aristotle in Lacanian terms and understand Aristotle's claim that wonder gives birth to beauty. And the cathartic effect of tragedy resides in that, meaning to the point where the possibilities of understanding are exhausted and a beautiful image is called up in order for any gap to be concealed; this is

actually what the wholeness of the tragic act indicates. Through the tragic act the poet has the power to enforce pity and fear and at the same time he has the ability to create a beautiful image and so to purify the spectator of those feelings, to offer it recourse in strengthening its relationship to the Other, which in this case is played out by the power of gods. It is to the unassailable power of the gods that the spectator ascribes the beauty of the hero.

Aristotle's definition of catharsis presents the spectator's purification of the feelings of pity and fear by means of the experience of these same emotions. Beyond the medical connotation that catharsis raises, Aristotle did not limit his theory on that. Jacob Bernays (1857) formulated a psychopathological theory limiting catharsis to a medical context (following the idea of Hippocrates) being eliminated to forms of discharge, to a return to normality believing that catharsis can heal the unbalanced man (Wells, p.467). Freud followed the medical aspect in his formulation of the cathartic method which aimed at absolving the hysteric patient of all those traumatic feelings (ex. guilt) from which she suffered. Cathartic method (which was no other than talking – bringing unconscious into consciousness) was supposed to produce an affective discharge that could treat hysterical symptoms. Nevertheless, Freud did not limit himself to the medical aspect of catharsis (emotional discharge); rather he made a strong link between the cathartic method and psychoanalysis. Catharsis is, according to Freud, the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests (1914, p.62-72). Some years later (1924) he will refer to the cathartic method as “the immediate precursor of psychoanalysis,..., which is still contained within it as its nucleus” (p.165). Freud, in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) argues that the poet offers to the spectator the possibility to be identified with the hero of the drama and in this way to give way to suppressed impulses:

the poet, as he unveils the past brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognise our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found. [The play] strikes us as a warning at ourselves and our pride, at us who since childhood have grown so wise and so mighty in our own eyes. Like Oedipus, we live in ignorance of these wishes, repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by Nature, and after their

revelation we may all of us well seek to close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood (1900, pp.365).

To close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood is one possibility of catharsis. This is where beauty appears in front of the trauma that we come across. This is how beauty averts our experience of *jouissance*. Freud will return to the idea of catharsis many years later in order to say that it

is a question of opening up sources of pleasure or enjoyment in our emotional life ...In this connection the prime factor is unquestionably the process of getting rid of one's own emotions by 'blowing off steam'; and the consequent enjoyment corresponds on the one hand to the relief produced by a thorough discharge and on the other hand, no doubt, to an accompanying sexual excitation;... (1942, p.121).

To get rid of one's own emotions is not the same with purification of pity and fear. The subject's purification of its emotions leads to a state where it can redefine them. This is where the process of sublimation can be applied. But to be purified from one's emotions is totally different and this is what Lacan means by the subject's purification from the Imaginary order as a prerequisite for the ethical act. In that case, sublimation cannot redirect the "sexual excitation" to another *semblant* of the object cause of desire. The transgression of the Imaginary order indicates the abolition of the libido to the point that it becomes pain, to the point that we meet Lacan's idea of the Other *jouissance*.

This thesis argues that Aristotle's definition of catharsis can be read as dealing with the object of desire and as referring to the process of sublimation. The hero of the tragedy becomes for the spectator the object of its desire in the sense that the beautiful image of the hero on the scene indicates the last veil in front of the power of the gods, in front of the Thing. In other words, the absolute choice of the hero makes the different goods that support the desire of the spectator vacillate. All the different concerns of the spectator are minimised to the point of disappearance in front of the commitment of an act that follows no prescribed rule but the enigmatic volition of gods. The hero is there to represent the absolute choice of a man who is motivated by the gods and will not succumb to the law

of the State. This is so because the absolute choice of the hero is motivated by one Good. It is in this sense that the spectator can accomplish catharsis; in terms of redefining its fundamental fantasy, in terms of raising the hero to the dignity of the Thing; in terms of ascribing the beautiful image of the hero to the power of gods. This is actually what sublimation aims at: the spectator is offered the possibility to address to a power that no good can represent except the hero who stands on the scene in an enigmatic position whose meaning is ascribed to gods. So, the Aristotelian catharsis refers to the spectator and the hero of the tragedy is used in this context in order to accomplish that effect on the spectator.

The argument of this section follows this line of thought: through catharsis the spectator can come to terms with Symbolic knowledge (*savoir*); it can reach the point of realising the vanity of the object's materiality that it used in order to answer the desire of the Other. The tragic poet uses the hero of the tragedy in order to indicate that no object can answer this desire and the reason for that is that the gods enforce on the subject an absolute Law that constitutes every object as inappropriate for answering their desire. The hero is there in order to play the role of a man who, by being betrayed by the sum of its Imaginary relationships to the others, is left without means and succumbs to the absolute demands of gods. At that point of the tragedy's plot the poet creates a beautiful image of the hero not only in order for the spectator to be able to be identified with but also in order to expose the limits of understanding for the spectator. At the point where meaning is paralysed, beauty comes in to protect the spectator from being exposed to the cruelty of meaning's absence. The effect of beauty seals any gap to which the spectator might be exposed; it represents the absoluteness of the signifier. So, the spectator, after being exposed to the progressive loss of the signifier's power in the life of the hero, is offered the possibility of being purified of the fear and the pity that it experiences in relation to the hero by the beautiful image that stops the signifier's defeat. By holding a Symbolic knowledge of that structure which underlines its own desire, the spectator can once more reformulate its relationship to the Other; it can keep the signifier once more whole, avoiding coming to terms with what constitutes the life of the hero as tragic. The spectator raises the beautiful image of the hero to the dignity of the gods' will.

This is how the hero and the spectator can accompany each other up to a point; the point where the poet invents one image in order to stop the spectator from moving beyond it. It

is at that point that no comment can accompany the experience of the hero who transgresses this limit. Tragedy remained alive throughout the centuries because it managed to exemplify the misfortune of the subject who resists reconciliation with the Other; who refuses the necessity of that legality to its life. The subject's renunciation of the law's significance makes it confront the gap that lies beyond it. This is what the tragedy of the hero indicates. And this is something that the spectator should avoid. So, catharsis in theatre, just like sublimation in psychoanalysis, is proposed as the ideal outcome of an experience that tends to some form of knowledge; a knowledge that constitutes the subject's relationship to the Other as vital. The effect of catharsis, as well as that of sublimation on the subject produces a form of reconciliation between the subject and the Other. The beautiful image that predominates in both cases signals the inability of the subject to deal with what might lie beyond the function of the signifier. Catharsis and sublimation aim at purifying the subject from the Imaginary order. The proposed process for that tends to constitute every attempt to satisfy the desire of the Other as vain. In other words, the subject might gain the knowledge of that fact but at the same time it cannot do anything else than to remain in that relationship since this is the only way where the interests of life can triumph over death. In a way sublimation and catharsis present a triumph of pleasure over *jouissance*. It is better to succumb to an illusion, enjoying through an object, rather than suffer its lack. The spectator is relieved from this suffering through the beautiful image of the hero, but as is obvious this reading cannot apply to the hero. Catharsis, being a prerequisite for sublimation, is possible for both the spectator and the hero but not in the same terms. The hero of ancient Greek tragedy opens up a different field of interrogation.

4.3. Tragedy and heroism

According to Sewall (1980), the word tragedy is a composite of two words, *τράγος* (goat) and *ᾄδω* (to sing, to hymn). In Greek mythology, god Dionysos is represented by a goat, so, the word tragedy acquires the meaning of a hymn to this specific god. Dionysos provokes the transgression of logic's limits; he is related neither to the good nor to the bad. He is the god-protector of tragedy, the god of passion, frenzy, but also of the relief after the adventure into "madness" (pp.42-44). He is the god whose help is always invoked as the last hope for the hero of the tragedy but that never succeeds in helping him

in the sense of keeping him in life since the transgression of meaning indicates the passage to another sphere, the zone between-two-deaths, where the climax of tragedy finds its place and the Dionysian relief involves the disengagement of every good that would keep the hero's interest in life alive. Tragedy tends to signify the worst of the possibilities that a human being can choose in order to act. It is a word that is related to misfortune in the sense that as a plot it presents the opposite of whatever the interests of life can represent. The hero of the tragedy is defined as the one who fights against his destiny; he is the one who, blinded by passion, tries to overcome the limits of human possibility. Tragedy is not destiny; it is a choice that the hero makes in order to overcome the latter. What is represented in tragedy is that destiny can only be overcome in terms of death. There is no possibility of changing it; but the hero proves that the human being can deny the law that constitutes him as the carrier of a predestined life and he does so by realizing that death is the only synonym of freedom. The climax of the tragedy's plot is death. This is the message of tragedy; the only free choice for the human being is death, which is not related to the fear of confronting life but has to do with the shrugging off of a life that is revealed in the eyes of the hero as a preordered game by the Other.

According to Vernant (1970),

The tragic heroes are men who are placed at the crossroads of action in a world in which all legal values are ambiguous and elusive, and when these men choose the Good on their right hand then all of a sudden Good goes over to the other side and their choice of Good becomes criminal (pp.279-280).

The ancient Greek world was divided in between two forms of legality; the laws of men and those of gods. It was very important that a balance between the two should be kept. Nevertheless, there were times that these laws clashed. It was usually a man's intention to raise the laws of men to an absolute power underestimating in this way the significance of gods' laws; this insult is what gave birth to man's tragedy. The laws of men were supposed to respect the laws of gods, to respect that there was another form of legality that restricted their power of application. Bollack (1999) shows that the conflict that tragedy presents emerges between the power of the law of the State over the subject and of an absolute Law represented by the power of the gods who are thought to determine

the destiny of the subject (p.119). The tragic hero is presented as following the law (lower case) of the signifier, to the point where it fades in front of the power of the Law (upper case) which is imposed on the law of the signifier. Man, in his attempt to attach meaning to everything, comes to terms with the power of the gods, who represent whatever eludes meaning, the gap of signification. Even though man is presented as struggling to keep the Other whole, as avoiding coming to terms with the emptiness of meaning, tragedy exemplifies the hero's movement towards the extinction of the signifier's limits. But even though the hero succeeds in reaching that point, it is always presented as succumbing to the Imaginary power of gods. So, tragedy presents the inability of man to transgress the limit of the signifier. Actually, it presents the hero collapsing in front of it. Following Bollack (1999),

Structured, known from the reverse side, the present is strictly determined. Every interference that asks to twist it and to cover it is condemned, because as it is blind, it doesn't recognise the logic of an enchaining (p.119, translated from French).

The determination of the present which follows the logic of an enchaining that Bollack refers to is what in tragedy is called the Até. Até can be seen as another word for the signifying chain which is transmitted to the subject from the previous generation and will be bequeathed to the next one holding a repetitive function. Até determines that enclosed message which every subject follows blindly and which defines its destiny. It is that message to which every family member answers differently but always in relation to it. It is the Law, the unwritten Law which no one can fully signify since it is partially that one replies to it. Its absolute and catalytic status is ascribed to gods who are presented as dominating the past, determining the present and being able to guarantee the future of every subject. Até, being a necessary element of the structure of ancient Greek tragedy, literally refers to the blindness of the hero in front of this enchaining to its past. It is this power that the tragic hero fights with in order to overcome it.

Nevertheless, what we should make clear is that Até is ascribed to the power of the gods but is different from the law of the gods. On the one hand we have the Law of destiny or the Law of the signifying chain, which in one word we call the Até and it constitutes an

unwritten Law and on the other hand we have the Imaginary laws of men (the laws of the State) and those of the gods. *Até* is that Law which cannot be registered in any field, neither that of man nor that of gods. It is due to the fact that it is beyond symbolisation that ancient Greek world attached it to the power of gods. *Até* is an absolute Law. Like men gods also have their laws; so, the law of gods is but another form of legality that submits to the power of the signifier. The existence of gods' law is but the "formal" and approved concealment of the gap in meaning. Gods are invoked whenever meaning collapses. But, even though both laws are presented as Imaginary, we have to underline their essential difference. The law of the gods is presented as more valued than that of men. The law of men tries to enforce its power over everything; in a sense, it tries to overcome the power of the gods, it tries to hide its own incompleteness. The law of the gods, on the other hand, is presented as the vital need of the man to understand what eludes the law of men. So, both laws are presented as interrelated; it is the law of the gods that is invoked whenever the lack in the law of the man opens up and furthermore it answers more flexibly to the gap of meaning whenever the latter opens up. That is because the law of the gods satisfies man's need to feel secure in relation to its inability to understand everything. It is a relief for man to create the illusion that beyond the power of the despot signifier there is a field where imagination can be free. This is a better way to deal with the limits of signification; it constitutes the illusion that man is free and master of himself. It is this illusion that collapses in tragedy and the necessity for the balance of the laws is exemplified in terms of life's interests.

The hero in ancient Greek tragedy is defined as the man who fights against everything that constitutes his destiny; it is a man who fights against the unsurpassable of his fate, against the *Até*. He does so by following either the law of men or that of gods to the point that their core emptiness is reached. Each law operates as a counter balance for the other one. But the hero ignores this balance; rather he attaches an absolute value to the law that he follows. For example, it is the violation of gods' law that leads the hero to the realisation that the latter is but the indication that the law of men is not whole, that there is a gap there, and the other way around. In this sense, either men or the gods become the punisher for the man who ignores the balance between the laws, who ignores his mediating position in keeping a fragile balance. In other words, as Vernant (1970) argues, every tragedy raises the issue of some kind of division in between the social and divine laws. It is in these terms that tragedy reveals the issue of human responsibility in the

context of the Greek law which is made up tentatively of different levels, some of which call into question the great powers (gods) (p.278).

According to Lacan (1959-60),

The hero and that which is around him are situated with relation to the goal of desire. What occurs concerns subsidence, the piling up of different layers of the presence of the hero in time. That's what remains undetermined: in the collapse of the house of cards represented by tragedy, one thing may subside before another, and what one finds at the end when one turns the whole thing around may appear in different ways (p.265).

The goal of desire is related to the revelation of the *Até* that underlines the structure of one's desire. For Lacan, this revelation refers to truth. The word "truth" in Greek language means *αλήθεια*, which is composed of the negative pronoun "α" and the word "λήθη" which means oblivion. So, truth means the withdrawal from oblivion. This truth is related to a signifying chain that the hero is looking for or is attempting to affirm and that the spectator is informed about it by the Chorus. Searching for the truth, as an action, is what moves the hero from the Imaginary and the Symbolic to what Lacan wants to constitute as the Real. In other words, if the goal of desire is truth, its revelation consists in the subject's confrontation with its absence. By moving towards it, the hero is presented as blinded and since the spectator is informed about the outcome it is fear and pity that he feels in relation to the hero. Nevertheless, the absolute act of the hero reveals the fact that truth has nothing to do with what the spectator was afraid that it will happen, it is not a substantiated message; rather it reveals the lack of materiality at the level of truth. Truth corresponds to the subjective apprehension of that message that is underlined by every familial *Até* and the inability of this apprehension to represent it fully. So, the truth that the hero comes to terms with is but his subjective response to a chain that has no consistency. It reveals the choice that the hero made in relation to it and his acceptance to follow it by building his life around it.

So, tragedy presents man faced with the responsibility of its action; actually posited at the crux of its action. Since human action was defined either as socially or divinely ordered, in the case of tragedy, the human being confronts its inability to be supported by either order; it realises that it has magnified one law over the other. Things come to a point where neither order, human or divine, can support its act. So, betrayed and alone, the hero follows his choice of acting to its end, which signals death. Nevertheless, the hero is exemplified because he has the courage and vigour to fight against the power of his destiny even though he does so in his ignorance, as this is expressed through his blindness to see what his own destiny orders. The hero doesn't sacrifice his life for an ideal, rather he begins to do so but at the end he comes to terms with his own act in such a way that he cannot step back; his enchainment to a prescribed destiny (the realisation of which consists in the gain of *savoir*) is revealed and makes the hero succumb to his destiny's unsurpassable power. The hero finds himself in a position where all alternatives of acting are exhausted; there is no possibility of fighting against his destiny; he reaches the limits of signification. The hero's choice of acting is determined by his mistaken belief that signification has no limits, that the signifier can be freely manipulated despite the limitation of its *Até*. The hero's choice becomes fatal, since he pushes the power of the signifier to its extinction. So, in ancient Greek tragedy, the hero, betrayed and alone from the all powerful signifier, succumbs in front of an unsurpassable and eternal power, the power of *Até*. Tragedy reveals the gap of the law to the point that an absolute Law, as it is understood through *Até*, incarnated though by the enigmatic power of gods, becomes the absolute limit of signification; this is what the revelation of the lack of the Other indicates.

The hero is confronted by the lack of the signifier and is presented as succumbing to some form of punishment for having doubted the legitimacy of the gods as a seal to the place of that lack. It is only the gods who are supposed to fulfil the lack and since the hero comes to terms with the gods' inability of doing so, he realises that is left alone and betrayed by all the different goods that kept the Other in a position of desiring. The tragic dimension of the hero's absolute choice indicates the impossibility of his desire. The hero is not confronted by any beautiful image; it deals with emptiness and does not have the means to deal with the division between itself and the Other; there is no place for an object in between them. He experiences pain since he now knows that no object can sustain a relieving relationship to the Other, no object can fill up the lack with which he is

confronted. It is exactly this knowledge that constitutes heroism in ancient Greek tragedy. But of course this knowledge cannot lead the hero to the reconstruction of a scenario that would mobilise his desire once again. Tragedy presents the hero as committing an absolute act, an act where death triumphs over the interests of life.

This is how the idea of catharsis can be illustrated. If we accept that catharsis tends to purify the subject from the Imaginary order, at “the end” of it the subject comes to a point where it realises that it is enslaved in the desire of the Other and that no object can satisfy it. At this point the subject has two alternatives, as the Lacanian definition of the death drive proposes: either it will change the position of the object of desire in the structure of its fantasy (sublimation) in order to sustain the beautiful image of the Other as whole, or it will retreat from its relationship to the Other choosing not to refill the lack of its desire, knowing that no object can answer it. In the first case, the subject overcomes the experience of pity and fear through the feeling of wonder in front of the beautiful image that guarantees to it that gods know more than it does offering to it relief and the possibility of dealing again with them, dealing with the Other; the subject succumbs to the desire of the Other once more (this is the case of catharsis referring to the spectator – it ideally results to sublimation). In the second case, the hero successively demystifies all the different objects that might acquire the role of a *semblant* in front of the lack of the Other. It is through this successive dematerialisation of the different contents that can be ascribed to his desire that the hero is purified from the field of the good, the Imaginary order. Catharsis, in this case, indicates the absolute purification of the hero from the Imaginary order. This is what pure desire indicates; a desire for desiring beyond the materiality of any object. This leads the subject to the zone between-two-deaths where the limit of fantasy is already transgressed. It is after that, that the subject becomes a hero since it renounces the effect of the signifier on his body; he renounces pleasure, making the emptiness of the Real appear as an absolute ascendant that constitutes any attempt to hide his lack as impossible. At the end the hero comes to terms with the knowledge of the impossibility that characterises any attempt of answering the desire of the Other; he comes to terms with the emptiness that determines the function of desire. And this knowledge cannot but constitute the hero as betrayed and alone and since he chooses not to rejoin the Other, his act is constituted as absolute, being the result of an absolute catharsis. In other words, on the one hand, catharsis might lead to sublimation which indicates a creation *ex nihilo* and so it is related to beauty which presents the absoluteness

of the signifier; but, on the other hand, catharsis can bring the subject to the point of realising the inability of the signifier to be constituted as whole.

In this sense, catharsis is a different process for the hero than what it is for the spectator. Lacan, like Aristotle, is concerned about the effect of tragedy on the spectator and he associates it with the ideal effect of analysis on the analysand. However, the effect of tragedy on the spectator (catharsis) is the result of a beautiful image in the sight of which the spectator is meant to sublimate the object of its desire. This beautiful image is the “answer” of the spectator to the knowledge that it gained from the act of the hero by being identified with him. In other words, the tragic act signals the lack at the level of meaning which the spectator hides through the beautiful image in order to defend itself against the painful experience of this lack. The spectator’s knowledge like the one that the analysand gains through the analytic experience (which also aims at some kind of catharsis from the Imaginary order and the gain of Symbolic knowledge) functions as an obstacle to the possibility of transgressing the limit of the signifier. In other words, the Symbolic knowledge presents the subject’s enchainment to a destiny (Até) that it cannot overcome; it can choose between remaining in a suffering relationship to it or it can slightly change the position of the object of its desire in its fantasy’s structure in terms of sublimation (this is defined as the ideal outcome of the cathartic process). Nevertheless, the process of sublimation cannot be assimilated to what the hero presents on stage through his act, his absolute and tragic act. The hero moves a step beyond the possibility of sublimation; he transgresses the level of the Other, the level of desire.

According to Lacan (1959-60), “in each of us the path of the hero is traced, and it is precisely as an ordinary man that one follows it to the end” (p.319). But what is that characteristic which constitutes the act of a common man heroic? Following Lacan again it is the relationship that the hero has to his desire that is different from that of an ordinary man (p.313). The hero’s relationship to his desire meets its end point, meaning the death of desire. That means that “the relationship between action and the desire which inhabits it in the space of tragedy functions in the direction of a triumph of death” (p.313) in contrast to the ordinary man who tries to satisfy the desire of the Other in terms of sublimation, in terms of a creation *ex nihilo*. The desire of the hero follows neither the laws of gods nor the laws of men; it follows its own Law, the Law of its destiny. The “ordinary” man adapts its desire to a form of legality that would offer it “protection”; it

would offer it a point of reference. The hero, on the other hand, acts autonomously; free of any dependence and the price for that cannot be other, according to Lacan (1959-60), than choosing to act in favour of “paying with a pound of flesh for the satisfaction of one’s desire” (p.322). Nevertheless, this is not the point at which a tragedy begins, rather it is the point that it reaches. In other words, every tragedy presents an ordinary man, someone the spectator can identify with, who passionately follows one law or the other. We can even talk about sublimation at the *beginning* of every play. The protagonist raises the human or the divine law to the dignity of the cause of his desire and blindly follows it to the end. He reaches a point where he realises that this law cannot reign everywhere; that it has a lack and this lack becomes obvious at the point where the other law appears as a punisher for the absoluteness that the protagonist has attached to the law that he followed. It is at this point that the gap opens up and the law is constituted as lacking. This is the point where the hero (but also the spectator being identified with the hero) realises that the fantasy, which he so devotedly followed, is but an illusion, the illusion that the signifier can attach meaning to everything. This is where we can locate the idea of the second knowledge, the *savoir* of that Symbolic construction that supports one’s desire. An absolute act takes place; an act that does not result in closing this gap (sublimation); rather, it follows no law; it is an autonomous act through which the hero chooses death over life. It is in this sense that the hero can illustrate the extinction of the signifier’s limits. This is what the hero’s unique relationship with his desire indicates.

It is not by chance that no heroic act is presented on scene. Rather what the poet makes appear is the beautiful image of the hero. It is to that image that the spectator should be identified with in order to succeed the effect of catharsis and so the possibility of sublimation. What we are presented in tragedy is the path of the hero towards the point of his act. This is where the performance of the actor ends. Arguing against Lacan’s point that the hero is situated from the very beginning in the zone between-two-deaths, we have already shown that the hero moves at this zone as an ordinary man. He tries to give an answer to his fantasy until he reaches the point where he realises that there is no answer, that the Other cannot be satisfied. This is the only limit that tragedy presents, the limit of the signifier where the fantasy functions as the last veil in front of the Real, in front of the lack of the signifier. It is exactly at this limit that the possibility of sublimation can be situated. This is what the schema presented in Figure 1.2 shown. In contrast to Lacan who argued that this is the Imaginary limit that the hero has transgressed from the very

beginning, we propose that the possibility of sublimation cannot be situated beyond the field of the Other, in the zone between-two-deaths. Everything in tragedy is played out at the level of the Other that is why the tragic act, which transgresses these limits is out of sight, it is beyond the possibility of understanding and in this sense it is located at that field where meaning vacillates between-two-deaths, the death of image and of the signifier itself. So, the beautiful image of the hero cannot but indicate the last veil in front of that zone where representation is impossible.

