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FREUD'S METAPSYCHOLOGY OF SUBLIMATION<sup>1 2</sup>Érico Bruno Viana Campos<sup>3 4</sup>, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4716-4163>Ana Maria Loffredo<sup>5</sup>, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4615-2117>

**ABSTRACT.** This theoretical essay aimed to present the metapsychology of the concept of sublimation in Freud's work. The interest is justified by the fact that this is one of the broadest and least elaborated concepts in Freudian theory, and its last formulations were particularly little explored in later developments in most schools of psychoanalysis. In this sense, the Freudian discourses on sublimation, centered on the transformations of the goal and the object of satisfaction, will be characterized. Two moments are defended: one in the context of the first drive dualism, in which the sublimation concerns the desexualization, another in the second dualism, in which the sublimation articulates with the erotization of the death drive, through narcissistic identifications. It is proposed that they be perceived as distinct moments of a general process, in terms of a primary and secondary sublimation. In conclusion, we discussed the implications of this last discourse for understanding the relation between desire and culture, as well as for the psychoanalytic view of man.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis and culture; sublimation; Freud; Sigmund (1856-1939).

## A METAPSICOLOGIA FREUDIANA DA SUBLIMAÇÃO

**RESUMO.** Este ensaio teórico tem por objetivo apresentar a metapsicologia do conceito de sublimação na obra de Freud. O interesse se justifica pelo fato deste ser um dos conceitos mais amplos e menos elaborados na teoria freudiana, sendo que suas últimas formulações foram particularmente pouco exploradas nos desenvolvimentos posteriores na maioria das escolas de psicanálise. Nesse intuito, serão caracterizados os discursos freudianos sobre a sublimação, centrados nas transformações da meta e do objeto de satisfação. Defendem-se dois momentos: um no contexto do primeiro dualismo pulsional, em que a sublimação concerne a dessexualização, outro no segundo dualismo, em que a sublimação se articula à erotização da pulsão de morte, por meio de identificações narcísicas. Propõe-se que eles sejam entendidos como momentos distintos de um processo geral, nos termos de uma sublimação primária e secundária. Como conclusão são discutidas as implicações

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desse último discurso para a compreensão da relação entre desejo e cultura, bem como para a visão psicanalítica de homem.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicanálise e cultura; sublimação; Freud; Sigmund (1856-1939).

## LA METAPSICOLOGÍA FREUDIANA DE LA SUBLIMACIÓN

**RESUMEN.** En este ensayo teórico se tiene por objetivo presentar la metapsicología del concepto de sublimación en la obra de Freud. El interés se justifica por el hecho de este ser uno de los conceptos más amplios y menos elaborados en la teoría freudiana, siendo que sus últimas formulaciones fueron particularmente poco exploradas en los desarrollos posteriores en la mayoría de las escuelas de psicoanálisis. En este sentido, se caracterizarán los discursos freudianos sobre la sublimación, centrados en las transformaciones de la meta y del objeto de satisfacción. Se defiende dos momentos: uno en el contexto del primer dualismo pulsional, en que la sublimación concierne a la desexualización, otro en el segundo dualismo, en que la sublimación se articula a la erotización de la pulsión de muerte, por medio de identificaciones narcisicas. Se propone que sean entendidos como momentos distintos de un proceso general, en términos de una sublimación primaria y secundaria. Como conclusión se discuten las implicaciones de este último discurso para la comprensión de la relación entre deseo y cultura, así como para la visión psicoanalítica de hombre.

**Palabras clave:** Psicoanálisis y cultura; sublimación; Freud; Sigmund (1856-1939).

### Introduction

Sublimation is a psychoanalytic notion that is usually described as a drive destiny marked by the transformation of the purpose of sexual satisfaction into another, of socially recognized nature. The term stems from the physical process of transforming the state of a substance without passing through its intermediary forms, but also has connection with the aesthetic notion of the sublime, describing a movement of transcendence. This notion is necessary to describe a fundamental passage in the conception of human sexuality, which is that of its individual dimension to the most collective scope of social life. In this way, this concept implies an ethical-moral connotation in the characterization of the Freudian conception of man as necessarily marked by the conflict between nature and culture.