What follows is a presentation of the way that Lacan has analysed the tragedy of *Antigone*. It will be shown how Lacan tries to identify the tragic act with the ideal outcome of an analysis, with sublimation, though unsuccessfully.

4.4. Summary of the tragedy *Antigone*

Eteokles and Polyneikes, the two sons of King Oedipus, fighting over the throne of Thebes, kill each other in front of the gates of the city. General Creon (their maternal uncle) takes over power and decrees that Eteokles will be buried with all honours (since he tried to defend the city of Thebes), but that Polyneikes will be left unburied, becoming food for the dogs and the crows (since his intention was to take over the authority of the city through violence). Additionally, he declares that whoever tries to bury the dead body will be severely punished. Antigone, one of the two sisters of the dead brothers, disobeys the order of the king, and buries her brother by covering his corpse with earth. She refuses the help of her sister Ismene who tries to persuade her not to act against the orders of Creon. Antigone is arrested by the guards and taken to Creon, who recognizes her as the daughter of his sister Jocasta, the wife (and mother) of Oedipus.

In his attempt to promote the good of the city, Creon orders the death of Antigone. The heroine exhibits no fear or regret throughout the play; on the contrary she defends her fatal action to death. Ismene and Haemon, Antigone's fiancé and son of Creon, plead for the life of the maiden who desired to honour her dead brother. His "blindness", however, does not allow the general-king to see anything beyond his own rage. He decides to bury Antigone alive in a cave. When the blind seer Teiresias hears of the cruel decision, he travels to Thebes to tell the king of the terrible signs and omens sent by the gods. Creon,

terrified, swears to the gods that he will liberate the girl with his own hands, but it proves to be too late.

Antigone has hung herself in the cave, and Haemon chooses death by killing himself in front of her dead body. Queen Eurydice, Creon's wife and mother of Haemon, stabs a knife into her heart, cursing her husband as the killer of their child. Creon feels his precarious power collapse in just a few seconds. He asks the people of Thebes to banish him from the city that he blighted with his arrogance, and begs the gods for his punishment.

4.5. Lacan's analysis of Antigone

According to Lacan (1959-60), "tragedy is at the root of our [psychoanalytic] experience as the key word 'catharsis' implies" (p.244). This is how Lacan begins the analysis of the Sophoclean tragedy *Antigone* in order to illustrate his theory on psychoanalytic ethics. He chooses this text because he believes that it is a turning point in the field of ethics. In fact, there is no one who doesn't evoke Antigone whenever there is a question of a law that causes conflict in us even though it is acknowledged by the community that this law is a just one (ibid, 243). According to Lacan, the tragedy of Antigone has nothing to do with the sacred rights of the dead and of the family nor is it all that we have been told about Antigone's bravery in defending them. Antigone is borne along by a passion (p.254). She doesn't care about Creon or the State. She stands on the edge of the celebrated tomb and she stops justifying herself, she only talks about the uniqueness of her dead brother (p.255). For Lacan, Antigone shows us the way towards our purification from the Imaginary order through the ethical act of sublimation. He presents her as raising the corpse of her brother to the dignity of the Thing, of her family's curse, the Até. She is presented by Lacan as progressively transgressing the two obstacles of desire, the barriers of the good and the beautiful reaching in this way the pureness of her desire. Even though for Lacan Antigone succeeds in both transgressions, he does not estimate them in the text; he does not say anything about these transgressions. His analysis focuses on the beautiful image of the heroine; an image that offers the spectator the possibility of sublimating the object of its desire.

Lacan analyses the text of *Antigone* by dividing it in three main parts. The first one is played out in the zone between-two-deaths where we find Antigone from the very beginning of the play. It includes the ethical act of the burial, which is described in terms of sublimation and all those parts of the text that deal with this act. This first part is extended to the point of the Chorus' hymn to Eros. It is after this hymn that Creon pronounces Antigone's punishment and her lamentation begins. Lacan believes that it is at this point that Antigone transgresses the barrier of the beautiful and moves to the Real. This second part, which is characterised by the heroine's lamentation, is controversial since Lacan situates lamentation in-between the two limits and not beyond the second one. The third part of Lacan's analysis begins from the song of the Chorus that follows the lamentation of the heroine till the end of the play, where, according to Lacan, the evaluation of the tragedy's effect takes place. So, the first part has to do with Antigone's beauty, the second one with a time of lamentation relative to "an Antigone condemned to a cruel punishment" (p.248), death, and the third one deals with the fate of a life that is about to turn into certain death.

This analysis is schematically represented in Figure 1.1 where an elucidation of Lacan's ethics is offered. The outer space, the level of the Other is where Creon is situated as a character who wants to promote the good of the city. Lacan presents him as the guardian of the first barrier, that of the Imaginary order, of the ideals of the Other. It is at that limit, faced with the possibility of losing the support of the Other's ideals that the subject experiences pity and fear. The subject has to transgress the limit of the good in order to find itself in the zone between-two-deaths where tragedy takes place. The first death refers to the destruction of every Imaginary support of desire and is characterised by fear and pity. The second one deals with the destruction of meaning in its Symbolic context (fundamental fantasy) and whether it fills the "ordinary" man with anxiety and guilt this is not the case for the hero. In that zone the heroine is offered the space where she can lament all those goods/ideals that represented the interests of her life. The second death is what characterises the ethical act of the hero of tragedy. In that zone, and more specifically at the second limit, the limit of the fundamental fantasy, the heroine's *Até* Lacan situates Antigone. Attached to that limit, Antigone radiates beauty to the spectator, she is described by the term "ἕμερος εὐαργής, desire made visible". The beautiful figure of Antigone is presented by Lacan as the central image of the tragedy, as the last veil in front of the experience of the Real. Since in the *Ethics Seminar* the Real, where

jouissance can be experienced, is unapproachable, the ethical act consists in coming to terms with the Symbolic structure that determines the limits of human desire, the limit of *Até*. Nevertheless, Lacan claims that Antigone transgresses the second barrier and that she moves towards the Real. However, he does not insist on this argument since he proposes that Antigone eternalises the *Até* of her family, something that is depicted by the beauty that the figure of the heroine illuminates in the text. So Lacan's reading of *Antigone* is limited to the beautiful image of the heroine, that is attached to the limit of her family's *Até*, and which can offer to the spectator the possibility of sublimation.

According to Lacan, the two protagonists, Creon and Antigone, appear on the stage very willing to do what they believe they should do. Both of them defend as much as possible their choice of action, exhibiting neither fear nor pity. Antigone, in her initial dialogue with her sister and despite the attempts of Ismene to change her mind, is presented as determined to honour the dead body of her brother and Creon as ready to promote the good of the city: to honour the defender and to leave unburied the traitor of the city. From the moment that Antigone decided to bury her brother she wasn't afraid of the punishment, death. According to Lacan, Creon exists to illustrate a function that is inherent in the structure of tragedy; as a leader he seeks the good, he exists to promote the good of all (p.258). Nevertheless, what constitutes Antigone as the only hero in the tragedy is the duration of her decisiveness. Antigone sustains a fearless and pitiless attitude throughout the play. It is Creon, at the end of the play, who exhibits fear for his destiny and pity for himself. Creon, according to Lacan, commits an *αμαρτία* (an error of judgment) because he treats the good that he wants to promote as limitless. But there is no such thing as the good for all. The good of every single subject is not determined by any human or divine law, it is an unwritten Law. According to Lacan, "the good cannot reign over all without an excess emerging, whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy" (p.259). This excess is determined in relation to the *Até*'s limit, the limit of signification.

4.5.1. The limit of *Até*

According to Lacan, the tragedy of Antigone turns around one single limit, the limit of *Até*, which "designates the limit that human life can only briefly cross" (p.262). *Até* is the

unwritten Law that stamps the destiny of every subject. It is a Law that was articulated in the previous generations and will be bequeathed to the next ones. Following Lacan,

This law is in the first place always the acceptance of something that began to be articulated before him in previous generations, and which is strictly speaking At . Although this At  does not always reach the tragic level of Antigone’s At , it is nevertheless closely related to misfortune (p.300).

At  designates an absolute Law and constitutes the hidden message of every family, the members of which come to terms with it through their subjective answer, their desire. According to Lacan, the At  is related to a misfortune that not only underlines the meaning of a signifying chain but also “flows beneath it as well; that is what we are as well as what we are not, our being and our non-being” (pp.321-322). Following Lacan, “one does or does not approach At  and when one does so, it is because of something that is linked to a beginning and a chain of events, that of the misfortune of the Labdakides family” (p.264). So, At  is nothing different than the destiny of every subject which exceeds the limits of understanding and is attached to the power of gods; it is related to the unwritten laws that Antigone will invoke at some point in the text. According to Lacan, Antigone not only comes to terms with her family’s At  but also tends beyond it, she wants to transgress this limit; “her desire aims at the beyond of At ” (p.263). The fact that she comes to terms with her At  is due to the memory and the care of her family as Lacan says, and it is especially this provision ($\mu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\nu\alpha$ =care) that leads Antigone to the border of At  (p.264). Nevertheless, “beyond this At  one can only spend a brief period of time, and that’s where Antigone wants to go” (p.264). In fact, in the context of tragedy the hero’s attempt to transgress the limit of At , the limit of destiny refers to the blindness that the gods enforce on the hero. The At  that governs the race of Labdakides leads the family to death/extinction according to the Chorus who proclaims that “man’s life does not stand for a long time outside the path of disaster” (lines 606-607).

The first reference to At  as an unavoidable misfortune for Antigone is made by the Chorus who describes the house of Labdakides as a house that is shaken of Heaven,

“disaster [Até] never leaves it, from generation to generation” (lines 581-582) and presents its opinion about the destiny of Antigone:

I see in the house of Labdakides how ancient sorrows rise again; disaster is linked with disaster. Woe [Até] again must each generation inherit. Some god besets them, nor will give release. On the last of royal blood there gleamed a shimmering light in the house of Oedipus. But death comes once again with blood-stained axe, and hews the sapling down; and frenzy lends her aid and vengeful madness...and to the man whom God will ruin one day [leads him towards Até] shall evil seem good, in his twisted judgment he comes in a short time to fell disaster [to go beyond Até] (lines 589-597 and 616-619).

Lacan argues that the Chorus, in this song, claims that Antigone is the one who violates the limits of Até through her desire (p.277). This argument of Lacan remains enigmatic if we do not link it to the heroine’s illusion that she can fight against her destiny. Since for Lacan Até is related to the limits of the signifier’s function, we understand that Antigone violates the limit of Até by wanting to transgress the limit of this predefined message to which Até is related. It is in this sense that Lacan comments on the uniqueness that the corpse of Polyneikes represents for Antigone; “My brother is my brother...!” says Antigone to Creon in order to explain her act of burying him and she constitutes that as nonnegotiable since according to her it is a value that is included in the unwritten laws that the gods are supposed to represent (Heaven),

Nor could I think that a decree of yours – a man – could override the laws of Heaven, unwritten and unchanging. Not of today or yesterday is their authority; they are eternal; no man saw their birth...I knew that I should die, even without your edict... (lines 453-461).

According to Lacan, the uniqueness of Polyneikes is related to the uniqueness of the Até that Antigone defends. The Até is described in terms of the unwritten laws of Heaven. Following Lacan, the verb “ορίζω” which is translated above as “decree” refers to the word “horizon” which implies a limit, that which is “determined by a structural relation;

it only exists on the basis of the language of words and it reveals their unsurpassable consequence” (p.278). “What is involved here” Lacan argues “is an invocation of something that is of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else” (p.279). This point is obvious, according to Lacan, from the moment when words, language, and the signifier enter the play as different substances: “...my brother is my brother”; “...this brother is something unique. And it is this alone which motivates me to oppose your edicts”, says Antigone to Creon. Following Lacan, the heroine “invokes no other right than that one, a right that emerges in the language of the ineffacable character of what is” (p.279); that is “from the moment when the emergent signifier freezes it like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations” (p.279). One cannot just “erase” from the world someone who is a man, identified with a name, without funeral rites. “All the clouds of the Imaginary come to be accumulated around it as well as the influences that are released by the ghosts who multiply in the vicinity of death” (p.279). If we agree with Lacan that “Antigone’s position represents the radical limit that affirms the unique value of [her brother’s] being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polyneikes may have done, or to whatever he may be subjected to” (p.279), can we talk about Antigone’s identification with the corpse of her brother?

According to Lacan,

The unique value involved is essentially that of language. Outside of language it is inconceivable, and the being of him who has lived cannot be detached from all he bears with him in the nature of good and evil, of destiny, of consequences for others, or of feelings for himself. That purity, that separation of being from the characteristics of the historical drama he has lived through, is precisely the limit or the ex nihilo to which Antigone is attached (p.279).

In other words, this is how Lacan introduces the idea of catharsis, the purification of the subject’s desire from the Imaginary order, from the “characteristics of the historical drama he has lived through”, which open up the space where the subject comes to terms with the “pureness” of its desire. “My brother is my brother” beyond all the different

characteristics that history attached to him. So, the transgression of the Imaginary limit brings Antigone to another limit that of the pure signifier to which the heroine, according to Lacan, is attached. So, it is not that Antigone is identified with the corpse of her brother; rather she is attached to the limit that the pure signifier indicates. A limit, which according to Lacan, is related to the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*, the rebirth of the subject's desire. But when does this transgression of the Imaginary order take place? When is Antigone purified from the Imaginary order? For Lacan, Antigone is from the very first lines of the text purified from the Imaginary order. Nevertheless, Antigone insists on wanting to defend the memory of her brother; she does not withdraw from their relationship, rather she refers to the sacred laws of the dead and the gods of Hades whose respect constrains her to bury the corpse of her brother since she is the oldest woman in her family. Even though Lacan wants to underestimate the significance of that part of ancient Greek tradition, his argument that the phrase "my brother is my brother" constitutes Antigone as purified from every Imaginary relationship is not consistent either with the appeal of the heroine to her sister for help nor with her proclamation that everyone in the city should be informed about her decision (both events happen at the beginning of the text). Nevertheless, for Lacan Antigone has transgressed the limit of the Imaginary order and so she is attached on the limit of the signifier, being purified from every Imaginary relationship.

Another point that Lacan uses in order to support the purification of Antigone's desire is that she denies the power of Creon; she insists on following the unwritten law of gods doubting the legitimacy of any written/known law. Moreover the laws in her words are commandments; someone (man or god) has determined (ορίζω) them. Antigone talks about the unwritten law, the law whose birth no one has ever witnessed, the law that transgresses every form of limitation. The limit in question is, according to Lacan, the one on which Antigone establishes herself, a place where she feels herself to be unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being to "υπερδράμειν", to go beyond the "νόμιμα", the laws (p.278). Nevertheless, the unwritten law is not something that Antigone invented rather it refers to tradition which is represented by the authority of gods. Throughout the text it is obvious that the heroine follows the laws of gods and that she is convinced that the people of Thebes are on her side. So, it is a bit risky for Lacan to overlook the fact that the authority of gods is but another Imaginary legality. Nevertheless, for Lacan Antigone has transgressed the Imaginary limit of the signifier

and so she is attached to its Symbolic limit, the limit of *Até*. It is due to this attachment that, according to Lacan, Antigone insists on wanting to bury Polyneikes. After having transgressed the barrier of the good, Antigone, according to Lacan, has come to terms with the limits of signification and she identifies the misfortune of her family with the unburied body of Polyneikes. In other words, she raises the corpse of Polyneikes to the dignity of her family's *Até*. It is a result of the process of sublimation that Antigone, following Lacan, is confronted by the limit of *Até*.

4.5.2. The zone between-two-deaths

According to Lacan, the space that tragedy occupies is that of the zone between-two-deaths. This zone delineates the two transgressions, the two deaths that Lacan presupposes in the course of the ethical act, the transgression of the barrier of the good (Imaginary order) and that of the beautiful (Symbolic order). Lacan presents Antigone as having transgressed the barrier of the good from the very beginning of the play and so as being in that zone and more specifically attached to the limit of *Até* which Lacan assimilates with the second death, an idea that he borrows from the Marquis de Sade.

The idea of the second death can be summed up in the last phrase of Sade's *System of Pope Pius VI* that Lacan quotes: "... nature wants annihilation; it is beyond our capacity to achieve the scale of destruction it desires" (p.211). According to Lacan, this phrase takes us to the split of the subject, to the point of division between the Nirvana or annihilation principle, on the one hand, and the death drive, on the other. The annihilation principle concerns a fundamental law which is characterized by the tendency to return to a state, if not of absolute rest, then at least of universal equilibrium (p.211). On the other hand, the death drive is to be situated in the historical domain; it is articulated at a level that can only be defined as a function of the signifying chain (p.211). It requires a fundamental act of memorization as a result of which everything may be recaptured, not simply in the movement of the anamorphosis but from an initial intention. This dimension is introduced as soon as the historical chain is isolated and history presents itself as something memorable, something that is registered in the signifying chain and dependent on its existence. The isolation of the historical chain in the form of *Até*, of that

prescribed destiny of the drive's satisfaction takes the subject to its core division, to the split between the signifier and its lack, its beyond.

For Lacan the drive is destined to sublimate, to create *ex nihilo*, so the idea of a transgression is impossible in this context of ethics. Lacan defines the zone as a place where the concept of the *ex nihilo*, of a fresh start reigns; it is a limit of freedom, according to him. It is freedom as the possibility for the subject to negate its given, Imaginary "nature" and to redefine it. And when we talk about Imaginary nature we refer to the subject's relationship to the object. The re-arrangement of the object in this relationship indicates the concept *ex nihilo*; meaning that the realisation of a specific fantasy's structure indicates the "possibilities" that the subject has already realised and which determine its "impossibilities" (everything incompatible with its possibilities). Of course, this freedom is limited to the specific zone, since the subject is by definition subjected to something and this something is nothing other than the signifier; the subject is subjected to the signifier and this constitutes him as not free at all. The only possibility for a subject to be free is by accepting its mortal nature. This freedom has to do with the acceptance of a beginning and an end, of the signifying chain as the limits of the human experience. As Lacan says: "it is insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is" (p.295).

Sade's idea of second death is regarded as the point at which the very cycles of the transformations of nature are annihilated, where the possibility of rebirth is absent. Nevertheless, for Lacan the second death is the prerequisite for a creation *ex nihilo*. This is the point where, according to Lacan, "the false metaphors of being can be distinguished from the position of Being itself" (p.248); in other words, it is that zone where the subject stands opposed to all the characteristics attached to it by culture (Imaginary) in a state of integrity of Being devoid of references. This zone offers the possibility of distinction between two fields that are Symbolically differentiated (p.248). This point can be explained through the words of Antigone addressed to Creon (lines 495-523) when she says that her brother is just her brother and not whatever the city thinks of him (traitor, enemy, etc). What she claims is what Lacan points out by the difference of the being and the Being; meaning that Polyneikes' "being" is constituted of all the characteristics that make him identifiable by the others, he is Oedipus' son, the traitor of the city, or whatever anyone can imagine and attach on him, this is the Imaginary. The Being of

Polyneikes is something devoid of all these characteristics, and, according to Lacan, this is what Antigone says: "he is just my brother". So, this zone, between-two-deaths, is where the Imaginary order collapses; it is a place where all false metaphors of being fade out. And this, according to Lacan, constitutes the limit between-two-deaths, the biological one and the death of the Imaginary order. This is expressed as a limit where the Being appears as a pure Being, as a lack of Imaginary content.

This lack of being is related to the second death. What Lacan believes is that tradition has never persuaded us that death comes through the biological one, since it has never ceased to imagine a second form of suffering, a suffering beyond death that is indefinitely sustained by the impossibility of crossing the limit of the second death. So, how does man have access to his own relationship to death? The answer, following Lacan, is given by the signifier insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that it comes up against the fact that it may disappear from the chain of what it is. Lacan refers to Sade and to his idea that "the greatest cruelty is that the subject's fate is displayed before his eyes with his full awareness of it. The plot against the victim is openly hatched in front of him. The value of this fantasm is that it confronts the subject with a final 'he didn't know'" (pp.219-220). He didn't know what? He didn't know that there is something which lies beyond this fantasm and this is *Até*; it is to that dimension that the fantasm attempts to reply but now it is obvious to the subject that this is impossible. In this sense, the problem involved, according to Lacan, is that of *jouissance* because it is presented as buried at the centre of a field which is inaccessible. This field is surrounded by a barrier which, for Lacan makes the subject's access to it impossible. Nevertheless, the drive is presented as trying to extinguish the limits of the pleasure principle in order to reach the Real, the absolute satisfaction. According to Lacan, the drive embodies a historical dimension since it is characterised as memorable, remembered. Remembering, "historicizing", is coextensive with the functioning of the drive in what we call the human psyche (p.209). Lacan is related to Sade in the sense that the subject in the zone between-two-deaths is condemned to look for the mythical something that is still remembered by the drive. In other words, the way that tragedy is presented by Lacan, since it is played out in that zone, cannot be other than the eternal suffering of the hero in front of the unforgettable but nevertheless lost *jouissance*.

The second limit of the second death, according to Lacan who follows Sade, is something that sought to pursue nature to the very principle of its creative power, which regulates the alternation of corruption and generation. This something constitutes a form of transgression possible that Sade calls “crime”. The aim of Sadean crime is to force nature to start again from zero. This can be accomplished if one sweeps aside the reproduction of forms against which nature’s both harmonious and contradictory possibilities are stifled in an impasse of conflicting forces. So, this limit, the *ex nihilo*, the starting from zero is where Sade situates his fantasm; a fantasm that gives us many possible images of the manifestations of human desire and it presents to us the eternal suffering at this limit. But, in the typical Sadean scenario, this suffering doesn’t lead the subject/victim to destruction; rather this suffering represents a space of freedom. Sade believes that the object of all this torture/suffering is to retain the capacity of being an indestructible support. Lacan relates this description to the experience of analysis which shows clearly that the subject separates out a double of itself who is made inaccessible to destruction, so as to make it support what one cannot help calling the play of pain. It is at that limit that Lacan finds the conjunction between the play of pain and the phenomenon of beauty (260-261). Lacan calls it sublimation and comments that “the notion of the death drive in Sade is a creationist sublimation and it is linked to that structural element which implies that since everything in the world appears in the form of the signifying chain, this is the beyond of that chain, the *ex nihilo* on which it is founded and is articulated as such” (p.212). Crime is said to be that which doesn’t respect the natural order. Sade believes that through crime man is given the power to liberate nature from its own laws because these laws are chains for nature.

*What one has to sweep aside, in order to force nature to start again from zero, is the reproduction of forms against which nature’s both harmonious and contradictory possibilities are stifled in an impasse of conflicting forces. That is the aim of the Sadean crime. It isn’t for nothing that crime is one boundary of our exploration of desire.... The frontiers represented by “starting from zero”, *ex nihilo*... Nothing demonstrates better that Sadean thought is situated at that limit than the fundamental fantasm one finds in Sade, a fantasm that is illustrated in a thousand or more exhausting images that he gives us of the*

manifestations of human desire; the fantasm involved is that of eternal suffering (pp.260-261 emphasis added).

Like the Sadean fantasm where the object is the power to support a form of suffering which is nothing else but the signifier of a limit, Lacan places Antigone at that limit and helps to bring her down the centuries as an image of suffering. At this limit, says Lacan, we meet a space of freedom, which is characterised by the phenomenon of beauty but also by the experience of pain. It is a limit where the subject, purified from the Imaginary order and so devoid of the means to deal with the Other, faces the limit of the Other petrified, in a state of suffering, feeling pain. According to Lacan, “suffering is conceived of as a stasis which affirms that that which is cannot return to the void from which it emerged” (p.261) and so asks for a reconciliation (sublimation). For the Sadean fantasy the victim is identified with the object that sustains this kind of suffering. For Lacan is a matter of sublimation, the subject rebuilds its relationship to the Other in order to prove that human desire is always the desire of the Other (pp.260-261). This is, according to Lacan, the effect of a creation *ex nihilo*, the effect of sublimation. According to Lacan, “in order to compensate for the inaccessibility of the Thing, all individual sublimation is projected beyond that barrier” (p.203). If Antigone sublimates the corpse of Polyneikes in order to reach the Thing, why is Lacan referring to the suffering state of Antigone? Is Antigone identified with the corpse of Polyneikes representing a state of suffering? How is this state of suffering resulting in a beautiful image? If Antigone is in the process of sublimation where is the beautiful object that she is attached to? Finally, who is in the process of sublimation, the poet, the spectator, or the heroine? Lacan says that tragedy as a form of art

Concerns the response of a being, whether reader or writer, at the approach to a centre of incandescence or an absolute zero that is physically unbearable ... When one approaches that central emptiness, which up to now has been the form in which access to jouissance has presented itself to us, my neighbour's body breaks into pieces (pp.201-202)

Antigone becomes a beautiful image, which “leaves man speechless at the prospect of the image that is silhouetted behind it and threatens it” (p.261). Following Lacan, this threat concerns the abolition of the object that supports the suffering state of the victim which is apprehended in terms of beauty. Nevertheless, the zone between-two-deaths is that space where the subject has the “freedom” of redefining its relationship with the Other, to reconstruct it *ex nihilo*. Sublimation is described by Lacan as that process which paralyses the power of the signifier, meaning that “the emergent signifier freezes it [the language] like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations” (p.279). Lacan constitutes the corpse of Polyneikes as that fixed object which is sublimated from Antigone and Antigone as the fixed object which is sublimated from the spectator. In other words, despite the flood of all possible transformation (the function of the Imaginary order), the corpse of Antigone’s brother becomes the object cause of her desire; it freezes and condenses the underlying curse of Labdakides’ family, the Até. It is in this sense that Lacan claims that “Antigone perpetuates, eternalises, immortalises that Até” (p.283). Nevertheless, Antigone does not claim for the beauty of her brother’s corpse. Rather, by incarnating a state of suffering, Antigone becomes for Lacan and the spectator a beautiful image which eternalises the Até of Labdakides throughout the centuries. The beauty that the image of Antigone radiates makes the spectator lose meaning. The spectator is fixed on the beautiful image of Antigone who becomes the reason for annihilating the sum of the Imaginary clouds that were accumulated around its own desire. This is what Lacan means by sublimation and the idea of the creation *ex nihilo* in terms of the second death; it is the possibility that the signifier constitutes the object as fixed, meaningless and almost absent at the limit between-two-deaths, but also the possibility of starting again the search for the Thing, to reconstruct a new fantasy in relation to it. The spectator has the ability to transgress the pity and fear that it had in relation to the heroine by being identified with her. In other words, the beauty of Antigone becomes a paralysing effect on the spectator’s code of understanding. The figure of the heroine “seen from the outside by us as α-τραγωδοί (not members of the tragedy), appears as the victim of the anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy. She is there in spite of herself as victim and holocaust” (p.282). So, even though through sublimation the signifier might reveal the lack of content, Antigone becomes that object which hides this incompleteness, offering to the spectator the possibility of attributing a different content

to it. This is the position that Lacan ascribes to Antigone “**in spite of herself**”. This is how himself experienced catharsis and not Antigone herself.

So, if we don't accept that the corpse of Polyneikes is a beautiful image for Antigone we cannot sustain Lacan's argument that the heroine goes through sublimation. The heroine does not talk about any beautiful image. So, following the analysis of Lacan, sublimation in tragedy is a process referring to the spectator. Antigone is read by Lacan as a fixed and petrified object for the spectator who raises it to the dignity of its Thing and creates a new *semblant* for the cause of its desire. This is how catharsis is achieved by the spectator and by Lacan himself.

4.5.3. The beauty of Antigone

According to Lacan, the limit of At e, the limit of the second death, where Antigone is attached, is not just a limit of suffering but also that limit from where the beauty of the heroine radiates; it is a limit where anamorphosis, the result of sublimation is possible (p.294). According to Lacan, the beauty of Antigone designates this limit, and radiates after the announcement of her condemnation to death, just before her entombment. This fascinating image of Antigone is described by Lacan in terms of an anamorphosis since this is the function of the tragedy, “tragedy is that which spreads itself out in front so that that image may be produced” (p.273). According to Lacan, “the violent illumination, the glow of the beauty, coincides with the moment of transgression **or** (emphasis added) of realisation of Antigone's At e” (p.281). This “or” is catalytic in the analysis of Lacan since it signals the doubt that he has in relation to what Antigone does, what exactly is doing in the zone between-two-deaths. In other words, Lacan cannot explain the path of Antigone towards her desire but only the limits of that zone that becomes the last barrier in front of the possibility of transgression. The only thing that he can say is that at that limit the subject reveals its relationship to its own death and this becomes evident to the spectator of the tragedy through the beauty that the heroine exhibits in terms of a blinding flash (p.295). Beauty is a blindness effect for the Chorus also. In front of the fascinating image of Antigone's beauty, the Chorus, according to Lacan, goes out of its mind, “this story is driving us mad; we are losing our grip; we are going out of our minds; as far as this child is concerned we are moved to...” (p.268). According to Lacan, “the moving

side of beauty causes all critical judgment to vacillate, stops analysis, and plunges the different forms involved into a certain confusion or, rather, an essential blindness” (p.281).

Lacan attempts to show how the beauty of Antigone affects desire,

Antigone reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire. This line of sight focuses on an image that possesses a mystery, which up till now has never been articulated since it forces you to close your eyes at the very moment you look at it. Yet that image is at the centre of tragedy, since it is the fascinating image of Antigone herself. We know very well that over and beyond the dialogue, over and beyond the question of family and country, over and beyond the moralizing arguments, it is Antigone herself who fascinates us in her unbearable splendour. She has a quality that both attracts us and startles us, in the sense of intimidating us; this terrible, self-willed victim disturbs us (p.247).

This comment rests on the “fascinating image” of Antigone that the Chorus sings of in the hymn to Eros. Lacan thinks this song of Chorus, where beauty is evoked, as a pivotal passage of the tragedy. No doubt, it is through these few lines that Antigone comes to our mind “έρως αντίκατε μάχαν...”, “eros incompatible in fight”. This song is encomium to eros, to passionate love, which, according to the Chorus, is visible on the face of Antigone. The Chorus talks about eros as a feeling that no one can escape from (even the gods) and that no one can fight with and be the winner. It is a feeling that turns logic to madness, that turns justice to injustice and that sits on the throne of the Great powers having a destructive power upon the man, whose body and mind, eros will choose to conquer. This is the context of beauty in the text; the reflected effect of eros on the face of Antigone, “ίμερος εναργής”, “passion made visible”.

What Lacan claims is that Antigone shows us the way that she follows towards the centre of her desire. This is a route whose end we are unable to see. It is a way that she follows by herself, she cannot be accompanied by anyone; the route to the centre of desire is a

lonely journey. According to this thesis, Antigone intimidates and disturbs us because we are left behind. She denies any attachment that will keep her away from the realisation of her desire. This constitutes her as self-willed and that is why we are disturbed; because we are unable to be so and it is annoying for the spectator to lose part of its identification. As spectators, we can only feel the power that magnetises her and sucks her in. It is this power of attraction that attributes to Antigone's image the possibility of purifying the spectator of the feelings of fear and pity. According to Lacan, this picture excites these feelings through which "we are purged, purified of everything of that order (Imaginary)" (p.248) this is the image of Antigone herself. It is through this line of sight that Lacan defines Antigone's beauty, which he thinks as determinant of the zone that she occupies, that between-two-deaths. It is there that the tragic action takes place and it is illuminated on the subject; it has to do with Antigone's beauty and it is doubtless from this place that her splendour derives (p.248). Attached to the limit from which she cannot escape, Antigone represents, for Lacan, the Other's wholeness. This is the point where the sum of the ideals of the Other is annihilated and the beautiful image of Antigone reveals the fatal consequences of any attempt to transgress the limit that the lack of the Other imposes on the subject. In order to say that we are disturbed by the image of Antigone, we have to accept that the heroine acquires the role of the object *a* for the spectator. So, the last veil in front of the Thing, Antigone herself offers to the spectator the possibility of experiencing the movement of the object that hides the lack of the Other. It is the revealment of this lack that disturbs us.

According to Lacan, the spectator, who "follows" the heroine in the zone between-two-deaths and so is exposed to the beauty of Antigone, reaches a state of excitement.

It is when passing through that zone that the beam of desire is both reflected and refracted till it ends up giving us the most strange and most profound of effects, which is the effect of beauty on desire. It [this zone] seems to split desire strangely as it continues on its way, for one cannot say that it is completely extinguished by the apprehension of beauty. It continues on its way, but now more than elsewhere, it has a sense of being taken in and this is manifested by the splendour and magnificence of the zone that draws it on (pp.248-249).

This state of excitement is defined by Lacan as “something that is involved in the sphere of your power relations; it is notably something that makes you lose them” (p.249). “To lose them” indicates to lose one’s means, to lose the tools that you have in order to understand and this is nothing else than the Imaginary object, which enables man to create a relationship with the Other. That is why Lacan states that in the image of Antigone there is no object any longer (p.249). It is here that the influence of Kant becomes obvious; in the case of beauty it is not the content of the object that matters, rather it is the fact that the frame of the object is there.

The effect of beauty is the ideal experience that can lead the spectator to purification from the Imaginary order. But this doesn’t happen, “I am not sure if the spectator ever trembles that much”, says Lacan (p.252). Nevertheless, he declares that he is sure that the spectator is fascinated by the image of Antigone. And even though he states that the whole tragedy turns around that image, he is in accordance with Aristotle who believes that “on the level of what occurs in reality, an auditor rather than a spectator is involved”; the spectacle is arranged on the margin (p.252). It is interesting that Lacan states that the function of the beautiful is presented in relation to the aim of desire (p.257). “Nothing is more moving than that *ἕμερος εὐαργίας*, than the desire that visibly emanates from the eyelids of this admirable girl”, Lacan adds (p.281). In fact, we have never seen Antigone; tragedy came down the centuries to us through words and it is these words that fascinate us and have made us work on Antigone for so many centuries. Lacan, even though he analyses the text, always has in mind his priority: to define tragedy as the zone between-two-deaths, between the good and the Thing. He presents Antigone as speechless, standing in that zone representing an agalma of fascinating beauty incarnating the primordial and hidden object of the spectator’s desire. He fixes her image on that zone, but, as he says, Antigone is magnetised by a power that makes her move towards it; she is not static, Antigone moves beyond images and words, she moves towards death, “she is identifying herself with the manifestation of the death instinct”, Lacan writes (p.281). She moves towards the satisfaction of her desire, which is a pure desire for death, according to Lacan, and she goes beyond the right one has to make light of what happens at the greatest of costs (p.281). And when Lacan insists that the effect of beauty is experienced by the spectator; it is just an indication that desire tends to be satisfied somewhere else, beyond what the spectator can see. So, it is the spectator which identifies Antigone with the cause of its desire, for which Antigone becomes an object. For the heroine the case is

different, she is not identified to any object; rather she moves beyond materiality. And this is a time which begins through Antigone's lamentation.

4.5.4. The lamentation of Antigone

Even though Lacan argues that the zone between-two-deaths is that space where the lamentation of the heroine takes place; that it is from the same place that her fascinating image along with her lamentation comes" (pp.280-281), he also says that lamentation signals her transgression or realisation of the limit of *Até*. According to Lacan, "lamentation begins from the moment when Antigone crosses the entrance to the zone between life and death, when what she has already affirmed herself to be takes on an outward form" (p.280). The idea that she is in the kingdom of the dead is now consecrated; her life is already lost and as such it is experienced at the limit of the other side. In the text Antigone's lamentation begins exactly after the Chorus' hymn to Eros and her beauty's praise. According to Eckermann (1835), Goethe, among others, thought that the lamentation of Antigone was a later addition to the text since it doesn't fit the figure of the heroine; it doesn't suit a fearless and pitiless character (p.35). Lacan, on the other hand, finds this passage essential since it presents the suffering of Antigone as the characteristic of the limit that she occupies. So, the second death, the meeting of the heroine with the lack of the signifier, is unbearable for her. But, what is Antigone lamenting? According to Lacan, her lamentation is not an attempt to justify herself; rather, what she does is exactly the opposite. "Antigone stops to justify herself", says Lacan; and her lamentation is "a question of life and death, of a brother, father, husband and child" (p.255).

Nevertheless, a few pages later Lacan argues that "her separation is lived as a regret or lamentation for everything in life that is refused her" (p.280). In this way, Antigone is presented by Lacan as lamenting for all those possibilities that she had in life but didn't have the time to realise and this could be a characteristic of the second knowledge that she gained by coming to terms with the second death. Nevertheless, Lacan's idea that Antigone regrets everything she has refused to live is not consistent with his argument that the heroine is not just purified from the Imaginary order but that she has crossed the limits of the signifier (or at least she is about to do so). His argument is inconsistent

because what the text reveals is that Antigone never stepped back from her decision even though she knew from the very beginning that her act would condemn her to death. The idea of regret cannot be supported by Lacan's analysis of the heroine. In another context, Lacan argues that what is actually revealed through her lamentation is the value of life as experienced in the intermediary zone between birth and death (p.248). This death, according to Lacan, is but the death of all those characteristics that constituted her brother criminal, of all those characteristics that constituted her family damned. As she says, she wouldn't do the same for her husband or her child because they are replaceable. But her brother is not. Nevertheless, this kind of lamentation would be better attached in the zone between-two-deaths where she comes to terms with a second knowledge indicating the death of the Imaginary order and not the transgression of the signifier.

The zone that Lacan defines as that being between life and death should be understood as the transgression of the heroine to the other side, to the beyond of what we can see and understand. This is not something that Lacan can theoretically support but he indicates it, he offers all the hints needed in order to understand it. In this way, lamentation signals the review of the life that Antigone has never lived. According to Lacan,

Life can only be approached, can only be lived or thought about, from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side. But from that place she can see it and live it in the form of something already lost (p.280).

So, Lacan's reference to Antigone's lamentation basically aims at showing that it is nothing more than an illustration of the death drive. The way that the text supports the mortal state to which Antigone is attached is exemplary. After the heroine's lamentation, the Chorus refers to three examples from mythology: that of Danae who was shut up in a bronze chamber and who continued to cry while being petrified by Zeus; that of Lycurgus who was blinded by gods and persecuted the servants of Dionysos who entombed him in a stone cave; that of Cleopatra who was also shut up in a cave. Lacan refers to all the mythical figures that either the Chorus or Antigone assimilates to her. These are figures that are presented in a state between life and death. They occupy a space which can be neither described in terms of life nor in terms of death. It is to the picture of Niobe that

Antigone is identified. According to Lacan, Niobe is but another image that is constructed in order for the limit that tragedy delineates between life and death to be illuminated, “it is around this image of the limit that the whole play turns” (p.268). Nevertheless, what is extremely important is that even though Antigone identifies with Niobe she bursts out against the Chorus when it replies to her that “for a mortal to share in the doom of a god, that brings her renown while yet she lives, and a glory that long will outlive her” (lines 837-839). Antigone asked the Chorus to stop laughing at her, “Alas, they laugh! O by the gods of Thebes, my native city, mock me, if you must, when I am gone, not to my face!” (lines 839-842). For Lacan, this outrage indicates some invisible line and signals the register of a destructive drive, “[beauty] bears within it the structure of the crossing of some invisible line, i.e. outrage” (p.238), “[this outrage] is correlative of something that makes its presence felt at the moment and that belongs to the register of a destructive drive” (p.239).

According to Lacan, these three examples concern the relationship of mortals to the gods:

The striking thing about Antigone is that she undergoes a misfortune that is equal to that of all those who are caught up in the cruel sport of the gods. Seen from the outside by us as ατραγωδοί [out of tragedy], she appears as the victim at the center of the anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy. She is there in spite of herself as victim and holocaust (p.282).

In these lines Lacan presents Antigone as the victim of her family's Até which she has chosen to follow in its wildest option. What he believes is that Antigone follows the criminal desire of her m(O)ther;

The fruit of the incestuous union has split into two brothers, one of whom represents power and the other crime. There is no one to assume the crime and the validity of crime apart from Antigone. Between the two of them, Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such (p.283).

According to Lacan, the reason for this is that the community refused to let her bury her criminal brother and so she “is required to sacrifice her own being in order to maintain that essential being which is the family *Até*” (p.283). Lacan constitutes Antigone as enslaved to the range of possibilities that her desire might have following the fundamental desire of her mother. In this sense he claims that “Antigone perpetuates, eternalises, immortalises that *Até*” (p.283). Nevertheless, if the subject has no other choice than following a prescribed desire, why is it criminal that the heroine decided not to transmit this *Até* further? Why is not that an ethical act? Or finally how is it possible to talk about Antigone in terms of freedom and autonomy since Lacan’s definition of the ethical act does not define a free choice?

According to Lacan, who follows the Aristotelian definition of the hero, Antigone is alone and betrayed at the limit of her desire and suffers because she is separated from the structure; her race-is-run and she vacillates between life and death (p.321). In the end tragic heroes are always isolated; they are always beyond established limits, in an exposed position, and as a result, separated in one way or another from the structure. The heroes are characters who find themselves right away in a limit zone, between life and death. It is a limit that doesn’t refer to their solitude relative to the others. It is a limit relative to the alienation of the hero from his own life. The Aristotelian definition of the hero can support the freedom of acting, in the sense that the hero is constituted as alienated from the interests of its life and so, devoid of them, its act cannot refer to any of them. It is an act autonomous and free from any restraint. Nevertheless, for Lacan Antigone’s lamentation indicates her regret for all the ideals that she was denied to live. It is in these terms that he understands the loneliness and betrayal that Antigone experiences. It is in this sense that he believes that Antigone has chosen a criminal option of the desire of her mOther.

Lacan reads loneliness and betrayal as experiences that Antigone has from the beginning of the play and not as a result of coming to terms with the inability of the Other to support her desire. According to Lacan, the lonely journey of heroine is obvious from the very first lines of the text where she denies any help from her sister. Lacan remarks a special solitude of the Sophoclean hero marked by the words “*μονούμενοι* (solitary), *ἀφιλοι* (without friends), and *φρενός οιοβώται* (not sharing the common, socially accepted logic)” (p.271). What Lacan believes is that Sophocles situates the hero in a

sphere where death encroaches on life, in the hero's relationship to what Sade has called the second death (p.285). So, the hero is always beyond established limits, in an exposed position, which constitutes him as separated from the structure (p.271). Antigone lives her life as though she were dead. She looks at life from the limit between life and death. And the motivating power for that is that Antigone has chosen to protect the Até of her family at any cost. This is how the heroine is presented by Lacan as being enslaved to a curse from which she cannot escape and death is a relief for that impasse.

In the case of Antigone the race-is-run in the sense that her whole family is dead except for Ismene whose companionship Antigone denies herself from the beginning of the play. Antigone is alone. This is pointed out by the Chorus who say: “ἀλλ’ αὐτόνομος ζῶσα μόνη δὴ θνητῶν Αἴδην καταβήσῃ”, “but autonomous, alone among mortals you descend to Hades while yet you are living” (lines 815-816) and “σε δ’ αὐτόγνωτος ὤλεσ’ οργά”, ≈“your self-willed pride has been your ruin” (line 868). To be alone seems to be a misfortune in the sense that, according to the Chorus, Antigone is moving toward the dead although she is alive because she follows her own law (αὐτόνομος=εαυτός and νόμος, self and law). Nevertheless, this autonomy seems to be against benefits of life. Even though Lacan claims that Antigone follows the desire of the Other, it is the words of the Chorus who disproves him. Autonomy refers to the Law that Antigone cannot understand but she follows to the end, and this Law cannot be other than that which Lacan names “pure desire”, *jouissance*. It is *jouissance* that makes the subject give up every relationship, that constitutes it as autonomous.

Antigone, according to Lacan, appears as autonomous, as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely the signifying cut that confers on him the indomitable power of being what he is in the face of everything that may oppose him. So, for Lacan is Antigone's transgression of the Imaginary order that constitutes her as autonomous. Nevertheless, autonomy is a composite of the words “self” and “law” and it characterises the subject who represents the law for itself, that it creates its own law beyond the influence of the Other. The Chorus, attributing this characteristic to Antigone, tells her: “You are going off toward death following your own law”. So, autonomy is not a characteristic of the state that the subject finds itself after transgressing the Imaginary limit, rather it refers to a force by which the subject is led beyond the limit of the Other's law. And this cannot be anything

else than what the lonely and autonomous experience of *jouissance* indicates. It is in this sense that this thesis understands the idea of autonomy. Antigone knows that she is condemned to a game whose outcome is known in advance. This game is posited by Creon, the Other, on every human being that is supposed to be under his law. She is condemned to the sealed chamber of the tomb; she is alone from the moment that she crosses the entrance to the zone between life and death and it is then that her lamentation begins. It is at this point that the idea that she belongs to the kingdom of the dead is consecrated. Her punishment is that she is suspended in the zone between life and death; so, eliminated from the world of the living, she laments her departure from the world of life without a tomb, *ἀταφῆ*, without a dwelling place, mourned by no friend. And even though she can regret (as Lacan claims that she did) and return to life, she cannot step back. Antigone follows her own law which has no way back.

4.6. Conclusion

Lacan concludes his Seminar on *Ethics* by formulating the ethical proposition: “do not give way on your desire” (p.321). Indeed for Lacan, Antigone incarnates the pure and simple desire for death. The realisation of Antigone’s desire indicates that “she sacrifices her own being [the ideals of the Other] in order to maintain that essential being which is the family *Até*, that is the theme or true axis on which the whole tragedy turns” (p.283). In other words, Antigone chooses to die in order to safeguard, to “perpetuate, eternalise, immortalise that *Até*” (p.283). Antigone is presented as sacrificing the sum of the goods, the sum of her interests in life in order to preserve the curse of her family, the *Até* of Labdakides, intact. Accordingly, *Até* is raised by Antigone to the dignity of the Thing; it acquires the status of that lost Thing, which the subject tends to recapture through the metonymic function of desire. Attached on the limit of the *Até* of her family, Antigone comes to terms with the structure of her fantasy meeting its Lost Cause; it is in this sense that, according to Lacan, she does not give up on her desire; she realises its Cause by devaluing all the different goods that she might have put in front of it.

Returning to Baas’ schema presented in Figure 3.1, it becomes clear that Lacan attempts to present Antigone as sacrificing everything in order to sustain the myth of her family alive, in order to keep the Other whole. It is by following this line of thought that Lacan

describes Antigone in terms of sublime beauty since for him she is attached on the limit of her family's *Até*; she becomes the veil in front of the Lost Cause, a beautiful *semblant* that does not allow for the lack of the Other to be exposed to the spectator. The Lost Cause, the Lost Paradise corresponds to lost absolute satisfaction, to lost *jouissance*. Reading Antigone in terms of beauty it becomes obvious that Lacan focuses on the Cause, the Paradise and the absolute satisfaction leaving aside the essential element of loss. For Lacan in the Seminar on *Ethics* loss, the Real is ex-centric to the subject; it corresponds to a mythical state of lost fullness. So, even though he tries to get rid of philosophy's trap (which postulates the existence of a mythical state where absolute satisfaction was possible), he cannot avoid defining psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the Lost One that beauty tends to represent. The lost Cause, the lost One is that "idea" towards which desire is mobilised through a variety of different goods that tend to represent it, to find again the unforgettable *jouissance* that was lost but the signifier promises that it can find again. In this perspective, Lacan proposes an ethics which define the ethical act as the realisation of that object that is presented as the Cause of the function of desiring and the renouncement of all the other possible goods that might have become its cover. It is in relation to this object, the Lost Cause that there is the ethical act.