Despite its fundamental character, the concept of sublimation is something that is not systematized in psychoanalysis. In the theorization of its founder, it remains as a general notion that unfolds in diverse scopes, from the metapsychological mechanisms, to the more general plane of the cultural phenomena, passing through the clinics. This is because in its general articulation, sublimation emerges as a privileged drive destiny as opposed to the symptomatic outputs produced in people, contributing in the production and maintenance of a shared social reality. In this sense, sublimatory destinies are an important parameter in the characterization of psychic elaboration of drive tendencies, hence their relevance to the theorization of technique and psychopathology in psychoanalysis. In its detailing, however, the concept articulates in very varied ways with others. At first and in its more general context, it is a destiny of the drives, but in its achievement, it is closely related to defensive processes and also to identificatory processes, involving different modes of psychic

representation and drive qualities. The metapsychological characterization of this process, involving the topical, dynamic and economic aspects, was not fully and explicitly developed by Freud.

It is, as Laplanche (1989) points out, a burden in Freudian thought: not only in the sense of a burden difficult to carry, but also in the crossroads of theory, clinic and culture. This all justifies the impression that it is more correct to speak of a multiplicity of aspects by configuring a mosaic of indications and figures involving the general notion of sublimation rather than a well-circumscribed systematic theory (Loffredo, 2011, 2014, 2015). Nevertheless, in this plurality of modes and levels, it is possible to distinguish two models of conception of the concept, which are rooted in two historical moments of the Freudian theory (Birman, 2000, 2008) or at least two characterizations of their metapsychological mechanisms (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998; Roudinesco & Plon, 1998). What is common in both is the permanence of a general notion of 'desexualization' by means of transformations within the scope of the drive goal and object, but the mechanisms, instances and the very qualities in play are different. Therefore, the objective of this theoretical essay is to make a metapsychological description of the concept of sublimation in Freudian theory.

This proposition is justified insofar as contemporary psychoanalysis turns to a new perspective on its conceptual operators and a repositioning of its conception of subject, seeking a more critical and political perspective in the articulation between psychism and society (Rosa, 2004; Birman, 2010; Dunker, 2015). This repositioning, particularly noteworthy in the context of the Brazilian psychoanalysis, often involves the revival of the concept of sublimation, to think of it as a fundamental operator in the constitution of social bonds (Birman, 2000; Kehl, 2000) at the risk of drive defusion and masochism in the context of the imaginary imperative and consumerism today (Silva Junior, 2003; Metzger & Silva Junior, 2010). In this sense, as developed on another occasion (Campos, 2013b), the rescue of the metapsychological crossroads of sublimation seems fundamental to us to think the meaning of a psychoanalysis of the social phenomena today.

### **First time: desexualization**

Mention of the term sublimation already appears in the pre-psychoanalytic writings of Freud's work in the manuscripts addressed to Fliess, especially in Sketch L (Masson, 1986), indicating the general notion that will be the keynote of the whole movement that will lead to the constitution of the first theory of sublimation, namely, the notion of a drive denial in function of the civilizing process. In this first moment are indicated the relations of the fantasy with the defense and with a certain refinement toward higher and sublime goals. In a very incipient way, fantasy appears as a way of refining memories in order to defend from the sexual dimension of traumatic experiences.

This conception of the closest sublimation of a defensive dynamic persists throughout the first two periods of periodization of the Freudian work, namely, the pre-psychoanalytic and the constitution of psychoanalysis (Mezan, 2014), being relativized only from the essays on sexuality (Freud, 2016), in which the question of the fate of the drive tendencies through the operation of desexualization becomes emphasized. Starting from the general notion of an original perverse-polymorphous sexuality that develops through the constriction of moral and social impositions, the author arrives at a characterization that the constructions of civilization arise at the expense of infantile sexual impulses. In this sense, there would be the diversion of sexuality to other purposes through the process of sublimation. The problem, however, is that at this level of characterization, the concept remains very close to the

general notion of defense, not actually distinguishing itself from repression. In addition, it also overlaps with other psychoanalytic concepts that have been defined up to that moment in the work, such as inhibition of the goal and reactive formation.

If in the characterization of the drive theory Freud (2015) pointed out that civilization is constructed at the expense of infantile sexual impulses, in the text on modern civilized sexual morality it is emphasized that sublimation would favor cultural formation and more explicitly address the higher social value of sublimated goals. The fundamental articulation is the need to repress the drive for the formation and maintenance of culture, relativized by a discussion about how psychoanalysis can contribute to the development of a culture less marked by psychic illness through a less repressive moral of sexuality. In addition, it is important to note that this text has the first appearance of a definition of sublimation. The main question, however, is this contraposition between the disruptive, symptomatic and dystonic elements of the drive renunciation that culture demands, as opposed to more harmonious and constructive possibilities of the destination of the drives, characterizing a kind of double face of the possible articulations between nature and culture. In this way, the fundamental ethical-moral dimension in the articulation between the sublimatory and symptomatic destinies for the drive conflict is more explicitly circumscribed, marking the beginning of a perspective of reflection and criticism on the modern society that will lead to the reflections on the malaise in the culture of the last period of the Freudian work. It should be emphasized that at this point the tendency is on a possible harmonization perspective between the records of the drive nature and the social requirements (Birman, 2000). In any case, the tension between the drive renunciation and the civilizational requirements by means of repression is circumscribed in a paradigmatic way in this text characterizing the design of a double face position and paradoxical function of the mechanism of sublimation between the cultural ideals and the psychic suffering (Loffredo, 2014).

The course on the sublimation has in the analysis of the childhood memory of Leonardo da Vinci (Freud, 2013) an important point of confluence. The text is the most illustrative example of its application in an interpretative analysis, remaining as the great reference in the Freudian work on the subject of sublimation (Cruxên, 2004; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998). In addition, it is the opportunity for the author to address the complexity of the impasse between symptom and sublimation in the elaboration of repression. In this text, he constructs an interpretation of the infantile memory of having his mouth whipped by the tail of a bird, revealing homosexual fantasies and identification with the maternal figure and its influence on Leonardo's creativity and curiosity. In this context, attention is paid to epistemophilic and domain impulses and their relation to sexual impulses, producing a privileged outlet for scientific and artistic interests, notwithstanding the presence of certain symptomatic elements, such as the difficulty of completing the works and activities. It is in this derivation of sexual fantasies to the realm of arts and sciences that the question of sublimation is properly posed. With regard to the sublimatory process metapsychological characterization, the emphasis is on modifying the drive goal, from sexual satisfaction to the knowledge and aesthetic interests, with emphasis on the former. The articulation of this transformation with a judgment of value and social recognition also appears explicitly. Modifications in the scope of objects are suggested, but generally indicating that they are mere displaced substitutes for an unconscious object that succumbed to repression, with the emphasis being on the originality of goal transformation as an alternative to these object constraints. In any case, it can be affirmed that there is a more effective discrimination in this text between the fates of repression and the sublimatory fate, and also between the mechanism of repression and the sublimatory dynamics, although they cannot be

completely differentiated. This is because the repression mechanism of defense is an integral part of the sublimatory process, since it focuses on sexual fantasy, but the difference is that instead of the object being relegated to the unconscious and investments return through displacements and condensations or be inhibited, in the sublimation the impulse is desexualized through the transformation of the goal and with that it is conserved in its investment in the object. In this way, the sublimatory destiny is different from the fate of the repression, but the mechanism is present and therefore integrates the dynamics of the phenomenon. But the dynamics takes place in a curious way, since it has the character of a conservation of the object and the impulse, through the transformation of the erotic into non-erotic, which produces a paradoxical effect of simultaneously supplanting and preserving the barrier of repression.

In the text on narcissism (Freud, 2004a), the notion of the ego constitution is introduced through the withdrawal of objectal investments from the sexual drive. Within the general framework of metapsychology this question will be responsible for a general upheaval in the frame of reference for understanding the psychic apparatus by erasing the distinction between sexual drives and self-preservation drives and for transposing the logic of representational systems toward instances structures. In particular, the notion of a dynamic of identifications with the object in the constitution of the ego unity and its ideal elements is introduced more clearly. Here an important metapsychological distinction is introduced, in which the ideal of the ego becomes an important parameter in the regulation of the fates of sexual drives from the repression. This means that the ideal of the ego tends then to indicate a path of drive's destination in the direction of socially valued objects and, therefore, to the sublimatory way. However, the fact that the ego ideal claims to the ego a sublimatory exit does not necessarily mean that the ego can produce it. In other words, while sublimation may be a process that is stimulated by the ideal, its accomplishment depends on the conditions of the ego in handling repression and on the favored paths of drive investment in the relationship between the unconscious and the preconscious.