This is how Lacan presents the ethics of desire. In relation to the function of tragedy, these ethics can describe the process of catharsis, a process that is assimilated to that of sublimation and refers to the spectator. It is in this sense that Antigone becomes an object identified with the cause of the spectator's desire. That is why Antigone is presented in terms of beauty. Lacan's last comment on the tragedy is that "the hero bears his partner into that zone along with him" (p.320). He writes: "as a consequence of the tragic act, the hero frees his adversary too" (p.320). Antigone was ready from the beginning to die, but Creon, even in the last words of the play, begs the Chorus to kill him. Is there any similarity between the two characters? What is obvious is that the tragedy of Creon is his inability to detach himself from the other, which is actually the tragedy of every one of us. Because it might "in each of us the path of the hero be traced, and it is precisely as an ordinary man that one follows it to the end" (Lacan, p.319), but not everyone becomes a hero. It is very hard to detach oneself from life. Man avoids his debt if the cost is his own life and in the case of desire most of us prefer to feel guilty for giving ground relative to it. As Lacan says, "psychoanalysis teaches that in the end it is easier to accept interdiction than to run the risk of castration" (p.307).

In this sense it would be very interesting to argue further on the idea that what forces Antigone to reach the limits of her desire is the experience of *jouissance*. In the case of Antigone there is something that makes her prefer death than a return to life, than a creation *ex nihilo*. From the very beginning, she knows that she will die and she is happy about that: “if I die before my time, why then, I count it gain” (lines 461-462). As Lacan says, “Antigone knows that she is condemned to a game whose outcome is known in advance”, “it is posited as a game by Creon” (p.280). This is the reason that Lacan opens up the dimension of transgression on the part of Antigone. While Lacan might situate her as a fixed object in respect to the spectator he simultaneously claims that Antigone transgresses the limit of the second death and moves towards the Real and certainly this is not done through a creation *ex nihilo*. Antigone withdraws from this game that is why she is admired throughout the centuries. Antigone goes beyond whatever can restrict her to the game of life as this is decided and prescribed by the Other. Actually, the Chorus insists on locating Antigone εκτός άτας, beyond Até, which is where Antigone wants to go. Lacan describes Antigone as pushing to the limit the realisation of the pure and simple desire for death. He believes that the heroine incarnates that desire. According to Lacan, Antigone makes us recognise the manifestation of the death drive; “I am dead and I desire death” (p.281); “she pushes to the limit the realisation of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death; she incarnates that desire” (p.282). Antigone shows us the way beyond the limits of Até. Even though for Lacan, Antigone has chosen to submit to her mother’s desire, there is the possibility that Antigone has reached the level of a pure desire where no mOther accredits a choice. It is in these terms that next chapter elaborates on Antigone’s pure desire through the experience of the Other *jouissance*. It is the experience of the Other *jouissance* that constitutes Antigone autonomous from the Other.

CHAPTER

V

**Antigone: Transgressing the limit of
the phallic *jouissance* towards the
Other *jouissance***

5.1. Introduction

Just as Hegel's comments on *Antigone* remained seminal for subsequent philosophical readings of the tragedy, so with Lacan's analysis of the same tragedy for the psychoanalytic field. Most psychoanalytic discussions of *Antigone* understood the heroine's act as the result of the experience of phallic *jouissance*. For Zupančič (2000), (researcher of philosophy), Antigone raises her family's Até to the status of a particular exception, to the object cause of her desire to which she is attached and for which she prefers to die rather than to sacrifice it. Her sublime beauty is the result of her identification with that object that represents the Lost Cause of her desire. Furthermore, for Zupančič, Antigone is a representative figure of the ethics of desire which nowadays is practiced by terrorists who, by being identified with the object cause of their desire, commit destructive acts (harming their lives and/or that of others) in order to preserve the Imaginary cause of their desire. Even though Zupančič offers us a different reading of psychoanalytic ethics defined in relation to the drive, she does not use *Antigone* as an illustration for it.

For Bollack (1999), (a classicist), and Morel (2000, 2002), (a psychoanalyst), Antigone illustrates the love of herself. According to Morel (2000), Antigone, being identified with the dead body of her brother, becomes an emblem which condenses the Até of Labdakides' family (p.13). Unable to love anyone other than herself, Antigone's motivation for death is the love of herself. In this sense, Antigone follows the desire of her father and chooses death in the Name-of-the-Father. According to Morel (2002), Antigone chooses to love herself and so she opposes the possibility of experiencing the *jouissance* of the Other to which she would have been led if she had chosen to love Haemon (p.240). According to Bollack (1999), *Antigone* refers to the tragedy of Creon and the absolute act of Antigone's death. The plot concentrates on the debate of the integration or not in memory; Antigone sacrifices her life in order to preserve the dignity of her family (Até) and Creon struggles to underestimate the effect of this memory, the curse of Labdakides that is why he meets his ruin. In contrast to Lacan, Žižek and Zupančič, Bollack and Morel disagree on the idea that Antigone is described in terms of beauty; rather, even though they do not argue for it, they believe that she should be located beyond the influence of the image.

Following the same line of thought, Copjec (2002) argues that Antigone sublimates the object of her desire; she raises the corpse of her brother to the dignity of her family's history. In this sense, she experiences the *jouissance* of the object and so she loves the object of her desire in its pureness, beyond the effect of any characteristic that might be attached to it. In other words, Copjec reads Antigone as an ethical figure whose emblem is the phrase "I was born to love and not to hate". The pure and simple signifier that Polyneikes represents for the heroine incarnates lovingly all the different characteristics that can be attached to it. Finally, Butler (2000) presents Antigone as being enchained to the desire of her father through the curse of their family. According to Campbell's (2002) reading of Butler, Antigone represents a figure of passivity. Antigone's claim is an address to the state asking for the re-articulation of kinship relationships in terms of new ways to love. Nevertheless, this claim is defeated by the state and it is in this sense that Antigone remains a tragic figure of passivity (pp.6-8).

As it becomes obvious none of *Antigone's* commentators in the psychoanalytic field challenge Lacan's analysis of the heroine's act. Lacan wished to define ethics in relation to a kind of transgression related to the idea of pure desire, yet no commentator has taken this up. Bollack and Morel might claim that Antigone is situated beyond the image but they do not argue for that. On the other hand, Zupančič (2000) offers us a different reading of psychoanalytic ethics but not in terms of Antigone's act. This thesis intends to follow Lacan's choice of this tragedy in order to define a transgression in the field of ethics. What it intends to show is that Zupančič's differentiation between two ethics, the ethics of desire and that of the drive is not consistent. Rather it is the function of the signifier as this is illuminated through the death drive that can define the transgression of the field of desire as an ethical act. This argument will be supported by Lacan's differentiation between phallic and the Other *jouissance*. Following Zupančič (2000) who argues that the phallic *jouissance* refers to the status of a lost and impossible to attain satisfaction (p.241), this thesis argues that phallic *jouissance* is the limit where pleasure's failure is recognised. It is around one partial object that the subject attains pleasure; this is the limit on which phallic *jouissance* is experienced. On the other hand, according to Zupančič, the Other *jouissance* acquires the status of enjoyment as that of the "one-Lack-less" (p.242). This is a formula that refers to the satisfaction of the drive through the lack of the object. So, on the one hand we have the metonymic function of desire and its status of un-satisfaction (phallic *jouissance*/pleasure) and on the other hand we have the

satisfaction of the drive beyond the materiality of the object. Nevertheless, if we follow Zupančič's argument that Antigone, assimilated to the practice of the terrorists, practices the ethics of desire being ready to sacrifice everything in order to protect the Lost Cause of her desire, we have to conclude that the heroine remains at the level of pleasure, that the experience of *jouissance* is excluded of her case. In other words, the Seminar of Lacan on *Ethics* is presented by Zupančič as an illustration of a process (sublimation) that supports terrorists' choices. But if that is the case, what about the end of analysis? Lacan defines the ethical act in terms of sublimation. What else can psychoanalysis promise to an analysand than *savoir* and the possibility of redefining its fundamental fantasy?

According to this thesis, the problem of Lacan's Seminar on *Ethics* is not that sublimation cannot define an ethical act; rather it is Lacan's theoretical insufficiency at that time to redefine his theory on ethics in order to include the act of Antigone in it. *Antigone* is not an illustration of sublimation. Antigone transgresses the limits of pleasure, the limits of her fundamental fantasy. We cannot argue for a theory that defines the act of Antigone as the only ethical one, as Zupančič does by differentiating the ethics of desire (which she constitutes as anachronistic) and that of the drive. What we argue for is that the ethical act in the limits of human desire corresponds to everyday, to common man, as Lacan claims. His attempt to define the transgression of this limit through the act of Antigone calls for a redefinition of psychoanalytic ethics. The heroic act of Antigone can be incorporated in the psychoanalytic ethics through the function of the death drive, through the idea of the Other *jouissance*. This incorporation asks for the understanding of the death drive in terms of its possibility not to create *ex nihilo* but in terms of its resignation of sustaining a level of pleasure for the human body. This is where the dematerialisation of the object of desire induces pain to the human body. This is what the transgression of the pleasure principle, of the Aristotelian good, indicates and this is what Lacan defines as pure desire. What will be considered in this chapter is how Lacan's wish to define a process for the Imaginary purification, the purification of Antigone's desire, does not coincide with the process of sublimation but with the signifier's fading out as this can be illustrated by the Sophoclean text of *Antigone*. This argument will be further supported by the distinctive function of the Chorus in the specific play.

5.2. Pure desire in relation to phallic and the Other *jouissance*

If we follow Lacan's definition of desire's pureness based on Kant's ideas on desire's purification from all different pathological objects, then Lacan's ethical proposition "do not give up on your desire" cannot indicate that the subject should "ideally" end up with the process of sublimation. This would not lead to purification from the Imaginary order and most importantly it would not allow us to support the kind of transgression that Lacan wished to define. So, instead of reading pure desire as that force which tends to the realisation of the Lost Cause in terms of sublimation and so phallic *jouissance*, we propose to follow a different reading of pure desire which Zupančič (2000) offers us,

Pure desire might be defined as the limit where desire finds itself confronted with its own support, its own cause. The absolute object-cause of desire becomes the partial object, the object of the drive (p.244).

But what does an ethical act indicate in relation to the detached object cause of desire? How should the subject "deal" with the object in order not to give up its desire? Lacan proposes that the subject should raise that object to the dignity of the Lost Cause so forbidding itself to come to terms with a transgression. On the other hand, following Zupančič, pure desire is a moment

when the only way for the subject not to give up on her desire is to sacrifice the very cause of her desire, its absolute condition; the moment when she sacrifices to her desire its very support, when she gives that which she does not have (p.244).

Zupančič offers an alternative reading of pure desire which allow her to define two different possible theories of ethics. The first one is the ethics of desire which Lacan

illustrates through the example of Antigone who sacrifices every ideal of the Other (even her life) in order to sustain the object cause of her desire as an exception. Through the process of sublimation the subject identifies the cause of its desire with one single object around which it builds meaning. This object is what mobilises the function of desire and so pleasure is attained by it. This object, which is nothing different than a *semblant* of the lack that the object cause of desire inaugurates at the heart of the signifier, is the answer to the lack of the Other. It tends to Oneness with the Other. This object-exception is what keeps alive the myth of the possibility of absolute enjoyment. So, rather than quitting from this illusion the subject is ready to sacrifice everything in order to keep the myth alive. This is how Zupančič understands Lacan's idea of desire's realisation in terms of the ethics of desire. The subject comes to terms with (*savoir*) and rejects the sum of all the different *semblants* that might have taken the place of the one object-exception. In this sense the subject comes to terms with that object that supports its desire and sacrifices everything in order not to give it up. The other theory of ethics is that of the ethics of the Real which Zupančič defines through a different act where the subject sacrifices the object-exception that represents the cause of its desire. In this theory the subject sacrifices this object in order not to replace it with another one. It is through this act that the drive is presented as "denying" creating *ex nihilo* another *semblant* for the cause of one's desire. In these terms the realisation of one's desire is understood as the end point of the possibility of desiring. Or even better, pure desire indicates the possibility of satisfaction beyond the support of any Imaginary object. This is a state that the death drive can reach by transgressing the limits of materiality, the limits of the signifier.

Lacan defines the Other *jouissance* as an illustration of the drive's possibility of transgressing the limits of the signifier, the limits of pleasure as this is defined through the phallic *jouissance*. In order for the subject to attain pleasure it has to deal with an object. It is through that object that the subject creates a link between itself and the Other creating the illusion of Oneness. For Zupančič, the ethical act, in the context of the ethics of desire, indicates the sacrifice of every good to the altar of the partial object that is identified with the cause of desire. In other words, the material object, the *semblant* of the cause of desire does not disappear in that case. As it becomes obvious, the subject who acts ethically, according to Zupančič in that frame, should be identified with that object in order to sacrifice itself for it. It is in this sense that we can understand how Zupančič

relates this “ethical act” with the practice of the terrorists. This reading of the ethical act brings Zupančič to the point of theorising perversion. It is in that frame that Zupančič presents Lacan’s ethics of desire. What we have to make clear is that Lacan does not argue that Antigone is identified with her family’s Até; rather he argues that she raises the corpse of Polyneikes to the dignity of this Até. In other words, he presents the heroine as being in the process of sublimation. The fact that this process does not result in the reformulation of her fantasy rests on the fact that Antigone is not in the process of sublimation and in Lacan’s inability to theorise his claim that in the case of the heroine “there is no longer any object” (p.249). So, Lacan’s theory on ethics should be strictly limited to the idea of sublimation. The realisation of one’s desire in Lacan’s ethics should be read in terms of *savoir*; the subject comes to terms with the object that represents the cause of its desire and it is in relation to it that the subject can redefine its fantasy. His idea of transgressing the limits of the signifier in order for the subject to come to terms with *jouissance* (in terms of which Lacan wished to define the ethical act) is what brings us to his definition of the Other *jouissance*. It is in these terms that we intend to describe Antigone’s act by redefining the ethics of psychoanalysis. In that case, our definition of pure desire agrees with that which Zupančič describes the ethical act in the field of the ethics of the drive/Real; meaning, a desire to desire beyond the materiality of the Imaginary object.

Zupančič defines the ethics of desire in terms of phallic *jouissance* and the ethics of the drive in terms of the Other *jouissance*. Lacan (1972-3), of course, presents the Other *jouissance* as supplementary to the phallic one. “Nothing can be said of woman. Woman has a relation with S (/A), and it is already in that respect that she is doubled, that she is not-whole, since she can also have a relation with Φ ”; “she has different ways of approaching that phallus and of keeping it for herself”; “there is a *jouissance* of the body, a *jouissance* beyond the phallus” (p.81, p.74 and p.74 respectively). So, if the ethics of desire presents phallic *jouissance* as the effect of the ethical act which changes the object’s position within the limits of the subject’s fundamental fantasy, the ethics of the drive answers the wish of Lacan to define a kind of transgression of the fantasy’s limits. Reading pure desire in terms of Zupančič’s definition, the act that coincides with pure desire is “accomplished in the frame of the fantasy but because what is at stake is that frame, it ends up outside the fantasy, in another field, that of the drive” (pp.244-5). In other words, it is within the limits of the signifier that the subject comes to terms with the

frame of its fantasy and it is the feminine position of the not-whole that allows a subject to experience what Lacan has called the Other *jouissance* in terms of transgressing the limits of this frame, the limits of the signifier. So, it is not Zupančič's argument that we have two different ethics; rather we have the ethics of desire, to which all speaking beings have access, and we have some cases which indicate a transgression of the limits that desire establishes on the human body. This is what the Other *jouissance* signals, an experience of the body that cannot be described by the signifier since it eludes its possibilities of doing so. This is how the drive becomes the support for this transgression and the ethics of desire are extended to the possibility of an absolute act in terms of the destructive power of the death drive.

Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* is the proper illustration of how the ethics of desire can become the ethics of the drive, the ethics of the Real. In contrast to the arguments that what Antigone wants is to sacrifice everything in order to preserve the Lost Cause of her desire, this chapter attempts to show that Antigone transgresses the limits of her desire by sacrificing its very cause. There is no doubt that Antigone follows the law of the gods; she is determined to bury the corpse of her brother from the very beginning of the play; it is her duty to the gods to do so. Antigone does not recognise Creon as King. The King of Thebes is, for the heroine, Oedipus and she is his daughter. Throughout the play she defends her decision to follow the law of gods attaching no importance on whatever argument Creon opposes to her decision. She knows that gods but also the people of Thebes are on her side, she is not alone. In other words, this chapter will present *Antigone* as raising the object of her desire to the dignity of the Thing, a process that takes place on the level of the Other and that the heroine is not found at the zone between-two-deaths from the very beginning, as Lacan has argued. It is at the point that her lamentation begins that Antigone starts to doubt the sovereignty that she attached to the law of gods and the kingship of the race of Labdakides. She wonders about the law that forces her to die and after renouncing the sum of the possibilities that might keep her alive, that might offer her another ideal to follow, Antigone realises her loneliness. It is then that she enters the zone between-two-deaths after having realised the limits of her fantasy. She is found in this zone alone confronting the emptiness of the object that supported her desire. It is in the limits of her fantasy that she realises its Cause (the Lost Kingship) and at the same time destroys it by presenting it ironically to the people of Thebes "look upon me, the last that remain of a line of Kings!" (lines 940-1). Antigone does not die in order to

preserve the Até of Labdakides, the lost and Imaginary Kingship of Thebes. Antigone freely chooses to die because she realised the myth that she was living in; she realised that what supported her fantasy was just a “beautiful bubble”. It is in this sense that after sacrificing the sum of the ideals of the Other, Antigone comes to terms with one partial object that she had identified with the cause of her desire and she destroys it knowing that it cannot support but an illusion. This is how the Other *jouissance* succeeds the possibly attained pleasure within the limits of the Phallus; this is what the transgression of the limit of her fantasy indicates.

The Other *jouissance*, the transgression of the signifier’s limits is what Lacan wanted to define in relation to the ethical act but he didn’t do until his Seminar *Encore*. In what follows we will see how the case of Antigone can support such a transgression. What will be presented in this chapter is how the signifier fades away progressively during the play. Additionally, the distinctive role of the Chorus in the tragedy will be presented since its function enforces the argument that the signifier gradually loses its power. What will be shown is how Antigone moves away from the law of the signifier to the point where she confronts the Law of the Thing, a Law that breaks the chains that were keeping her in the torturing illusion of the preservation of that myth that constituted the perseverance of the kingship of her family as the object of her desire. It is at that point that we will meet Baas’ (1987) reading of Antigone as a figure who exemplifies the pureness of the snow’s whiteness (an image that Antigone chooses in order to describe her situation at the end of the play). It is through that blank/empty image that Baas defines the pure desire that Lacan attempted to constitute as the motivating power for the ethical act that he wished to define in terms of transgression. So, beyond the effect of every beautiful image that comes down the centuries full of glory and immobilises the heroine at the limit of the image, presenting her as unable to transgress it, we have to recognise Antigone’s free choice not to reconstruct her fantasy, to sacrifice her means of desiring. Her death is not just a biological one. Antigone reaches the point of the second death, which indicates the death of the signifier. And this second death cannot but signify the destruction of Até’s ability to transmit its message further; it indicates the death of that power that defined her past, her life, and the future generations of the race of Labdakides.

5.3. The function of the Chorus and its distinctive role in *Antigone*

The Chorus is an important function of the dramatic action. According to Sewall (1980), the Chorus is not involved to individual passions, aims, characters and intrigue. It takes up the role of the narrator of a dramatic plot. Being aware of the substantial issues, it informs the spectators about past events, it warns them against false conflicts and weighs the outcome of the play. Just as the ancient Greek theatre has its external terrain, its scene and its surroundings, so the Chorus, the sum of the city's elder people, is as it were the scene of the spirit, of the moral conscience. Nevertheless, the Chorus is not at all moralising; rather it is the actual substance of the ethical life and action of the heroes themselves. In contrast to the heroes' choices, the Chorus is the people as the fruitful soil out of which the heroes grow and by the character of which they are conditioned. So, the Chorus is essentially appropriate in an age where the ethical order appears only in its direct and living actuality and remains just the equilibrium of a stable life secure against the fearful collisions to which the energies of individuals in their opposing actions might lead. The Chorus warns and sympathises or it appeals to divine law and those inner powers which imagination portrays to itself objectively as the group of gods who hold sway. It actively sides with the hero who becomes the victim of some false collision created by the gods. The Chorus is there in order to make explicit the substance of the collision, to illuminate the reasons for it, and to express the common feeling that an action arouses in the people of the city (pp.140-156).

In all dramas presented in ancient Greek theatre, the Chorus is essentially present as a highly emotional influence. In other words, it is not just representing the common feeling, but it also manoeuvres the spectator's reactions since it is presented as that one who knows the beginning and the end of a signifying chain. The Chorus incarnates the substance of knowledge, in the sense that it knows what precedes an act and to what tends. It is in this sense that the Chorus enables the dramatic action; it presents that "legal" frame against which the hero fights; it presents the context in which the signifier creates its terrain of action. The Chorus incarnates the city as that beyond of the hero which creates the field of speech and enables the dramatic dialogue. Standing up as an indestructible limit, the Chorus comments on the choices and the actions of the heroes who struggle to overcome its power. In ancient Greek tragedy no act takes place on scene. The Chorus is there in order to bring to light everything that happens beyond the

theatrical scene. It is in this sense that according to Sewall (1980), the Chorus has a decisive power over the dramatic dialogue. It has the role of describing and commenting as it wishes on the scenes that escape the spectator's sight. In general, the Chorus has the power to manipulate the spectator as far as his/her feelings towards the heroes are concerned. Of course, the aim of this manipulation is not to deceive the spectator. The Chorus' function is to lead the spectator to emotional catharsis, to make him/her overcome the feelings of fear and pity by making him feel these same emotions for the heroes (p.147). And the reason for that is that tragedy was invented in order to reconcile man with his fate. The obedience to the gods or to whoever was presented as a Master was necessary in order for man to be controlled. Any attempt to transgress this limitation was punished and the Chorus was there just in order to exemplify the unsurpassable power of the signifier's domination over man. All tragedies present the dramatic collapse of the heroes in front of this power. And the Chorus is there in order to express the inability of man to transgress the limit of what defines his/her life, of what defines his/her destiny, the power of the signifier itself.

The Chorus's role is to deliver the message of the tragedy. Man's life is presented as pre-ordained. Man is born as being the carrier of a familial history that encloses a message inscribed within the structure of a discourse. The hero of the tragedy, blinded by the gods, tries to overcome the power of the latter and the Chorus makes it clear that this is impossible. Man has admirable advantages over nature but he never managed to overcome his fate, his Até. The plot of every tragedy always meets death at its climax. It is a death understood as the hero's collapse in front of the fate's power. Death is a solution, a relief for the hero who confronts his invincible opponent, the signifier. The gods are there or invoked by the Chorus, who sympathizes the misfortune of the hero, in order to deliver the desirable resolution of tragedy, death.

But, in contrast to other tragedies, this thesis argues that in the case of *Antigone* the function of the Chorus differs. Here the Chorus does not side with the heroine. It is absolutely neutral in relation to the expression of feelings. The Chorus is lost among the words and actions of Antigone. The heroine is not misled by the gods, she chooses to follow the divine law knowing that she opposes the human one; she is not afraid of the punishment because she feels protected by gods and supported by the people of Thebes. But the Chorus must serve its role; it should help the spectator to understand, to feel

somehow the fear and the pity necessary for catharsis. Unable to understand, the Chorus invents a spectrum of glorified images for Antigone. It will try to “hide” Antigone’s act behind the construction of images. The Chorus struggles to understand the absoluteness of her choice and it creates images as a defence, as a veil for the gap that is opened in its system of understanding, in its relationship to the signifier. The Chorus tries to hide its inability to offer meaning and it does so through the construction of images. It is through these images that it tries to purify the spectators from these feelings, and Lacan in *Ethics* adopts this opinion “it is one image among others that purifies us from the Imaginary order and this image is that of Antigone herself” (p.247). Lacan falls into the trap of the Chorus in the sense that he attaches the constructed image of the heroine to the gap of meaning that is opened up successively throughout the text. But by following the songs of the Chorus the reader is able to detect the progressive loss of the signifier. This fading out of meaning is concealed through the mass productions of images of the heroine and her act.

Antigone has many times renounced the images that the Chorus chooses in order to represent her although it insists. The Chorus is unable to hide the horizon that is opened up beyond the words and the images. Something is always missing from the signifying chain and the gap that slowly opens up in the text cannot be concealed through images. Antigone represents an incompatible power, that of the death drive, which makes the Chorus lose its mind, “which evil spirit divides my mind?” (line 374, my translation) and furthermore “I too, when I see this sight, cannot stay within bounds...” (lines 795-6). It is beyond these bounds of meaning that the signifier freezes and no image can represent it. It is this effect of the degradation of meaning that becomes obvious if one follows the text and the songs of the Chorus. It is in this sense that *Antigone* should be read beyond the impact of images since the axis around which the whole play turns is the dead body of the signifier; the corpse of Polyneikes and, according to Bollack (1999), all the other dead bodies that are spread around on the scene (p.4).

The dead body of signification is that around which the Chorus swirls. Its ability to explain whatever happens on or behind the scene slowly fades. No limit can stand in this tragedy except from that absolute one of meaning itself. This is literally the role of the Chorus (the role of attaching meaning to events) and it is from that which surprisingly enough it retreats in *Antigone*. The Chorus collapses in front of the fascinating image of

Antigone. So, in contrast to Lacan's subdivision of tragedy into zones, which are supposed to define limits that are to be transgressed by the heroine, this thesis argues that *Antigone* has an inherent structure, which flows beneath the text and is articulated through the songs of the Chorus. Actually, it is the decomposition of this structure that is exemplified in this tragedy. In the sense that the Chorus cannot but make obvious that there is something that hovers above the text and the image. This is the inability of the signifier to cover the hole of meaning that grows as one follows the text. The Chorus struggles to present the law of the signifier as dominating the whole play. The meaning twists in between men and gods' law or it takes refuge in the beauty of the heroine who is assimilated to semi-god figures. Nevertheless, the Chorus cannot hide that something beyond gods' power hovers above and this is the Law exemplified in the text in terms of the emptiness of the law that Antigone so faithfully followed until the end. This is actually what the Lacanian Real implies: the constitutive emptiness that ridicules all those attempts of signification that can only produce illusions and phantasms. It is in these terms that Bollack (1999) claims that the conflict of this tragedy represents "l'horreur pure d'un 'pour rien'", the pure horror of one "for nothing" (p.3).

It is exactly this illusion of meaning that is illuminated through the text and emphasised by the songs of the Chorus. We can detect this idea if we follow the six songs presented in *Antigone*. The first one sheds light on what preceded the opening scene of the play; it refers to the death of Oedipus' sons in their fight over the kingship of their motherland, the city of Thebes. The second one is a hymn to man's admirable advantages over nature, but is also an affirmation of the antagonist that man can never overcome, death. The third one refers to the Até, the destiny, of the family of Labdakides and the failure of every member of it who tried to transgress it, to go beyond it. This song is an illustration of the previous one and an omen for the plot of the play. Destiny is what man cannot come to terms with. Then follows the hymn to Eros, which is situated among the greatest powers that govern the universe. It is a power that is described as being able to make desire visible (*hymeros enarges*) in terms of beauty. Eros here does have a sexual connotation, since it is used as a reference to the disarming power that characterises the beauty of Antigone on Haemon. Antigone becomes a beautiful object around which phallic jouissance can be experienced by the Chorus, the spectator and of course Haemon. It is from then on that the Chorus will take refuge in the fascinating images of the heroine in order to hide the fact that it has reached its limit of understanding. This is further

illustrated by the next song, which draws parallels between Antigone and three mythic figures. This is an attempt of the Chorus to attribute meaning to a phenomenon that eludes its capacity. The Chorus invokes the “help” of the universe of Gods, but even that is not enough. So, finally, the last song is an invocation to Dionysos, an appeal for his help in order for harmony to return to the city.

5.4. Following the signifier to its extinction

Most commentators think that the tragedy *Antigone* has no plot! They think that the first words of Antigone are her last ones. And in the middle, what? Just beauty? What this section will show is how the first words of Antigone correspond to her certainty that she can attach to her brother all the glory that her family deserves. Even though, she is about to sacrifice her life in order to defend this certainty we will see that the plot of the tragedy will include a vacillation of this certainty. We will see how the play allows us to observe the fading out of the signifier’s power. Antigone will question this certainty, she will slowly begin to doubt it and finally she will reveal the emptiness that supported that belief and it is as such that she will sacrifice it. The kingdom of Thebes became a lure for the race of Labdakides. The ambition to reign a city, to promote the good for all and the lure of becoming a King is what the corpse of Polyneikes represents. The family of Oedipus is a royal family; this is what Antigone claims when she says that her brother is not a slave and that he deserves an honourable death. She is ready to die in order to preserve the honour of her family. But Antigone realises that the crown is useless to a dead body. She knows that all the dead bodies spread around on the scene have fight for that crown; without it they are just bodies. Antigone stops justifying her act knowing that these bodies cannot support her anymore. The kings of Thebes are dead. It is in this sense that the heroine will end the Até of her family by destroying, devaluing this crown that supported her desire so long. By transgressing the limits of her fantasy, by “killing” the object of her desire, she will get rid of the possibility of becoming once more the victim of an illusion.

5.4.1. The first scene – Antigone and Ismene

The heroine is introduced on the scene while declaring to her sister her determination to honour her family by burying the corpse of her brother and defeat the law of the State; declaring her readiness to die for that. This is what happens on a first level, but the play does not end on that level. In contrast to what *Antigone's* commentators believe, the heroine does not remain stuck on her initial intention. According to Lacan, Antigone has raised her brother's body to the dignity of her family's Até before the play begins and so by having transgressed the limit of the good she is from the very beginning situated in the zone between-two-deaths. She has sacrificed every single good and is ready to die in order to preserve and eternalise the Até of her family something that she finally does, according to Lacan. Following the argument of Lacan, Bollack believes that Antigone declares from the very beginning her intention to sacrifice her life in order to integrate her brother and so her family to memory; this is the axis of the play, the integration or not to memory (pp.1 and 2). Bollack's "integration to memory" is understood as the preservation of the familial Até. It refers to Antigone's intention not to discriminate between her brothers and to offer to both of them the rituals that they deserve. According to Bollack, Antigone, choosing to remain alone throughout the play, exhibits from the very beginning her determination to sacrifice every single relationship (sister, fiancé) in order to succeed in her aim. She has from the very beginning transgressed the limit which could restrain her in the interests of life; she has "married" Hades (p.4). In the same line of thought, Copjec argues that Antigone from the very beginning of the play transgresses the level of the Other and that she ascribes to her belief a universal value. Referring to Antigone's demand to her sister to openly declare her decision, Copjec claims that "the singular truth of Antigone's for her brother must be a universal destiny, must be openly declared" (p.41). Additionally, Copjec follows Lacan on the idea that it "is not the otherness" that Antigone renounces in the first lines of the text, but "the non-existence of the Other" and in this sense she claims that the heroine is autonomous from the beginning (p.42).

But, the opening lines of the text introduce Antigone as being in the service of the Other; she is in the field of the Other, ready to follow the good to which she is attached. Antigone has not entered the zone between-two-deaths yet. The heroine is determined to violate the law of Creon in order to obey the law of the gods, which demand from her to

bury the corpse of her brother. According to Rohde (1925), “the first duty that the survivors owe to their dead is to bury the body in the customary way” (p.162). This is the highest religious requirement in the ancient Greek world. Antigone is presented as being ready to do her duty, to do whatever is good for her family’s reputation and this good can only be reached through the law of gods. The heroine is introduced asking for the help of her sister in order to do their familial duty, to bury their brother. It is obvious that the heroine tries to persuade her sister to help her: “So it is now for you to show if you are worthy, or unworthy, of your birth”, she says to Ismene in lines 37-38. Ismene is afraid of violating the law of the king and tries to change her sister’s mind. But, even though the heroine looks very determined, she doesn’t seem to take the proclaimed punishment seriously; rather she points out that she will stop when she feels that she cannot go any further (line 91). What is clear is that she questions the legitimacy of Creon’s words whom she never addresses or ever refers to as a King; rather she refers to him either by his name or his title “General”.

Antigone has raised the honour of her family to the dignity of the cause of her desire. She is about to violate Creon’s proclamation because she believes that he has set up a trap of betrayal for her (line 46). And this betrayal is but to make her overrule what the gods want from her; this is obvious in line 77 where she tells her sister to do whatever she wants even to “dishonour the sacred laws that Heaven holds in honour”. So, any attempt to make her deviate from the route that she has been attached to is condemned by the heroine. Antigone believes that the gods are on her side. It is through this absolute belief that she would even accept death, “and if I have to die for this pure crime, I am content, for I shall rest beside him [her brother]” (lines 72-73). So, she might be denied the help of Ismene but she knows that she has the support of gods since she is about to satisfy their demand; she obeys the divine law so she is not outside the field of the Other. She is so sure that gods will help her that she doesn’t hesitate to force Ismene to tell everybody her decision, otherwise she “will hate her even more” (line 86). Is not this why Lacan situates Antigone in an “unassailable” position? Having the absolute belief that she answers the demand of the Other, Antigone has no doubt about her choice to act in the way that she decided to.

5.4.2. The first *stasimo* – a prelude of the plot

The first song follows the scene between the two sisters and explains the situation under which the sons of Oedipus killed each other. At the beginning we have Antigone who sides with the law of gods and now we are presented with Oedipus' sons' fatal fight over their demand on kingship, the law of men. This song is the introduction to the plot in the sense that the whole play is going to turn around the idea of kingship's vanity, of a fight over the signifier's dead body. We remember Oedipus who dedicated his whole life in order to know the "truth", he became a King and finally he realised that he was living an illusion, and we can see that his sons were fighting in order to become part of this illusion. The Chorus attempts to present a destiny. According to Bollack, the destiny of Labdakides is to reach a limit, the limit that leads them outside the walls of the city. What they all of them share is that they fought against this destiny; they all tried not just to be inside the city, rather they wanted to reign over it (pp.50-52). In this sense, he argues that Antigone fights for attributing to her brother the burial that all the Thebans deserve, to prevent him being left unburied outside the walls of the city as a traitor. For Bollack, Antigone follows the curse of Oedipus to fight against the city law's application. Antigone is victimised by the curse of her Father who now takes up the role of her Erinyes who ask for revenge, for the debt to their destiny to be paid (p.43 and p.53).

Antigone is different from the rest of her family since she has already been presented as unwilling to enter a similar fight. For Antigone there is no law of the city; the only and absolute law, the divine order to honour the memory of her family, this is what mobilises her desire. The city's representative, Creon, has no legitimacy for her. Her insistence that Ismene declares her decision to the city is a proof for that. She doesn't share a common destiny with her brothers; that is why Antigone cannot differentiate them. And even though they have chosen otherwise, they are still her brothers and since gods do not differentiate them she does the same. Even though the Chorus will try to describe the destiny of Antigone as a shared one by the whole family, "all are children of the same mother and the same father" (lines 145-146), coming from a common past and sharing the same destiny, Antigone refuses the help of Ismene to their familial duty to bury their brother. Antigone is moving along holding the certainty that she is accompanied by the gods and the silent approval of the Thebans.

According to Bollack, this song raises the issue of the integration or non-integration of Polyneikes into memory. It has to do with the past, which in this tragedy divides Creon and Antigone; the former wants to erase the power of the past (like Eteokles and Polyneikes tried to do) and the latter wants to sacrifice her life in order to integrate her brother into memory. According to Bollack the sons of Oedipus refuse to look back at their family's past, they repeat their father's mistake, they think that they can raise Kingship to an absolute power and they close their eyes in front of the fatal outcome, death (p.2). This is, according to Bollack, a warning for Creon who is about to make the same mistake. He is about to proclaim the absolute reign of his law. A law that is going to make him believe that he has the power to erase the past, that he can exclude himself from the curse of Labdakides family. In other words, according to Bollack, Creon, by mortifying the power that his past has over his life, begins the war over a dead body (p.46). So, Antigone is about to integrate Polyneikes to the past (by burying and attributing to him all the funeral honours that her family deserved). She is about to close the circle of the curse by leaving aside the law of the city in order to apply a law that does not differentiate between traitors and defenders of a Kingship.

The Chorus does not want to say anything more than that the gods are always punishing arrogance. This song is a prelude to the plot of the play and the Chorus cannot but play its role; meaning to prepare the spectators for what is going to proceed. Lacan, in *Ethics*, claims that this song has an ironic tone since the Chorus celebrates the liberation of the city while the drama is about to begin (p.266). This song might not be ironic but certainly is an indication that the law of gods to which Antigone has just declared that she is attached is much more valued than the law of the city for which Creon will immediately present himself as a defender. The Chorus describes with great relief how Thebes was released from the destructive power of Ares (the god of war) and how Zeus punished the arrogance of Polyneikes. This song is situated after Antigone's decision to follow the law of the gods and before Creon's proclamation of his law as an absolute one. It becomes obvious that the Chorus attempts to construct a polarity between Antigone and Creon (an idea that Hegel defended). Nevertheless, this is only the case for Creon since, as Bollack claims, it is Creon who begins the war with a dead body. Antigone does not oppose any law; she does not recognise any other law, she just follows her divine duty.

5.4.3. The second scene – Creon’s declaration of the punishment

It is exactly after the prelude of the Chorus that Creon will attempt to differentiate the sons of Oedipus by attributing to Eteokles all the funeral rites and by refusing to allow a sepulchre for Polyneikes that the second scene opens. It is then that the *hybris*, the insult to the memory of the Labdakides will be committed. Creon discriminates between “two sons of one mother and one father” (lines 142-144) putting in between them his law as an absolute power. He is the king and this is his first law enforced on the dead body of Polyneikes. But the messenger will bring the bad news that someone has violated his command by burying the dead body. His law has been challenged; his position is made insecure. It is from then on that Creon will passionately defend the enforcement of his decision, of his law. Nevertheless, he is the one who seeks approval of his decision, he asks the Chorus to be the guarantor of his words. Even though the Chorus doesn’t have any reason not to accept the king’s proclamation, it asks Creon to find younger people to guarantee his words; the burden is too heavy for the Chorus, the wise people of the city. So, the latter is not “a collection of yes-men”, as Lacan argues in *Ethics* (p.266). Rather, it is obvious that it doesn’t want to take anyone’s part; the Chorus wants to remain neutral. So, the Chorus keeps some distance from the law of the king in order for the plot of the play to be advanced making it obvious that this law is too heavy to be supported by anyone. It is heavy in the sense that it is an absolute law allowing no flexibility, no space of freedom where the Chorus would have the ability to situate Antigone.

Lacan argues that “Creon exists to promote the good of all” and that “in his innocence he crosses over into another sphere”, the sphere where tragedy is situated, that of between-two-deaths (*Ethics*, p.258-9). This is so because “the good cannot reign over all without an excess, this is what tragedy reveals to us” (*ibid*, p.259). The “good” is a value/property subjectively attached to an object which the subject enjoys to possess. For example happiness, health, sickness, wealth, property, etc, are some goods which every subject understands and enjoys differently. This subjective response to a good is what defines the Sovereign Good which is no other than the personal route to satisfaction; it is the object cause of our desire and its *semblant*, the materiality that we attach to it becomes a good. So, it is utopic to talk about the good of all. It is in Imaginary terms that everyone defines its good so the good of all (ex. the enforcement of the laws of the State or the blind belief to God) results in an excess, as Lacan claims. And we cannot doubt that this excess,

jouissance, is what defines the zone between-two-deaths. But, according to Lacan, in order for one to find oneself in the zone between-two-deaths, he has first to transgress the barrier of the good. So, having transgressed the barrier of the good and wanting to promote the good of all cannot go together. Creon treats the law of the city as a good; indeed, the law is for him the good to which he is attached to and even identified with. That is why throughout the play Creon will treat Antigone as his personal enemy, as the enemy of the city. So, we cannot claim that Creon has crossed the limit of the good and that he is in the zone. According to this thesis tragedy is played out on the level of the Other, the level of the good. At this point Antigone follows the good of the gods and Creon follows the good of the city. Of course, there is a difference between the two; Antigone does not ascribe to the words of Creon the validity of a law rather Creon thinks that the good that he is enforcing is a good that the gods do not doubt. He evokes the gods many times (i.e. line 518 – “the traitors and the defenders are not valued the same by gods). So, we cannot claim that both of them have already transgressed the limit of the good since they have both engaged themselves to one law or the other. Neither can see any exception to their law; they treat it as being whole, as being able to reign everywhere. That is why the Chorus cannot take up the burden of a law that has no counter position. No single good can become the good of all and since Antigone will come to terms with this illusion it is Creon who will finally be constituted as the only victim of the tragedy.

5.4.4. The role of the messenger

After the declaration of Creon's law, the messenger arrives for the first time in order to make the power of this law vacillate. It is with the introduction of this scene that the deterioration of meaning begins. The messenger announces that the corpse of Polyneikes has been covered over with a fine layer of dust (symbolically - instead of an ordinary burial). Creon is terrified and tries to give an explanation for that which the messenger cannot explain. Why would someone risk his life in order to bury the traitor of the city? According to Creon, the only reason for that would be money. This is how he attempts to fill the gap that this announcement opens up in his certainty that he can be the guarantor and the promoter of the city's good. For him there is no possibility that he doesn't know the good for all. So the role of the messenger is crucial in the sense that he triggers the law's absoluteness. In contrast to Lacan who characterised this scene as a relaxing (even

“ridiculous”) interval between the two burials, this scene shows how elusive is the certainty of a meaning. An act of some unknown doer upsets the legislator of the city. Antigone’s act, the burial of Polyneikes cannot be described through words. The messenger is there just to exemplify his inability to describe something that he attaches to a divine power, to a miracle of nature.

According to Bollack, the role of the messenger is crucial in the sense that it represents the difficulty of language to attach meaning to what has been done (to the burials). “Le garde est le maître du discours”, the guard is the master of discourse (p.31). The guard is incapable of describing what has happened; this incapacity is attributed to the power of the gods, it is beyond language (p.31). Following Bollack, it is due to the messenger’s role that the enigma, as the lack of meaning, is revealed in the drama. The dust storm doubles the effect of the transgression, of the metaphysical element that suffers incomprehension. This transcendental power takes the form of a physical phenomenon and in this way minimises the power of the decoding. Creon desperately looks for the criminal guilty of breaking the law of the gods; he has to substantiate the figure of the bad, he cannot admit that something outside meaning can represent a gap in his system of belief. Bollack emphasises the fact of the dichotomy between the spectacle and the absence of meaning. So, it is the messenger, the master of discourse that allows the gap in meaning to open up.

The Chorus cannot but attribute this first burial to the intervention of the gods; this is when we reach the limit of understanding and the gods are there in order to fill up the gap; the gods are always there in order for meaning not to collapse. So, both Creon and the Chorus try to find an explanation of what has happened. Creon attempts to construct a delirium around the power of money, “for money opens wide the city-gates to ravishers, it drives the citizens to exile, it perverts the honest mind to shamefulness, it teaches men to practice all forms of wickedness and impiety” (lines 297-301). The Chorus’ mind cannot rest but upon the idea that someone above the power of man’s thought has acted: “my lord, the thought has risen in my mind: do we not see in this the hand of God?” (lines 278-279).

5.4.5. The second *stasimo* – a hymn to man’s advantages over nature

Even though the Chorus attributed Antigone’s act to the power of gods, in this song and through a variety of images, it presents the wonder, the awe that man inspires. The Chorus makes it clear that it is not certain at all; the doer of that act might after all be a man. Nevertheless, it tries to attach meaning to what is going on; the gods and now man’s enormous capabilities could be an answer to the enigma that slowly rises up. It is through this song that the climax begins to advance and we will see how this happens. The Chorus sings of the wonder, the awe that man inspires regarding his ability to tame nature. Furthermore, it introduces the laws of the gods and those of men. It talks about the tight oath between the two and declares that it won’t follow any man who respects just one of the two. It is their conjunction that the Chorus believes is the right path for man to follow (the Hegelian idea of the ideal synthesis could not be better illustrated). In other words, man has to know where his limits are or even better he has to know that there are limits. This is exemplified through the example that the Chorus creates regarding the failure of man in respect to his attempt to overcome death. Man has invented diseases, which he has cured in order to show that he could win over death. But, as much as man tried he has never managed to overcome death.

What we have to make clear at this point is that the word “wonder” does not mean wonderful as many English translations use. The Oxford’s translation of the first lines of this *stasimo* is: “wonders are many, yet of all things is man the most wonderful” (lines 334-5). The Greek translation of the text does not agree with the idea of the ‘wonderful’, rather it proposes: “many things inspire/engender awe, yet the most awesome is Man himself” or “Awe is engendered by many things, among them Man begets the greatest”. Wonder has the meaning of admiration and fear at the same time. In that case, the Chorus sings about the enormous capabilities of man in relation to nature, which inspire admiration but nevertheless fear also since man is trying to overcome himself. He tries to overcome death by “creating diseases that he tries to heal”. Unfortunately, Lacan adopted the translation of “wonderful” which, according to Bollack, is a limitation that restricts his analysis to the Imaginary field. What Bollack claims is that Lacan might try to establish a field beyond the pure explanations of the words, but in the same time he blocked it through insisting on the “fascinating image of Antigone herself” (pp.96-99). Referring to the word “wonder” (*deinon*), Martha Nussbaum (1986) argues that it would

be a mistake to translate it in a specific way in English since there is no single word for it and additionally it seems that it appeals in many different situations. Even though it tends to be more close to a translation referring to awe and wonder, it also refers to the dazzling brilliance of the human intellectual, to the monstrousness of an evil and even to the terrible power of fate. It frequently implies a disharmony: something is out of keeping with its surroundings, or with what is expected (p.52). Following Nussbaum, the human being who appears to be thrilling and wonderful may turn out at the same time to be monstrous in its ambition to simplify and control the world. Consequently, an object of terror and loathing may turn out to be wonderful at the same time, constitutive of what makes a human life beautiful or thrilling. "We might see the play as an investigation of the "deinon" in all of its elusive many-sidedness" (ibid, p.53). Furthermore, Nussbaum takes the chance to criticise Hegel's commentary on Antigone by stating that "the hymn to man's wonderfulness casts doubt on attempts to create harmony through synthesis; ...it is a criticism of the ambition for the elimination of conflict" (p.74). Rather this song testifies the opposite; man is trying to extinguish the limits of its abilities.