The text on the drives (Freud, 2004b) summarizes the metapsychological definition of the first drive theory, characterizing the basic elements of the drives - the source, the goal, the object and the pressure - and presenting the difference between the self-preservation drives and the sexual drives, their relations differentiated due to the principles of mental functioning and the support relationship of the second in the first along the psychosexual development. It also presents the destinations of drives, which is the most original and innovative point of this characterization and where the question focuses on the subject of sublimation. Freud (2004b) distinguishes four drive destinations. By destiny is meant a routing of the drive tendencies in its pursuit of satisfaction, modulating itself through dynamics in which investments are shifted from one object to another with transformations of the affective qualities involved. In this sense, it is fundamentally of the order of a dynamic characterization of the vicissitudes by which the drives pass in the arc that goes from its source to its goal of satisfaction, which indicates that it is a notion of a more descriptive character. However, destinations can in general be considered as forms of defense insofar as they represent deviations and delays from the goal of sexual satisfaction, which is ultimately taken by the preconscious system as unpleasant. But the notion of destiny is broader than the specific concept of a defense mechanism, inasmuch as defensive operations modulate the destinations of drives, but they do not represent the totality of the vicissitudes through which the drives pass.

This is noted in the distinction that the author operates, where, strictly speaking, only one of the destinations is a specific defense mechanism, in this case, repression.

Repression can be defined as a mechanism that operates in the separation between the ideative and affective representatives of a libidinal fantasy, causing the ideative representative to be withdrawn into the unconscious system along with the libido attached to it. However, the libidinal investment once in the unconscious seeks to return through associative dynamics according to the principles of condensation and displacement, and may erupt in the form of formations of the unconscious, especially the symptoms and among them, the anguish. In this sense, repression operates by restricting the object of a sexual drive and by effecting the search for a partial substitutive object, that is, it is a defense mechanism that imposes the exchange of the original sexual drive object by another, allowed. In this process, there is no transformation of the satisfaction goal, only its restriction. But more importantly, the active character of the impulse also does not change, nor does the direction of the subject and object relationship. In the same way, there is no transformation in the quality of the affective representative, in the sense of a transformation from love to hatred or vice versa. Freud (2004b) also describes two other destinations, understood as more primitive and therefore characterizing dynamics of moments previous to the repression in the psychosexual development: the reversion in the opposite and the return on itself. At this point enters the fourth destination, which is properly the sublimation. This, although not treated in detail in the text in question, appears more articulated to the dynamics of repression. This is because the sublimation, following the course of theorizing that has been shown, is a process that involves the possibility of maintaining the objects of the repressed sexual drive by means of a transformation in its goals. Thus, it should be pointed out that the four destinations described by Freud are articulated in pairs (Loffredo, 2014; Green, 2010), with repression and sublimation emerging as the privileged pairs for understanding the dynamics of the psychic apparatus, within the scope of Oedipal register, while the other two destinations succumb to the failure of articulation to the narcissistic register (Campos, 2014). In any case, the text is an important theoretic point of arrival, since it distinguishes between sublimation and repression as distinct but articulated destinations. But the most innovative one is that it expands the discussion, announcing for the first time in a clear way the question of the object of the sublimated drive (Loffredo, 2014; Castiel, 2007). This is due to the distinction between sexual and self-preservation drives regarding flexibility in relation to the object, since the objects of self-preservation are more fixed whereas in the sexual ones they are more easily displaceable and subjected to transformation.

With these final elements the construction of the first model of sublimation is properly closed. It explains a master line that has been announced from the beginning, in which sublimation appears as an outlet supported by the ethical-moral values of social life in contrast to the outflow of psychic suffering caused by the need to restrict sexuality. From a form of defense against sexuality to a transformed destination of sexuality that involves both the substitution of the goal and the object, the metapsychological elements that define the concept were characterized. In this first theory, the emphasis falls heavily on the question of desexualization through the transformation of the goal, in which the effective discrimination between its dynamics and that of repression is the main focus. The question of the transformation of the object is announced at the end, closing the classical elements of its characterization. In the perspective of what has been developed within the frame of reference of the first topic and the first drive theory, it can be said that sublimation is this fate of socially valued sexuality that is opposed to symptomatic outputs through goal transformations and object substitutions. It is the effect and the point of arrival of a dynamics

of the psychic apparatus that is structured from the logic and dynamics of repression, as a destination more evolved and also implicitly as an ideal of psychic functioning.