It is through this song that the great difference between Creon and Antigone is stated. Creon has mixed the laws up; he overestimates the law of men by underestimating the law of gods. His clash with the limits of the law that he follows will be unavoidable. On the other hand, Antigone, from the very beginning, exhibits her determination to pay the price of being wholly dedicated to the law of the gods. Antigone will follow the law of gods and she "will face the danger that so dismays you (Ismene), for it cannot be so dreadful as to die a coward's death" (lines 96-97). It is around the clash of man with his limits (the signifier) that this song turns. Lacan analyses this song as an illumination of the splitting that the signifier gives rise in man, as the unsuccessful attempt to create a joint between nature and culture (p.274). This splitting is obvious through the antithetical ideas that are presented in this song: life-death, human-divine laws, and health-sickness. This song is but the illumination that man tends to the opposite direction; meaning that what guides his action is the destructive power of the death drive and not its possibility for a creation *ex nihilo*.

Man tends to his extinction, to self-destruction whenever he tries to challenge the limits of what defines him as divided; and this is constitutive. Of course, this line of thought would bring Antigone and Creon to the same position. If Creon has confused the human

and the divine law by attributing to the former the power of the latter, Antigone has separated them and so she might be presented as following just the divine one, as Lacan argues (pp.276-7). But, this is not the case. This song does not intend to put Antigone in the same place with Creon. Rather, we have already seen that Antigone does not ignore the law of the state but is ready to pay the price of not considering it in her act. She follows the divine order to bury her brother but she does not refuse to pay the price for violating the human law. The heroine knows from the very beginning that her choice includes the risk of losing her life and when the time arrives she is ready to pay the price of her act. This song is there in order to make this difference obvious but also to present the Chorus' attempt to describe the most extreme possibilities that a human being can reach.

5.4.6. The third scene – Antigone defends her act

The end of the above song brings the guard once again on the scene. This time he is not alone, he brings with him the daughter of Oedipus, Antigone. She is the one who had violated Creon's order. The guard describes the scene of the second burial in terms of a cataclysmic natural phenomenon. A strong wind that lasted long and changed the calm image of nature made the guards close their eyes. When the wind stopped, they opened their eyes and saw Antigone who was cursing those that had uncovered the body of her brother and she buried him once again crying above his corpse like a bird which has just found its nest empty. The guard struggles to find the proper words in order to describe the scene. A scene that he never saw since his eyes were closed, but that he intensively experienced through all his other senses.

Then, suddenly, a whirlwind came from heaven and raised a storm of dust, which blotted out the earth and sky; the air was filled with sand and leaves ripped from the trees. We closed our eyes and bore this visitation as we could. At last it ended; then we saw the girl (lines 418-421).

According to Bollack, this scene has the same function as the first announcement of the burial of Polyneikes, it cannot but represent the absolute condition of the emptiness of meaning. Following his argument, the messenger cannot find the words; he cannot describe what indeed cannot be said (p.31). The guard is incapable of describing what has happened and this incapacity is attributed to the power of the gods, it is outside language. Lacan talks about this scene in terms of Antigone's metamorphosis, as that limit where metamorphosis is possible (pp.264-5). He talks about this effect in terms of the image that the guard describes. But surely this sort of metamorphosis refers to the gradual loosening of meaning. It is here that the necessity to transgress the limits of the words is enforced. And this is done by the guard who, even though he tries to attach to this transcendental power the form of a physical phenomenon leaves open the possibility that something is missing. The words are not enough; an image must be created in order to fill up the gap in meaning. But, even that is not enough. And it is then that Antigone is called up in order to explain what happened.

After the guard's exemplary attempt at description, Antigone is led before the king who tries desperately to make her admit that she didn't know about his order. But, Antigone disappoints him. "No, I do not deny it. I admit it" (line 441). She fearlessly admits her full conscious act and she doesn't stop there. Antigone still has on her side the law of the gods; she vigorously defends it, juxtaposing its legitimacy to that of Creon's law.

It wasn't Zeus who ordered that law, nor was it Dike who lives with the gods of Hades that ordered such laws to men. Nor could I think that your decrees have such legitimacy in order that you, a mortal, could override the unchanging and unwritten laws of gods. Not of today or yesterday is their authority; they are eternal; no man saw their birth (lines 448-455).

Lacan argues that Antigone in these lines refers to a legality that is even beyond gods and that it is at this limit that she establishes herself, feeling unassailable. The unwritten laws, involve for Lacan, the invocation of "something that is of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain" (Ethics, p.278). This is partially correct, in the sense that Antigone talks about the unwritten laws as having been constituted before the

appearance of gods. But, nevertheless, she points out clearly that these laws are enforced by gods and it is to them that she will defend her act (lines 456-457). So, Antigone still feels protected by the gods. She so underestimates the power of Creon that she is presented as being persuaded that the gods won't let her down. It is in this sense that Antigone has not yet moved from the Symbolic, the law. For her, it is the law of the gods that makes her defend her act in such a way.

Antigone bravely confesses her act and defends it further still through an encomium to the uniqueness of her brother. It is in relation to the definition of the good that Creon will challenge Antigone. The heroine refuses any possibility of discriminating between her brothers. For her it is the family which is an absolute value that nothing can question. She attributes the definition of the good to the world of men, to the upper world and claims that no dead man in Hades would care about what is good or bad. It is in this sense that Antigone defends the good of her family. By refusing to discriminate between her brothers as the one good and the other bad, the heroine does not prove that she has transgressed the level of the Other, the level of the good, as Lacan claims. Rather, Antigone makes it clear that she cannot follow the law of Creon and that she chooses that of the gods because the latter leaves open the space where she can honour the uniqueness of her family; the law of gods allows her to respect the memory of her family. So, Antigone is still following the good that she has defined for herself, the good of her family.

Antigone: "To reverence a brother is no shame"

Creon: "Was he no brother he who died for Thebes?"

Antigone: "One mother and one father gave them birth"

Creon: "Honouring the traitor, you dishonour him"

Antigone: "He will not bear this testimony in death"

Creon: "Yes! If the traitor fare the same as he"

Antigone: "It was a brother not a slave who died"

Creon: "He died attacking Thebes; the other saved us"

Antigone: "Even so, the god of Death demands these rites"

Creon: "The good demand more honour than the wicked"

Antigone: "Who knows? In death they may be reconciled" (lines 509-519).

Antigone determines her good in relationship to her brother's uniqueness, which indicates the special value that she attributes to her family; this value being her family's Até. It is a value that only gods can respect. Creon, on the other hand, defining as his own good the good of the city cannot see anything else beyond that, he believes that the gods are on his side. In this sense, this is the first scene in which it becomes obvious that the dead body of Polyneikes acquires a differentiated but nevertheless absolute value for both Antigone and Creon. Creon cannot accept that this corpse is a dead body which should be buried properly; for him this body represents the enemy of the city, the enemy of the law. Antigone, according to Lacan, attaches to her brother's corpse purity, the absolute value of the signifier itself, the unique value of language and this is what makes her "raw" towards Creon. This is how the Chorus responds to Antigone's attitude towards the king: "The daughter shows her father's temper – fierce, defiant; she will not yield to any storm" (lines 469-70). This rawness is for Lacan the result of the absolute value that Antigone attaches to the signifier.

The unique value involved is essentially that of language. Outside of language it is inconceivable, and the being of him who has lived cannot be detached from all he bears with him in the nature of good and evil, of destiny, of consequences for others, or of feelings for himself. That purity, that separation of being from the characteristics of the historical drama he has lived through, is precisely the limit or the ex nihilo to which Antigone is attached. It is nothing more than the break that the very presence of language inaugurates in the life of man (Ethics, p.279).

The signifier, language is a limit that creates the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*; in other words, of sublimation. According to Lacan, Antigone, by detaching from the body of Polyneikes all those characteristics that defined him through life, by mortifying the power of the signifier over his being, raises him to the dignity of the Thing. Accordingly, the limit of the signifier, which Antigone reaches, takes up the function of the Até that constitutes the heroine as capable of raising her brother above the whole family, constituting him as the representation of the Thing, the absolute condition that she describes. This limit of the signifier, the Até, is according to Lacan in *Ethics*, the limit of

the beautiful where Antigone is attached and feels unassailable (p.278). Lacan describes this unassailable place, where Antigone finds herself after sublimation, as signalling the entry of the heroine into the zone between-two-deaths (ibid, p.278). So according to Lacan, Antigone feels unassailable because she has already renounced the ideals of the Other and she has done so by condensing the Até of her family to the corpse of Polyneikes. But this is somewhat controversial.

Antigone talks about the uniqueness of her brother; this is the result of raising the value of her family to the dignity of an exception, to the dignity of the Thing. The corpse of Polyneikes represents this value. Polyneikes is not devoid of all those characteristics that accompanied him through life; rather Antigone replies to that as “I live in order to love and not to hate” (line 521). So, Antigone has not stripped her brother of all his characteristics, rather she does not care about them, or she loves all of them, since for her Polyneikes is but the means to honour her sovereign value, her family. Polyneikes is for Antigone the object that allows her to hide the emptiness that threatens her ideal, her family. It is in this sense that the corpse of her brother is unique. She lives in order to love, to love that object which allows her not to come to terms with the lack. It is in this sense that the idea of sublimation cannot be detached from the essence of the good since an object is used in order for the subject to fill up the lack that make her illusion of wholeness vacillate.

Sublimation results in the experience of phallic *jouissance* which could not be better described than in terms of love. Copjec uses Lacan’s argument that “sublimation is not, in fact, what the foolish crowd thinks... [it] doesn’t necessarily make the sexual object disappear – far from it” (Ethics, p.161) in order to claim that “the affect of *jouissance* [as a result of sublimation], satisfaction in the object, is not passive; it arouses itself through the active gift of love” (p.40). It is by reading the issue of *jouissance* as just phallic that Copjec limits her reading of Antigone to the idea of love. This is also the case for Bollack and Morel who argue that Antigone is driven to act by narcissistic self-love. Nevertheless, at that point of the text they are right. Antigone refers to her brother as unique and lovable exactly because he is the object that she uses in order to sublimate the cause of her desire. It is phallic *jouissance* that she experiences at that point. For Butler (2000), it is the love of the heroine to its family that cannot be supported by the law of the city which imposes a barrier to the familial relationships. It is the state’s forbiddance to

express her love towards her brother that makes Antigone to rebel against Creon (pp61-76). However, Antigone does not rebel against Creon, rather, she underestimates his power being absolutely dedicated to her aim and this is to follow the law of gods.

Love, Copjec argues, is the “near coincidence of the drive with its object” and she claims that Antigone is not indifferent to the qualities of her brother; “she accepts them all, lovingly. For love is that which renders what the other is lovable” (p.42). According to Copjec, Polyneikes incarnates for Antigone this object whose singularity is synonymous “with these surface transformations, the ruptures in the order of his appearance” (p.43). So, all the different characteristics of Polyneikes are understood as the filling up of the ruptures that are opened up in the level of appearance. According to Copjec “the drive continues to circle the object because the latter is never identical to itself, is split from itself” (p.43) and referring to Lacan’s phrase “I love in you something more than you”, she renders this “something more” as accessible through love (p.43); the beloved is described as something more than just an ordinary object of someone’s attention and it is this more that is accessed through love. In other words, sublimation is presented here as that process which can, by raising an object to the dignity of the Thing, attach to that object the capability of an absolute satisfaction for the subject. So Copjec argues that the satisfaction derived from sublimation is but the result of the quality that the object acquires. And this quality is characterised by the ability of this object to incorporate all the different characteristics that can be attached to it and even something more than them. This more is the subject itself. In other words, the subject is identified with the object that it uses in the process of sublimation. This object is lovable in the sense that it satisfies the fulfilment of the Other’s lack; it fills all the ruptures that are opened on the surface of appearance. So, love, as an effect of sublimation, corresponds to the phallic *jouissance* which is not far away from the field of the image. For Lacan, “to love is essentially to wish to be loved” (S11, p.253); it is exactly the narcissistic nature of Antigone that is pinpointed on this scene as Bollack and Morel characterise it in terms of self-love. For late Lacan, love is “based on a fantasy of oneness with the beloved” (S20, p.46) and it is exactly this that the uniqueness of Polyneikes represents. Through the heroine’s attachment on the uniqueness of her brother it becomes clear that she has not entered the zone between-two-deaths; she has not renounced the ideals of the Other, yet. She might have integrated them in one single object but this does not indicate any kind of transgression.

The love that she defends becomes the obstacle between herself and her sister. When Ismene enters the dialogue and demands that she share her sister's punishment of death, it is Antigone who replies that she doesn't love those who love just in words (lines 540-541). She immediately differentiates her position from that of her sister. Antigone feels disappointed with her sister for not following her in what the gods want from them. Lacan in *Ethics* argues that Antigone rejects her sister "with a cruelty and a scorn that are consciously calculated" (p.263); and we don't disagree with him since we have already stated that Antigone believes that by her act she avoided the trap that Creon set up for her, not to honour her dead brother. In contrast, Ismene has fallen into the trap and now it is Antigone who won't help her to correct her mistake. Her scorn is obvious when she says to her sister that she can only find happiness as Creon defines it for her (line 547). And even though Lacan believes that throughout this dialogue Antigone makes obvious that she feels dead among alive, we claim that Antigone expresses that scorn just in order to make the difference of her sister's decision look greater: "you chose life [obeying to the law of Creon] and I chose death" (line 553), "...I have given my life already, in the service of the dead" (lines 557-558).

Antigone exhibits no fear or pity but she begins to worry about the way that the Chorus behaves to her. Even though she talks in the name of the gods, she knows that she represents something that makes the Chorus step back. She realises that not even the power of the gods who accompany her, can make the Chorus take her part. Nevertheless, Antigone doesn't feel betrayed yet; rather, she attempts to explain that fact logically. She attributes fear to the Chorus who do not admit that she acted in the proper way (lines 521-522); fear of the king. She even attributes fear to the people of Thebes, "these men too would say it, except that terror crows them into silence" (lines 502-3).

For Lacan the attitude of rawness, expressed by Antigone in this scene, is the result of sublimation through which she transgressed the limit of the human, the limit of the signifier (p.263). But, Antigone is not yet situated beyond the limits of the human. The fact that the Chorus says that "the daughter shows her father's raw temper – fierce, defiant; she will not yield to any storm" (lines 468-469), doesn't move Antigone beyond the limits of the human. In fact, as Lacan said, it is always as an ordinary man that the hero follows his path. Rawness cannot signify the inhuman. Rawness is an attitude expressed to another human being; it is defined within the limits of the human, within the

limits of the signifier. So, in contrast to Lacan, we claim that Antigone is still in the field of the Other and that is why she cannot get rid of her feelings. It is in this scene that we can see that Antigone still struggles to defend her absolute choice of following the law of the gods. Furthermore, the argument of Lacan that Antigone exhibits rawness as a result of sublimation strengthens this thesis' claim that sublimation cannot move someone beyond the limit of the human, beyond the signifier. It is in this sense that we highlight the essential difference between rawness and the inhuman. The Chorus understands Antigone as raw and defiant in its attempt to situate her inconceivable position in relation to a code of meaning. The Chorus' attempt to understand this rawness makes it try to find meaning in the limits of the Labdakides Até, in that destiny which will be exemplified exactly after this scene.

5.4.7. The third *stasimo* – the Até of Labdakides

The Chorus searches now for signification at its source, in the Até of Labdakides. Até literally means misfortune; that is why the Chorus uses the word in order to refer to the destiny of Oedipus' race. It sings about the Até, the curse that governs the race of Labdakides and leads the family to extinction. Até defines a family history, the hidden message of every family, which is transmitted from generation to generation in terms of repetition. Até is beyond the signifier in the sense that it is an absolute Law to which the subject can only answer partially. Every member of a family answers it differently constituting this answer as the source of its desire. The subject's relationship to the signifier is determined by the Law, the até of the family. So, até is a Gordian knot which defines destiny in terms of a hidden but also constitutive message which every member of a family tries to reveal by reading it differently, but the message does not change. What changes is the position that every subject takes in relation to it. What changes is the subject's fundamental fantasy and it is only there that sublimation might have a meaning. Sublimation allows the subject to redefine his position in relation to that Law, in relation to this Até. The Chorus says:

*I see in the house of our kings how ancient sorrows rise again;
disaster is linked with disaster. Woe again must each generation
inherit. Some god besets them, nor will give release...future, present*

and past are sealed by this law: man's life cannot stay for long outside the path of até (lines 589-592 and 605-608).

In the case of Labdakides, the até is underlined by a curse and all of its members are fighting to overcome the power of this curse. As we have already said, following Bollack, the destiny of Labdakides is to be led outside the walls of the city. Their Até orders them to struggle for Thebes' kingship without ever being able to hold it. Laius ordered the death of his son (Oedipus) in order to defeat the oracle that forecast his overthrow from the throne by his son. Iocaste disregarded the oracle and arranged for her baby to be saved by a shepherd secretly. She married the man that saved Thebes from the terrible monster (the Sphinx), who was in fact her son (Oedipus) and gave birth to his children as queen of Thebes. Oedipus killed his father and solved the enigma of Sphinx gaining the kingship of Thebes. Eteokles and Polyneikes killed each other in their attempt to reign the city. Antigone is now asked to scorn her past by leaving her brother unburied in order to dignify the law of the city, that city, which the whole of her family fought against.

According to Morel (2000), Até designates a limit in the interior of tragedy and concentrates around an object, the corpse of Polyneikes without a tomb. The corpse of Antigone's brother represents for the heroine the absolute condition of her desire that she has deducted from the desire of her parents who had inherited from their antecedents in their turn (p.12). It is the limit of her destiny, the limit of Até that Antigone wants to transgress, according to Lacan: if tragedy indicates a limit, "beyond Até" signals the transgression of the tragedy's limits, "beyond Até (εκτός άτας) has the meaning of going beyond a limit in the text" (Ethics, p.270); it is to this beyond, beyond the Other that the heroine tends (ibid, p.261). This is actually what is underlined through this song of the Chorus. This song, situated in the specific part of the text, illuminates the point that all members of Oedipus' race tend to the repetition of the misfortune, the curse that underlines the destiny of Labdakides. The Chorus attempts to understand the act of Antigone who is led to death because Creon is enforcing a law that does not allow Polyneikes to be buried as the other citizens of Thebes. Creon excludes a member of Labdakides from what the law of the gods prescribe for all. And even though this is the curse of this family (to be excluded from the law of the city), Antigone is presented as determined to put an end to this but Creon holds her back. This is how the Chorus

attempts to understand Antigone's raw attitude towards Creon. Antigone does not share the *Até* of her family. She cannot be included in the way that the Chorus tries to understand her. Nevertheless, someone could argue that she is also led outside the walls of the city; that she is also punished to death deprived of a proper tomb. But, the difference is that Antigone knows the punishment and she is not afraid of it. This is so because the heroine feels supported by the gods in her attempt to overcome her destiny. She is not alone. She knows that she can get rid of her family's *Até* through the help of gods. This is what the Chorus cannot understand: that she goes towards her *Até* in full knowledge of its outcome. It is exactly this point that constitutes Antigone a unique tragic figure; in contrast to the rest of her family members who followed their destiny blindly, Antigone is determined to overcome the burden of it. The Chorus recognises that even though it attempts to conceal it. So, in this song it is Creon who is portrayed as: "to the man whom God will ruin one day shall evil seem Good, in his twisted judgment he comes in a short time to fell disaster" (lines 616-619). Through this song, which follows the most intense scene of the play, Antigone's fearless avowal of her act, the Chorus does not comment on Antigone rather it designates the ruin of Creon. This is what it can do. Creon is predictable; he follows the curse of the family. Antigone tends beyond it and the Chorus has nothing to say about her.

5.4.8. The fourth scene – Creon versus Haemon

After the song that designates the ruin of Creon, his son, the fiancé of Antigone, Haemon enters the stage in order to persuade his father to change his mind regarding the punishment of the young girl. It is through this scene that the difference between the two protagonists becomes greater. In contrast to Antigone who refuses to share the cost of her act with her sister, Creon is presented here as being afraid of losing the love of his son. This is how the characteristic of autonomy that the Chorus attached to the heroine is exemplified. Antigone follows the law of the gods, being ready to pay the price of disobeying the law of the king, she is ready to die. Haemon, on the other hand, compares his father to a tree which resists the power of the torrent and finally succumbs to the latter's power (lines 706-708). Creon cannot see that the law of the gods does not coincide with his belief; he cannot see any other law than the one that he struggles to enforce, his own law. Haemon openly sides with Antigone. He even presents the whole

city as being on her side. And he repeats what his fiancée had said in the previous scene in relation to the fear that people feel when they are “asked” to disagree with the law of the king. Haemon warns his father that he cannot act (enforce his decision) without being ready to lose something for it; he warns him that whether he wants to or not he will pay for his decision. “So, she must die [referring to Antigone] – and will not die alone” (line 745), says Haemon to Creon, but the latter will only understand that as a threat and not as a warning.

As stubborn as Creon might be, it is in this scene that he reveals the fact, which Lacan emphasises in his seminar on *Ethics*, “all executioners and tyrants are a human character at the bottom; only martyrs know neither pity nor fear” (p.267). During Creon’s conversation with Haemon, it appears that nothing can challenge the king’s certainty of being the representative of the city’s good. Haemon leaves the scene warning his father that he won’t see either him or Antigone from then on. And Creon furiously announces to the Chorus the way that Antigone will die. He will imprison her in a cave alive, offering her only as much food as is necessary in order to avert the curse that the gods might impose upon the city. He will leave her there to pray to Hades, the god of death, to rescue her from death and to learn, though it will be too late, that it is wanton folly to respect the dead (lines 767-774). Creon presents Antigone’s salvation as impossible. He considers himself the one who holds her life in his hands. Nevertheless, it is impressive that this man who believes that his law can be applied without any remainder, that his good can reign everywhere, is afraid of the gods’ curse; he is afraid of paying a price for his order, of losing anything. Creon is afraid of losing his son; he rushes to kill Antigone who is presented as having “stolen” the mind and the heart of his son. And he does so extremely carefully; he is afraid of the gods. He will not challenge the power of the gods; he will offer the girl the food that the gods order him to offer her. Even though he does not pay much attention to the gods’ law on the burial of the dead, he is afraid of their curse. Creon, after discriminating between the sons of Oedipus, now differentiates between the laws of the gods. That strong adversary of the heroine is now presented as the most confused and fearful man of the city.

The Chorus can follow and even give advice to Creon who now makes it obvious that he seeks help. It is only after the intervention of the Chorus that he changes his mind and decides that he will punish only Antigone and not her sister too. Nevertheless, the Chorus

does not side with Creon; it is there in order to make clear that there is only one hero, or martyr (according to Lacan), and that is Antigone herself. Even though everything turns around the absolute character of her act, it is only the effect of this act on the others that the Chorus can comment on. The previous song was about Creon's ruin in and in what comes next it is Haemon's Eros towards Antigone that is described. This is the only way that the Chorus can come closer to Antigone, through her effect on the lives of others.

5.4.9. The fourth *stasimo* – the hymn to Eros

The Chorus, through its hymn to Eros, makes it clear that Antigone's power is enormous. It is this dramatic power that the Chorus tries to catch through the effect that Antigone has on other figures. It cannot touch her. It is only through the others that it attempts to demystify that enormous power of the heroine. It is through her eyes that Antigone reflects that power which mobilises the desire of Haemon. The Chorus attaches to Antigone's image the ability to inspire a power that no human mind can understand. Eros is a power that is included in the Greatest powers of the world and it paralyses meaning. According to Bollack, the hymn to Eros is crucial to the tragedy, "it is as if Sophocles used the Chorus' inability to understand in order to pay tribute to the inaccessible grandeur and the heroic solitude of Antigone" (p.11). It is always the invocation of a greater power that is involved in tragedy whenever the Chorus is unable to understand. And since the great powers elude signification, it is always an image that is created in an attempt to fill up the gap in meaning.

This inconceivable power extracted from the eyelids of Antigone, Eros, becomes the cause of Haemon's death and consequently Creon's destruction. The effect of sublimation is always a beautiful image. This is how we can explain the role of this hymn at that moment. Even though we saw that Antigone is ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of her brother's love. Nevertheless, we are not presented with any beautiful image of that corpse to which Antigone is attached. Beauty is a characteristic of Antigone and that is so because it is she that becomes the object of the other's desire. The heroine incarnates the image of that power which can paralyse meaning and lead man to death. The power of Eros is referred as the reason for the fight between Creon and Haemon (lines 775-799). It is that passion, which is extracted from the eyelids of Antigone that

makes Haemon lose his mind. It is that power, which can influence both humans and gods; it has no limits and furthermore it can destroy any form of limitation. It is experienced as a force that turns logic to madness, justice to injustice and that sits on the throne of the Great powers having a destructive power upon man, whose body and mind Eros will choose to conquer. Eros, that passion made visible in the eyes of Antigone, makes Haemon turn against his father and will force him to kill himself after Antigone commits suicide. It is the power of Eros that leads him to self-destruction. Antigone's image, being identified with the object of his desire, makes him follow her blindly and this leads him to death. All Great powers have a common denominator: death. Eros, according to Bollack, should be read in the context of the unwritten laws that govern the world and accordingly as that Law that overrules the laws of the city. It is situated next to *hymeros* and to death in the absolute sphere that transgresses the laws of men and can have a destructive effect on them (pp.13-15). The power of Eros, following Bollack, is revealed through its capacity to block out the legislative machine (p.21). So, Eros, being that power which eludes meaning, is presented as capable of attacking and paralysing the human body, leading man to take refuge in death.

Eros, which according to Lacan transforms Antigone into a beautiful image, paralyses the possibility of meaning for the spectator of this image. "Nothing is more moving than that *hymeros enarges* (ἡμερος εναργής), than the desire that visibly emanates from the eyelids of this admirable girl", Lacan writes (p.281). Lacan, as many other commentators, translated *hymeros* as desire, which is not the case. *Hymeros* in Greek refers to passion, the strong sexual attraction. In the seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan reads '*hymeros enarges*' as 'desire made visible', as the reflection of the subject's desire, and it refers to the desire of Antigone which becomes visible through her eyes. In other words, Lacan presents *hymeros* as the desire that mobilises the desiring subject; as the apocalypse of Antigone's destructive desire, which mobilises her act. He links the revelation of the heroine's desire to a beautiful image and he presents the latter as the aim of her desire (p.257). But, Lacan, by emphasising the issue of the image's necessity in the process of desire's revelation, makes it clear that Antigone exercises the power that she represents (Eros) through the Imaginary order. It is a power that affects the spectator and so the heroine becomes the object *a* of his desire. In other words, Lacan is "fascinated by the image of Antigone" (p.247) because the heroine becomes the object cause of his desire. In this sense, by focusing on her image, we can claim that Antigone becomes the object *a* of

every spectator's desire as she was for Haemon. Actually, by focusing on her image, we can claim that the heroine offers us the possibility of sublimation, which as we have seen gives birth to love. In the sense that sublimation is a process defined in the Imaginary order allowing the spectator, in the case of the tragedy, to redefine its relationship to the Other. According to Weininger, it is man's love that creates woman's beauty:

The love bestowed by the man is the standard of what is beautiful and what is hateful in woman. The conditions are quite different in aesthetics from those in logic or ethics. In logic there is an abstract truth that is the standard of thought; in ethics there is an ideal good that furnishes the criterion of what ought to be done...in aesthetics beauty is created by love...all beauty is really more a projection, an emanation of the requirements of love; and so the beauty of woman is not apart from love, it is not an objective to which love is directed, but woman's beauty is the love of man; they are not two things, but one and the same thing (quoted in Žižek, 1994, p.139).

Aesthetic beauty is for Lacan ethical beauty. Following Kant's definition of beauty, Lacan presents Antigone as incarnating a beautiful image in front of that which must not be seen; in front of that which induces to the subject pain. Like the Chorus, Lacan cannot define the beyond of the *Até* to which Antigone tends. So, a beautiful image is necessary in order for the impasse to be overcome. This is how philosophy uses beauty, as an answer to that which eluded it and so does Lacan. Nevertheless, Lacan does not stop there; he knows that there is something else that is going on but unfortunately he has nothing to say about it. He knows that it is him as a spectator who apprehends beauty; he knows that Antigone cannot be limited to that but he does not know what is going on exactly. He claims that the hymn to Eros presents Antigone as either transgressing the limit of *Até* or as realising it.

the violent illumination, the glow of beauty, coincides with the moment of transgression or of realisation of Antigone's Até...It is in that direction that a certain relationship to a beyond of the central field is established for us, but it is also that which prevents us from seeing its

true nature, that which dazzles us and separates us from its true function (p.281)

Lacan's focus on Antigone's beauty limits his analysis to the Imaginary order. If we fall in the same trap and restrain ourselves to Lacan's comment on Antigone as the representation of a fascinating image which becomes the object cause of the spectator's desire we will not understand how Antigone transgresses the world of images. This argument is of use only in relation to Haemon's decision to accompany Antigone to death. The role of Haemon in this tragedy is to exemplify the failure of meaning, the death of the signifier. Antigone becomes for Haemon an absolute condition, the cause of his desire. Throughout the previous scene, Haemon defends his love for a woman who nowhere in the text expresses her feelings towards him. Antigone never even refers to his name. The issue of erotic love in this tragedy becomes the illusion for Haemon who is entrapped in the image of his fiancée and he leads himself to death just in order for his corpse to become the evidence of what Bollack claims "is the sign of what he has to communicate: nothing" (p.17). Haemon incarnates the impossible position between his father (Other) and his fiancée (object a); that is, he confronts the illusion of their reconciliation, which becomes the confrontation with a desire for nothing.

For Zupančič, Antigone is a sublime figure for just the spectator; she doesn't experience the feeling of the sublime herself. This is because she has not transgressed the limits of her fantasy, "she is not a subject who observes through the window (of fantasy) the spectacle of her own death"; rather, she enters, according to Zupančič, into her fantasy. "She does not wait for the Last Judgement, she does not wait for the Other to express its (and so her) desire: she does it herself" (p.253). The zone between-two-deaths, the frame of one's fantasy (as we have defined that zone and in the same way does Zupančič) is the necessary time and space for the final lament to take place (p.253). But the entrance to one's fantasy does not indicate its transgression, so Zupančič agrees with Lacan that the heroine is attached to the limit of her *Até*. As we have seen Lacan does not stop there, he implies that something else is going on.

According to this thesis, the hymn to Eros is situated in the text at that point of articulation where the signifier freezes, where it is no longer transformable. Antigone cannot signify anything than her destructive power over a father and a son, over Creon

and Haemon. Her eyelids radiate a destructive power that disengages object *a* from its content. Baas (1987) argues that *hymeros enarges* takes up the role of object *a* as that which derives from Antigone's eyes and which is detached from her desire (p.86). It is that power which disjoins the cause from its effect; it diverts the movement of the drive from its aim. Now the death drive does not achieve its satisfaction by encircling the object cause of desire any more. What is reflected through the eyelids of the heroine is this destructive power which disengages object *a* from its creative function. The object cause of desire is separated from its cover, the *semblant* and designates the *hymeros enarges* (passion) of the bride's eyes. Lacan did not see that Antigone's desire is not illuminated through her eyes, but is rather the object *a* presented as already detached from her desire as Baas has argued. This is how we can move beyond the power of the image. This is how the experience of the Other *jouissance* can be described. Desire has no more meaning here because its object cause has been detached and it becomes autonomous. For Lacan, the image of the heroine can take up the role of the object cause of Haemon's desire and of all those spectators that are fascinated by and entrapped by that image or it can show us the way that Antigone goes beyond her desire. It is through this disengagement that Antigone transgresses the level of the image, and she enters her fantasy confronting the lack that its object cause represents. Antigone reaches the point where the cause of her desire is detached from the structure of her fantasy. She can see it as detached from meaning hovering as an absolute thing above all the different goods that serve the purposes of life. It is at this point that Antigone enters the zone between-two-deaths. This is the time for her to lament for the loss of those goods; to lament for the possibility of offering her pleasure.

5.4.10. The fifth scene – Antigone's lamentation.

Antigone's suffering is expressed through the lamentation that comes just after the description of her bright and most glorious image. This passage has raised a lot of controversy. Nevertheless, what is obvious in the text is that the lamentation of Antigone is the point which signals her transgression of whatever might keep her in relationship to the Other. Antigone transgresses the Imaginary level and laments all the different objects that might have kept her desire alive. This is how the transgression of the first death is

presented. According to Lacan, her lamentation is not an attempt to justify herself; rather, what she does is exactly the opposite.

When every move has been made, her capture, her defiance, her condemnation, and even her lamentations, and she stands on the edge of the celebrated tomb with the martyrdom that we have witnessed already behind her, Antigone stops to justify herself (pp.254-5)

For Lacan Antigone's lamentation is "a question of life and death" (p.255). Her lamentation "begins from the moment when Antigone crosses the entrance to the zone between life and death, when what she has already affirmed herself to be takes on an outward form" (p.280); meaning that the idea that she is in the kingdom of the dead is now consecrated; her life is already lost and as such it is experienced at the limit of the other side. "Her separation is lived as a regret or lamentation for everything in life that is refused to her", Lacan writes on page 280 of the *Ethics* seminar.

Even though we agree with Lacan that Antigone's lamentation signals the transgression of life's limit, we cannot argue in favour of the idea that this indicates regret on the part of the heroine. Actually, nothing is refused to her; it is Antigone who refuses the different roles that she laments. Throughout the play, Antigone has opportunities to regret her act, to change her mind; nevertheless, she insists on defending her choice. So, what is actually revealed through her lamentation is the value of life as experienced in the intermediary between birth and death. Through her lamentation she counts all the different goods that could have substantiated the cause of her desire. But for her, the object cause of her desire can only be seen as far away from life. No good can be attached to it. It is detached from that structure which through the means of a *semblant* it could support.

According to Zupančič, Antigone's lamentation has precisely the value of the infinite measure of her desire. The list of things that she will be deprived of by her early death, the list of things that never existed and never will exist are those that actualise this measure. "It is through this lack of a common measure that the incommensurable, infinite measure which is desire can be realised, that is 'measured'" (p.252). The infinite is

evoked in the “all” that Antigone sacrifices for it (p.257). It is through this idea of Antigone’s lamentation that Zupančič defines the ethics of fantasy, the ethics of desire: “we cannot deny all ethical dignity to someone who is ready to die (and to kill) in order to realise his or her fantasy” (p.254).

Those who practice such an ethics today are called terrorists, fanatics, fundamentalists, madmen...we are post-modern, we know a great deal, we know that all these people are dying and killing for something which does not exist. This attitude implies a preference for the eternal metonymy which shows its real face here: it proves to be not an infinite pursuit of some ideal that transcends us, but a flight from the infinite that pursues us in this world. For Antigone death proves to be the best shelter against the death drive (p.254).

For Zupančič, Antigone passes over entirely to the side of the object; she becomes that beautiful *semblant* which hides the lack of the Other. ‘Wanting *jouissance*’ maintains us on the side of desire, whereas ‘realising desire’ transposes us to the side of the *jouissance* (p.255). According to Zupančič, in contrast to Oedipus who represents the Thing, Antigone sacrifices everything in order to protect that Thing; she incarnates the imaginary phallus (p.259). The ethics of desire that Antigone represents in this reading tends to preserve the myth alive. The absolute choice of Antigone’s death indicates, for Zupančič, a flight from *jouissance*; this is what the infinite that pursues us in life indicates. The heroine is presented as unable to endure the pain which is revealed through her lamentation. This lamentation recites all the different goods that could have constituted her desire as possible. The heroine cannot stand this infinite of desire’s possibilities and so she prefers death by means of her identification with one partial object that realises her desire. According to Zupančič, the realisation of Antigone’s desire, the perseverance of her family’s *Até* is accomplished in three steps:

1) In life, there is one thing which one cannot give away (‘the absolute condition’)

2) *For this Thing one is ready to give away everything (even life)*

3) *One realises the absolute condition by sacrificing, in one single gesture, the 'all' of what one is ready to sacrifice.*

It is in this sense that Antigone, according to Zupančič, realises her desire; she finds a way of giving an end to the infinite potentially of her desire. She constitutes one single Thing as the unconditional of the absolute condition. "She laments the loss of what she does not have" (p.257). She establishes this loss in the name of which she sacrifices everything. This gesture puts an end to the metonymy of desire. It is the effect of the infinite on Antigone that is realised in terms of her sublime representation; she functions as its screen (p.258). "This explains the sublime splendour of her figure, which is the result of the Thing which she hides and announces at the same time" (p.258). In the end, she realises herself in this final 'having'; she merges with it, she becomes herself the signifier of the desire which runs through her, she incarnates that desire (p.259). Zupančič presents Antigone as being identified to her family's Até and as sacrificing her life in order to preserve it.

Based on the description of Antigone as an example of the ethics of desire, Zupančič counter argues an ethics of the Real, an ethics of the drive. In that case, the subject has to take the decision to act in spite of the knowledge that the object of desire does not exist, and to commit the very act that this knowledge makes "impossible"; after sacrificing everything for its Cause, it has to sacrifice this very Cause itself (p.256). According to Zupančič,

the infinite is visible here differently; not as an absence which illuminates the figure of the heroine with a sublime splendour but, rather, as an embarrassing and out-of place presence, manifesting itself in the distortions, in the torsions, of a body which is not made in the measure of the infinite (of the jouissance) that inhabits it. Antigone gives away everything in order to preserve some final 'having' (p.258).

What this thesis argues is that the time of Antigone's lamentation can be described exactly as Zupančič does above. The heroine reaches the point of Oedipus's famous phrase "μη φύναι", better not to have been born. Antigone comes to terms with that absolute condition of her desire, she reaches the point of realising the mobilising power of her desire and she can recognise that she is not free to determine her life, that she is condemned to follow a predestined life, her family's Até. She laments, having realised that the journey to life is an impasse. She knows that she can either take another chance and join the game of the Other or she can refuse it. However Antigone knows that the curse of Labdakides to which she was attached and ready to die for is but a myth. Through her lamentation Antigone comes to terms with what Lacan defines as second knowledge. For Lacan when the subject confronts its fundamental fantasy, it can act ethically only in terms of redefining it. But Antigone knows that this fantasy is an illusion, is what in life supports a myth. Oedipus wanted to know, Antigone knows. And it is exactly because she knows that she cannot give another chance to that myth.

For the Chorus Antigone remains enigmatic. While it makes another effort to understand her by ascribing attributes of semi-goddesses, Antigone rejects them. It is at this point that the Chorus's inability to understand the heroine is exemplified.

*Chorus: [referring to Niobe and addressing to Antigone as an attempt to console her]
But she was a goddess, and born of the gods; we are but mortals, of mortals
born. For a mortal to share in the doom of a god, that brings her renown while
yet she lives, and a glory that long will outlive her.*

*Antigone: Alas, they laugh! O by the gods of Thebes, my native city, mock me if you
must, when I am gone, not to my face! (lines 828-835).*

Antigone demystifies the power of the gods; she doesn't want to be assimilated to anyone. She can now realise that she is alone and betrayed. No support is available for her. The gods, on whom she was counting, have abandoned her. Antigone knows that they never existed, that they were on her side just because she needed them. But, now she can bravely attain the emptiness and it is a mockery for her that the Chorus still refers to gods. Having rejected the assimilation to the mythic figure of Niobe, Antigone can only

accept the following words of the Chorus: "Too bold, too reckless, you affronted Justice. Now that awful power takes terrible vengeance, O my child. For some old sin you make atonement" (lines 847-850). This is what Antigone has come to terms with, the old sin, her family's Até. Having reached the core of this curse, having reached its emptiness, the heroine wonders what the reason for persecuting it is. Antigone, far beyond having any relationship to the signifier, demystifies the power of that curse that condemned her family to blindly follow it. She remains there, in front of the people who watch her, unwilling to change her mind. She just wonders what her crime is and no one can give her an answer because there is none. Antigone never stepped back or even vacillated; she never doubted the power that was enforcing her to act in the absolute way that she did. And now, bravely, without fear or pity, she is ready to pay the price of her act. Nevertheless she wonders about that power that makes her not to regret for that; "which laws accompany me to death?" (lines 841-2), "which law mobilises me? (line 899). The gods are not there anymore. Creon orders the guards to guide her to the tomb and Antigone calmly follows them.

Antigone is in the frame of her fantasy, she has moved to the zone between-two-deaths, without means; the lamentation of Antigone indicates the deprivation of all the goods that hide the absoluteness of the object cause of her desire. Antigone stands on the scene lamenting all the different roles that the Other would offer her and that she denies. As Bollack argues, the royal glory, that Labdakides had so desperately looked for, fades out in front of the common, non-heroic values that Antigone laments for; being a wife and a mother (p.61). But what is even more important is that Antigone denies her assimilation to the goddesses that the Chorus tries to identify her with. She renounces the glory of the gods. She does not expect that gods will help her. Antigone compares her death to that of Niobe who was petrified by the gods and who did not stop lamenting even though she was transformed to a stone. The heroine moves beyond the support of the gods. She gives up all hope that gods used to offer her. Her lamentation illustrates the loneliness and betrayal of the tragic hero. Antigone is alone in confronting the cause of her desire which from now cannot but disappear as a bad dream, as a nightmare to which the Labdakides were enslaved. She takes leave of the kingship of Thebes only after the myth of Oedipus' curse is demystified. These are Antigone's last words:

O city of Thebes where my fathers dwelt, O gods of our race, now at last their hands are upon me! You princess of Thebes, O look upon me, the last that remain of a line of Kings! How savagely impious men use me, for keeping a law that is holy (lines 929-935).

Antigone takes leave of the kingdom of Thebes. These lines have an ironic tone. The heroine is sarcastic to all those ideals for which she was ready to sacrifice her life. She devalues the glorified race of Labdakides and the gods that “promised her protection”. She even says that “at last their [gods] hands are upon me”; she realises that the gods can only protect her by petrifying her as they did to Niobe. Antigone does not blame the gods for not protecting her; rather we could say that she blames herself for dedicating her life to “keep a law that is wholly”. “The last that remain of a line of kings” (without mentioning Ismene), Antigone takes upon her shoulders the Até of Labdakides and leaves the scene. This is how enigmatically Antigone’s lamentation ends for the spectators. The heroine will not appear any more on the scene.

5.4.11. The fifth *stasimo* – after the lamentation

The Chorus still attempts to signify the heroine’s exodus. What is essential to point out is that the Chorus will insist on referring to the gods, whom Antigone has already renounced in the previous scene. The Chorus cannot do anything else. It resides on the power of the gods, it cannot think of anything else. This is how the signifier makes its fading out obvious. There are no words any more. The Chorus cannot comment on Antigone’s lamentation; it just focuses on the image that the heroine leaves behind her, assimilating her to three examples from mythology. The first one is that of Danae who was shut up in a bronze chamber, the second one refers to Lycurgus who was blinded by gods and persecuted the servants of Dionysos who entombed him in a stone cave, and the last one tells us the story of Kleopatra who was also shut up in a cave. The Chorus can do anything but describe the petrification of the heroine, but at the same time it is the petrification of the signifier itself that it presents. The mortification of meaning is evident.

According to Lacan, these three examples concern three dramatic destinies that are all on the boundary between life and death, the boundary of the still living corpse (p.268).

The striking thing about Antigone is that she undergoes a misfortune that is equal to that of all those who are caught up in the cruel sport of the gods. Seen from the outside by us as ἀτραγωδοί [out of tragedy], she appears as the victim at the center of the anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy. She is there in spite of herself as victim and holocaust (Ethics, p.282).

But Antigone is not caught up in the gods' cruel sport. This is the point that the specific anaphora to these mythic figures raises; meaning that the gods, who are always invoked in tragedy in order to explain what eludes the possibilities of men, here, in *Antigone*, cannot do anything. The gods are involved in this tragedy only to prove their inability of helping out the Chorus to understand. The gods in this tragedy cannot support meaning; they cannot hide the lack that hovers above this tragedy. Dionysos, the god of tragedy, will be invoked only after the heroine is dead. And this is so because Antigone is autonomous and this is exemplified in her story. She never regrets for her choice of act; she takes full responsibility for her deed. Even when she confronts the decision of her death punishment, the heroine does not succumb in front of the power of her destiny. Rather Antigone is ready to come face to face with that which no god would allow her to come in terms with. Actually, what is exemplified in this tragedy is exactly the opposite of what Lacan claims. Antigone is not the victim of the signifier as the ordinary hero is presented so. Antigone enters the zone between-two-deaths because she is not afraid of doing so. She does not close her eyes in front of the emptiness; she does not allow any god to hide this view. She magnifies the power of all the dead bodies that are presented one after the other on stage by calling everyone to look at them. No one wishes to do so. Ismene denies to see the dead body of her brother out of fear for the law of the king, Creon forbids the burial of Polyneikes because the latter represents for him the enemy, the traitor of the city that he has to fight with, the Chorus denies that Antigone signals something more than the fascinating image that it tries to present by assimilating her to mythic goddesses. This argument could not be better illustrated than by the next scene.

5.4.12. The sixth scene – the prophesy of Teiresias

Teiresias, the blind seer, enters the scene being accompanied by a child, who leads his steps. And this child cannot but be assimilated to Antigone herself. It is exactly this scene that comes to mind when we remember *Oedipus at Colonus*. Antigone is the child who leads the steps of her father. According to Nussbaum (1986), the parallelism of Antigone with the child that leads the steps of Teiresias cannot but make evident their interdependence (p.79). As Antigone was helping her father to transmit the second knowledge that no one was willing to accept, so is now that child in relation to Teiresias. In this tragedy it is Antigone who tries to show the way to all those blind people around her. Teiresias, the representative of the divine order, arrives just in order to show them what they resist seeing. He does not refer to Antigone; the heroine is beyond his power. Teiresias makes dire prophecies for the future of Creon and the city. He obliges Creon to regret his decision and he orders him to try to correct it; “forbear to strike the fallen; to slay the slain, is that a deed of valour?” (lines 1015-1016). Nevertheless, Creon resists; the absolute ruler displays his unwillingness to respect the law of the gods once more, but this would be the last time. He desperately tries to make the seer appear as subject to the law of men; he presents him as “even the clearest men fall shamefully when for a little money they use fair words to mask their villainy” (lines 1031-3). But Teiresias has a lot of weapons; he threatens Creon through the revenge of Hades and the death of his beloved. Teiresias pinpoints the weak point of Creon. The king would do anything in order to remain a king, in order not to lose anything and in this sense Creon succumbs to the threats of the seer. It is evident that Creon changes his mind for fear of losing the throne and this can be done only by the power of the gods.

Teiresias leaves the scene and Creon begs the Chorus to show him the proper way. Creon cannot take a step without the approval of the Chorus/Other. And it is in this scene that the Chorus will exhibit its catalytic role in tragedy. The Chorus, being afraid of the seer’s prophecies, urges Creon to release Antigone from the cave and to lay the unburied body of Polyneikes in a tomb. Creon resents it but he feels obliged to follow the advice of the Chorus. He leaves the scene in order to carry out the order. The Chorus now beg Dionysos to save the city. This is the last song of the Chorus which is presented as being completely deficient. Creon might follow its advice blindly but the Chorus does not feel secure. Sophocles makes a strong and even determinant point of this tragedy in terms of

pointing out that even Dionysos, the god of tragedy, cannot do anything. According to Lacan in *Ethics*, “those who knew what Dionysos and his savage followers represent realise that the hymn breaks out because the limits of the field of the conflagration have been breached” (p.269). Nevertheless, what we should point out is that Dionysos, as the god-protector of tragedy, never turned down either the hero or the spectators. His help was always invoked whenever the impasse was obvious and Dionysos managed to offer the release of tension. But in this tragedy Dionysos cannot do anything in the sense that he doesn’t even appear in the text. It is in this sense that we can understand that the limits are abolished. Because, to be accurate, Dionysos is the god who abolishes the limits of logic but he is also that god who restores them and it is exactly for this that the Chorus invokes his power. Dionysos does not emerge in *Antigone* because he wasn’t there from the very beginning; he wasn’t responsible for Antigone’s decision. That is why the invocation of his help falls in the void that the Chorus cannot but represent in this scene just in order to confirm what Antigone tried to exhibit throughout the play: *there are no laws that can restrain the hero who is about to simply die.*

The absence of Dionysos, the absence of any divine power, becomes obvious since immediately after the end of the Chorus’ song the messenger arrives in order to describe how Creon didn’t manage to avert the death of Antigone and of Haemon. The messenger describes how Creon buried the corpse of Polyneikes, attributing to him all the honours that he had deprived him of, and how he rushed in order to release Antigone from her tomb. But he arrived at the cave too late. Antigone had already hung herself from a tree and his son Haemon was loudly lamenting his dead fiancée. Creon rushed into the cave in order to save his son but Haemon threatened him with his sword. Creon rushed out of the cave and Haemon embeds the sword in his body and lies dead at Antigone’s feet. While Creon and his guards were returning to the palace with the dead body of Haemon, the messenger had already announced the bad news which lead Eurydice (Creon’s wife) to her death. Creon, being given the bad news, pleads with the Chorus and the gods for offering him what he deserves, death. But no one is there to relieve him.

It is this scene that exemplifies further the great difference between Antigone and Creon. The former doesn’t wait for death to meet her or for anyone to bring it about. Antigone kills herself because, being deprived of those means that would keep her in life, she cannot stand anymore the pain that characterises the zone in which she is. Being deprived

of that object which would offer her the possibility to build up a new desire, a new fantasy, Antigone swirls into the eddy of *jouissance*. Pitiless and fearless, Antigone kills herself refusing to sublimate the object cause of her desire. Creon on the other hand exhibits his fear of losing anything that might deprive him of his life. He steps back when his son threatens his life and when all his beloved are lying in front of him he begs the Chorus and the gods to kill him. He desperately asks the help of the Other in order to be relieved of pain. Creon doesn't have the vigour to face his life; he remains on the scene self-abandoned, prey to the will of the Other. Sophocles presents the collapse of every Imaginary support in relation to the heroine and exemplifies its necessity for Creon. Antigone is not afraid of death, but Creon, even in his final words in the play, begs the Chorus or whomsoever other to kill him. What is obvious is that the tragedy of Creon is his inability to detach himself from the signifier. This piece of art is called *Antigone* and Creon is just there in order to illuminate the chasm that is opened up between the two figures. It is this abyss that slowly opens up in the text; it is this gap that as it is enlarged, swallows every attempt at bridging the gap in signification. This is how the tragedy *Antigone* ends.

When the subject chooses to disengage the object cause of its desire from its desire there is no way back. When the chasm is opened up and object *a* is hovering in the middle of it there is no possibility of catching it again. Nobody argues that it is easy to detach oneself from life. Man avoids sacrificing the illusion that he can successfully reconcile his being with the Other. The cost of it is too heavy; the confrontation with emptiness too painful. It is in this sense that in relation to Lacan's proposal of the ethical guidance as "the only thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one's desire" (Ethics, p.321), we claim that man prefers to feel guilty for giving ground relative to it. This is what the last words of Creon show; "the guilt falls on me alone; none but I have slain her [referring to his wife]" (lines 1296-1297). Actually, how is it possible for the subject not to feel guilty relative to his desire since his desire is "the desire of the Other" (Ethics, p.309)? But, what might help us to clarify the message of *Antigone* is the fact that the heroine judges her action, as Lacan claims that the ethical subject does (p.311). Antigone is not afraid of paying the cost of her act, something for which Creon can only feel guilty of. The payment of one's desire's debt is a personal affair and is only paid with "a pound of flesh" (Lacan, Ethics, p.322). This is what the experience of the Other *jouissance* indicates.

5.5. Conclusion

What has been argued in this chapter is that the tragedy *Antigone* presents the progressive extinction of the signifier. Antigone, compared to her adversary, Creon, exemplifies the disengagement of object *a* from its function of supporting human desire. Following Lacan's definition of desire as the desire of the Other, we differentiated our reading of the tragedy from his, arguing that tragedy is played out at the level of the Other. We defined only one limit between the Other and its beyond where we situated the transformation of the phallic *jouissance* into the experience of the *jouissance* of the Other as the signal of the entrance to the Real. We claimed that Antigone transgresses the level of the Other by relinquishing her engagement with the signifier thus countering Lacan's thesis that Antigone moves to the Real by sublimating the object of her desire. We believe that this reading is a proposal for the disengagement of Antigone's image from the essence of her absolute act which introduces us to the field of the Real. Antigone's experience of the Real indicates the transgression of the beautiful mask of an image and not the confrontation with it, as most of commentators have argued.

Antigone moves beyond images and words, she moves beyond the signifier, and tends to death, "she is identifying herself with the manifestation of the death instinct", Lacan writes (p.281) without ever supporting this idea through his analysis of the text. Lacan intended to show that Antigone transgresses the limits of both words and images but he never managed to do so since he attached Antigone to the limit of beauty, presenting her as sublimating the object of her desire and linking her intention to the creation *ex nihilo*, to the reconstitution of her fantasy. He attached her on the limit of the wonderful images that the Chorus produced for her throughout the text attaching to sublimation its creationist and artistic nature. But the Chorus had no other way of describing what it could not understand. The Chorus used the images as a defence for the incompatibility presented between the signifier and Antigone's absolute choice of death.

The detachment of the object cause of desire from the construction that it supports is what the Other *jouissance* indicates. This experience was illustrated in terms of the *hymeros enarges* that Baas described so, even though he does not name it. After Antigone has transgressed the level of the image and she entered the zone between-two-deaths, she confronted the object cause of her desire. The kingship of Labdakides, the glory of her

royal family is what this object represents. Antigone comes to terms with the vanity that this object supported. She refers to the death of all her family, she refers to the inability of gods to sustain the myth alive. Antigone faces the lack in the Other and knows that another object of desire would result in the same illusion that she has just realised. The heroine chooses to leave the gap open and is moved to the place of the dead Other. The Other *jouissance* is here exemplified as an absolute choice.

CHAPTER

VI

Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

Lacan's Seminar on *Ethics* aims at differentiating psychoanalytic ethics from the morality of goods. Leaving the Aristotelian *eudemonia* behind, Lacan moves to Hegel's dialectic of the *Master and the slave* in order to finally reach Kant's *moral law*. In complete agreement with Freud's wish to define a field beyond the pleasure principle, Lacan attempts to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of a transgression of the morality of goods. Nevertheless, the weight of the philosophical heritage restrained him from reaching his goal. This thesis explored the development of Lacan's ideas on the ethics of psychoanalysis along with its impasses.

The aim of this thesis was to redefine psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the Other *jouissance*. The Sophoclean tragedy *Antigone* was an illustration for that. In order to conclude this thesis, a summary of the procedure that this research followed along with the results will be presented.

6.2. Hegel's influence on Lacan's thought

Hegel's influence on Lacan's thought was catalytic. Following the dialectic of the *Master and the Slave*, Lacan defines human desire as the desire of the Other, a desire for recognition. The morality of the goods, the morality of the Master is what limits the subject to a search for that object that would satisfy the Other. The material object becomes the support of this relationship and it is through it that the subject hides the lack of the Other achieving pleasure. The subject's desire is identified with the desire of the Other. However this dialectic is based on the issue of negativity. The Other rejects every object that the subject offers him hence rendering his desire unsatisfied. In this sense Hegel proposes that human desire follows a circular movement; the subject creates an object in order to answer the desire of the Other, the Other rejects it and the subject tries again. This is what the birth-death-rebirth (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) process indicates. Following Hegel, Lacan defined human desire as metonymic.

But, why is the subject trying to extinguish the limits of pleasure? Why does it constitute every object as inappropriate for the satisfaction of the desire of the Other? For Lacan the answers are given by elaborating on the function of the death drive. Indeed the drive

achieves pleasure by circling around the material object of desire. Yet the reason that Lacan conceived of every drive as death drive is because the drive is indifferent to the materiality of the object of desire inasmuch as it achieves satisfaction precisely through this endless encirclement. So the drive circles around a lack. According to Lacan, on such a basis for an act to be ethical it is essential that desire be purified, divest of its Imaginary content, of the good that sustains the subject's relationship to the Other.

6.3. Kant's ideas on the moral law

Lacan moves to the Kantian ethics and the idea of the moral law. He borrows the Kantian term *pure desire* in order to indicate the force that pushes the subject towards the dematerialisation of the object of its desire. *Pure desire* is identified with the function of the death drive. According to Kant, desire is an obstacle for the ethical act. In other words, desire should be purified from all those pathological objects that restrain it from reaching its pure nature. It is *pure desire* that meets the level of the moral law for which Kant offers two different readings. On the one hand, the moral law is defined as a void in which the subject "freely" attaches a content. The meeting with this void indicates the experience of the sublime, which Kant defines by two stages. First, the subject stands in awe before the all-powerful Nature witnessing its vulnerability and the possibility of its death. Nature is summoned as a formless object that eludes the possibility of being understood; this is what the sublime object indicates for Kant. The stage that ensues is that of the subject's belief that it can tame the omnipotent Nature. In order for that to happen, Kant proposes that the subject should experience the sublimity of Nature through a safe place otherwise it will face terror and fear. Secure in that place, the subject has the ability to attach meaning to Nature by creating a beautiful object, which represents it. So in the first stage Kant defines sublimity in terms of a formless object and in the second one he presents the transformation of the sublime object to a beautiful one. The second definition of Kant's moral law is the voice of conscience. The agent of morality is now transformed to a fearful voice that orders the subject to succumb to its power. The subject is obliged to answer the demand of this voice by creating beautiful objects which would fulfil the demand of the Other and concurrently limit the fear that the subject experiences in front of it. This reading is no different from the Freudian superego.

6.4. Lacan's theory of psychoanalytic ethics

Lacan draws on the Kantian moral law *qua* void to define the Imaginary purification of the subject as a prerequisite for the ethical act. He claims that the subject should overcome the limit of the signifier in order to move towards the source of one's desire, a source to be 'found' in the Real. Now the Real is the field where emptiness reigns and where Lacan situates the Thing, that object which the Other lacks and eludes the possibility of being signified; it is beyond the power of the signifier. The Thing is Lacan's first attempt to define the object cause of desire. In his Seminar on Ethics, the Real is constituted as unapproachable for the subject, ex-centric to the function of the signifier. Thus the Thing acquires an absolute value from which the subject should be protected. The Real is a field that the subject can move towards only by experiencing pain. This is what the experience of *jouissance* indicates and it is in relation to it that Lacan wished to define the ethical act.

Nevertheless, Lacan does not succeed in proposing a process that would allow the subject to come to terms with the lack of the Other. He defines sublimation as that process which results in an ethical act. Sublimation is defined as "raising an object to the dignity of the Thing". The Imaginary purification is partly achieved given that the subject does not confront the lack of the Other. Rather it reaches the level of its fundamental fantasy where it realises the scenario that supports its desiring possibilities (*savoir*) and it can identify the cause of it with one partial object. It is in relation to that object, that representation of the Thing, that the subject can reformulate its fundamental fantasy achieving a better libidinal satisfaction in terms of its relationship with the Other. In other words, the subject has to be protected from the void of the Thing with an Imaginary object, a *semblant*. According to Lacan, the fantasy's redefinition results in a beautiful image. Consequently, the ethical act is not the result of the Imaginary order's transgression. The subject remains at the level of the Other and sublimation offers it the possibility of redefining its relationship with him. So even though Lacan wished to define the ethical act in terms of the experience of *jouissance*, he comes up with a definition that supports the experience of pleasure. It follows that despite Lacan's attempt to define psychoanalytic ethics in line with the Kantian law *qua* void, he opts for the second reading.

6.5. Lacan's analysis of *Antigone*

Lacan has chosen the text of *Antigone* in order to define a transgressive ethical act. Even though the text indeed defines such an act, his analysis is limited to the process of sublimation. Antigone is presented as raising the corpse of her brother to the dignity of her family's *Até*. For Lacan *Até* assumes the absolute value of the Thing. The heroine is presented as sacrificing the sum of the Other's ideals in order to preserve, to eternalise her family's *Até*, the curse that defined the myth of Oedipus's family. Nevertheless, his analysis is often controversial. Lacan claims that Antigone has transgressed the Imaginary limit of the Other's ideals from the very beginning of the text. She finds herself in the zone between-two-deaths, a space wherein the heroine comes to terms with the Symbolic construction of her fundamental fantasy. It is at that limit of the second death that Lacan attaches the possibility of creating *ex nihilo*. This is the limit where the subject can redefine the object of its desire. Even though the ethical act, according to Lacan, would indicate the reformulation of the heroine's fundamental fantasy, quite paradoxically he claims that while Antigone has transgressed the limit of her fantasy at the same time she is attached to that limit embodying a beautiful image.

As we have seen, beauty has become the proper veil in front of the impasses raised by philosophical thinking and so becomes the impasse for Lacan's ethics. According to Lacan, it is around this image of Antigone, attached to the limit of *Até*, that the whole play turns (p.268). Antigone represents a beautiful object that hides the lack of the Other. This is what sublimation is meant to produce, a beautiful image. Even though Lacan claimed that the heroine sublimates the object of her desire, that she sacrificed every interest in life in order to eternalise her family's *Até*, we have not come across any part of the text allowing us to argue that the heroine is confronted with the result of her sublimation, with a beautiful image. What we can say is that the effect of beauty is testified by the Chorus, maybe by the spectators and certainly by Lacan. So, we presented sublimation as a similar process to the aim of tragedy in relation to the spectator: the process of *catharsis* which aims at purifying the spectator from the feelings of pity and fear by means of these same emotions (by being identified with the hero). But, Antigone is beyond such a process. Lacan offers us enough hints to suspect this. Nevertheless, as he claims in his Seminar *Encore*, when he defined the ethics of psychoanalysis he "didn't want to know anything about [that beyond]" (p.1).

Lacan has defined an ethics of desire. The drive is not offered any other possibility than that of creating *ex nihilo*. Its destructive power is limited to the possibility of the Imaginary object's rebirth. In this sense the ethics of desire confine the subject within the eternal search for pleasure. The ethical act is not a free choice. Lacan has not managed to relinquish the Aristotelian *eudemonia*; neither has he abandoned Hegel's circular movement of desire nor Kant's moral law as the representation of a beautiful object. Even though Lacan's argument for the transgression of the Imaginary order along with his intention to define the ethical act in terms of this transgression should not be underestimated, still most commentators of *Antigone* do not challenge his reading. The arguments of Bollack, Morel, Copjec, Butler and Zupančič have been elaborated on this thesis in order to prove one single thing: *Antigone* does not sacrifice her life in order to preserve the Lost Cause of her desire.

In contrast to what many think, Lacan has defined psychoanalytic ethics excluding *Antigone*'s act from that field. Let us consider what Žižek (1994) says,

This ethics of persisting in one's desire irrespective of the common Good inevitably gives rise to anxiety: is not such a radical attitude the preserve of a few 'heroes', while we ordinary people also have the right to survive? Consequently, do we not also need an 'ordinary' ethics of 'common Good' and distributive justice that would meet the requirements of the majority, despicable as it may appear in the eyes of the suicidal heroic ethics advocated by Lacan? (p.69).

In contrast to Žižek's claim that Lacan's ethics is not the ethics of "ordinary people", this thesis has shown that it is precisely that. It is an ethics of desire and it is specifically the process of sublimation that secures the limits of pleasure. The "common Good", as this is defined by Aristotelian *eudemonia*, triumphs in Lacan's ethics. Even though Lacan claims that the experience of *jouissance* should signal the ethical act, his ethics defends the avoidance of pain. This avoidance can only succeed if one obeys the fearful 'voice of conscience', the Freudian superego. *Antigone* does not fit in such ethics and Lacan knew

it but he could not do anything about it. Even though at that time Lacan “didn’t want to know anything” about the field that the reading of *Antigone* might fit in, it is some years later that he offered us the idea of the Other *jouissance* in order to give us the material for redefining psychoanalytic ethics and reading *Antigone* in the way that he wished: in terms of the signifier’s transgression.

6.6. Redefinition of psychoanalytic ethics in terms of the Other *jouissance*

In *Encore*, Lacan offers a different reading of the drive. Up until that time, the drive was destined to follow the Hegelian circular movement of the object’s birth-death-rebirth. The drive had no other choice than redefining the object around which it attained satisfaction. However the dimension of the human body was never indifferent to Lacan. The experience of pain, whenever the subject transgresses the limits of the pleasure principle, was defined by Lacan as *jouissance*. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the possibility of such an experience was not enough for defining the mechanism that allows the body to transgress the limits of the signifier. *Jouissance*, in *Ethics*, was the sign of the ethical act read in terms of sublimation. But *Antigone*’s beauty could not accompany the experience of *jouissance*. Certainly, after differentiating between phallic and the Other *jouissance* Lacan can support a different function for the drive. At that point Lacan frees himself from the circular movement of Hegel’s thought.

By defining phallic *jouissance* as the attainment of pleasure’s limits through the encirclement of a partial object and the Other *jouissance* as being experienced in the field of the Other, Lacan illustrates how the drive can transgress the limits of the oedipal law. In order for pleasure to be attained, an object is always necessary. This thesis read phallic *jouissance* as pleasure’s limits. The field beyond the good around which pleasure is attained is what Lacan wished to define as the zone between-two-deaths. The first death is that of the object’s materiality. The second one refers to the opening up of the lack of the Other. The inability of Lacan to define a process that would allow the subject to come to terms with the lack of the Other limited psychoanalytic ethics in the field of desire. It is the Other *jouissance* that offers such a possibility. The subject’s confrontation with the lack of the Other makes the content of that Imaginary object which supported desire to vanish. It is at that point that the subject deprives the Other of enjoyment and so does to

itself. The vanity of every object that could hide this lack now becomes obvious. So the subject is offered two possibilities and so is psychoanalytic ethics: either it will choose to return to the circular movement of desire in terms of sublimation or it will choose to retreat from that process incarnating the dead position of the Other; in other words, by raising the Other to the dignity of the lack.

In these terms this thesis redefined the psychoanalytic ethics. The reading of the text of *Antigone* made clear that the heroine confronts the lack of the Other and decides not to revitalise her relationship with him. Undoubtedly, from the very beginning of the play, Antigone is ready to sacrifice her life in order to do her duty to the gods, to bury her brother. She is determined to do so because she knows that the gods and the Thebans are on her side. Nevertheless, when Antigone enters the zone between-two-deaths, when she transgresses the field of the Other, at the time of her lamentation, she is alone and betrayed by every Imaginary support. Even though she pertinently insisted on sacrificing her life in the name of Labdakides's kingship and the divine law she realizes that all this was for nothing; in short an illusion. Yet while she has the chance to reflect, regret and return to life, she prefers to die. This is how this thesis reads the free and autonomous ethical act. This is what the transgression of the signifier's limit implies.

6.7. Conclusion

It is through this redefinition of psychoanalytic ethics that this thesis attempted to answer the questions that motivated this research.

- Is *Antigone* a case of the ethics of desire – is she following the process of sublimation?

As we saw Antigone does not fit the reading of sublimation. Sublimation is a process that allows the subject to redefine its relationship with the Other, to deal better with its libidinal demands. Sublimation can be the promise of the end of analysis since it certainly does not lead to death. It “promises” a relief from the burden that a certain desire might impose on the subject. In this sense sublimation is a relieving response to the discontents

of civilisation; it is a response that allows the subject the possibility of voting in relation to its desire, of taking responsibility of it. Nevertheless, it is not a free and autonomous act. It is always in relation to some *Até* that the subject redefines its fantasy. It is the *semblant* that it redefines in front of the *Até* that defines its desire. The perseverance of the Lost Thing is what “everyday” people do. In fact this is what the function of desire indicates. Even though, the end of analysis can promise such relief for the subject, psychoanalytic ethics cannot be limited on that. It is in this sense that *Antigone* is not a case of sublimation.

- Does the ethics of psychoanalysis offer to the subject the possibility of a choice?

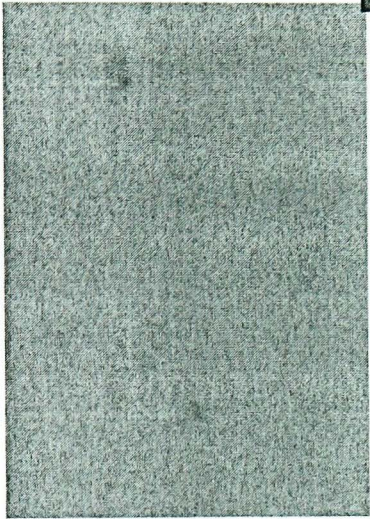
The ethics of desire, as these were defined by Lacan, does not offer any choice than that of the redefinition of the object of one’s desire. The drive is presented as destined to circle around a *semblant* in order to achieve satisfaction. This is how the Aristotelian definition of *eudemonia* fits the Lacanian definition of psychoanalytic ethics.

- Is it possible for a subject to act freely?

Lacan’s idea of the Other *jouissance* allows us to define a choice in the field of psychoanalytic ethics. The death drive, functioning as a mortifying power over the materiality of the Imaginary object, allows for the lack of the Other to open up. This is the point where the possibility of choosing between life and death is offered to the subject. This thesis has shown that the transgression of the Imaginary order is achieved precisely at that moment. Antigone’s absolute choice of death is defined in terms of the Other *jouissance*. In so doing psychoanalytic ethics can support the absolute and fatal choice of freedom from the Other. However the experience of the Other *jouissance* does not necessarily lead to death; the subject might choose to return to the world of goods and this can be done through the process of sublimation, after the subject has come to terms with the lack of the Other. In this reading the subject meets the void of the Other and after that it raises a material object to the dignity of a pre-defined Thing which nevertheless has been momentarily vacillated. This is how the two choices of acting ethically in the field of psychoanalysis are defined. The first one defines the ethics of “ordinary people”, the second one defines the ethics of the drive, the ethics of the Real which cannot be better illustrated than in terms of Schopenhauer’s (1969) reference to tragedy:

The purpose of this highest poetical achievement is the description of the terrible side of life. The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the good and the innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and of existence... The motives that were previously so powerful now lose their force, and instead of them the complete knowledge of the real nature of the world, acting as a quieter of the will, produces resignation, the giving up not merely of life, but of the whole will-to-live itself (pp.252-3)

The aim of this thesis was to differentiate psychoanalytic ethics from the morality of the Master. It is the ideas of late Lacan that allowed this research to reach its aim. The Other *jouissance* is that experience which can move psychoanalysis beyond the Aristotelian *eudemonia*. The Sophoclean tragedy *Antigone* can support such a transgression. This thesis has proven that Antigone's act is the result of that experience which philosophy tried to hide behind beautiful images. That experience, the Other *jouissance*, is not outside the field of psychoanalysis and Antigone is an illustration of that. This tragedy allows for Freud's research on the field beyond the pleasure principle and Lacan's definition of the Other *jouissance* to meet. In contrast to the argument of most psychoanalytic commentators of *Antigone* that the heroine experiences phallic *jouissance*, this thesis took advantage of Lacan's choice of *Antigone* in order to define psychoanalytic ethics in terms of an ethical act that transgresses the limit of the oedipal law. Lacan might not have succeeded in achieving his intention in the *Ethics*' Seminar but he offered us the idea of the Other *jouissance* in order to do it for him.



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