## Second time: erotization

According to Mezan (2014), the period of revisionism of the Freudian work is based on the introduction of the second theory of drives in the text on the beyond the pleasure principle (Freud, 2004c). Although in this text there is not really an elaboration of the concept of sublimation, being more quoted than worked out, the affirmation of the new dualism brings a significant extension of the sexuality concept, formulating a general frame of reference in which the problematic of sublimation will begin to be developed. In this sense, it can be said that the turning point of the twenties is also the beginning of a fundamental change in the theory of sublimation. The main expansion in the conception of sexuality occurs because in the affirmation of the life drives the aspects of self-preservation and sexuality are integrated within the scope of this general category, making sexuality to act in the direction of life, integration and connection and as opposed to the death drives, which now occupy the place of the disruptive and disintegrative factor (Castiel, 2007). The characterization of the death drive as the most original dimension of the drive economy, governed by the principle of nirvana as a tendency to complete discharge of the excitation and by the compulsion to repetition as an exercise of a traumatic pressure on the psychic apparatus demanding connection, establishes a fundamental understanding of the human condition, in so far as it withdraws the focus on the dimension of renunciation implied in the repression and in the Oedipus complex, putting in perspective a more original dimension of helplessness towards the drive.

From this, Birman (2000) affirms that it is from the thesis of the death drive that it is announced in Freud a condition of structural abandonment of the subject, in the sense that this original position is never surpassed, as well as the satisfaction of sexuality in the registration of the desire is also never fully satisfied and guaranteed. This would be the proposition of a second Freudian discourse on the social, proper to the revisionism moment, in which the emphasis would be on the impossibility of complete harmonization between the registers of individual desire and the demands, constraints and ideals of cultural formations, in opposition to a first discourse on the social, in which this integration would be possible due to the elaboration of symptoms and suffering through psychoanalytic treatment and also of social reform oriented by a transformation in the sexual morality of modern Western culture (Birman, 2000). In this sense, the path inaugurated in the scope of metapsychology will result in a broad reflection on culture (Freud, 2010a) in which individual suffering is ultimately referred to as a dynamics inherent to civilizational progress in which the economy of the death drive has a leading role.

Thus, it can be said that this general reorientation of sexuality will mark the whole discussion of this last period of the Freudian work, approaching in a new way the fundamental ethical question of the relation between the individual and society in the ambit of desire, in which the problem of sublimation will gain new densities and orientations, coming out of a tone of overcoming to theoretically stage the “[...] tragicity underlying the human” (Loffredo, 2014, p. 125). This new tonic also highlights the fact that sublimation will be called much more in the sense of an “[...] alliance with erotization, than as a process that goes against sexuality” (Loffredo, 2014, p. 126).

A first point of note in this course is the text on the psychology of the masses (Freud, 2011), where the formation of group bonds is referred to the identification process, resulting



in a significant elaboration towards the proposition of the instances of the ego and of the ego ideal in the structural model of the psychic apparatus. In this particular text, the formation of the groups organized by means of a double libidinal bond, of the members among themselves and of this one with the leader is described, sustained in a mechanism of identification with the leader and of instituting this object to the condition of ideal parameter for the ego of the members. The essential operator in this transformation is the sublimatory process, which would operate a deviation from the original goal by means of a desexualization that should retain some of its original identity by means of identificatory mechanisms. What is new at this moment is the indication that the deviation from the goal consists in an initiation of the sublimatory process, which would be articulated to the establishment of the ideal ego component. In this new twist of theory, the notion of a mechanism that would operate 'from the beginning' (Loffredo, 2011) returns, indicating transformations in the goal as a first step toward sublimatory fate, articulated to the identificatory processes.

The development of this question depends on the full characterization of the structural model of the psychic apparatus (Freud, 2004d), in which more explicitly statements and elaborations about the concept of sublimation appear, but have a very diversified character, allowing to recognize two distinct poles of characterization of the problem of sublimation, forming a 'double face' of sublimation (Loffredo, 2014). In the text, the characterization of sublimation is resumed, now within the scope of the attributes of the instances of the psychic apparatus and the relationships established between them. The most original point of this text's contribution for the theory of sublimation lies in the full enunciation of the derivation of the understanding of narcissistic identifications in the ego constitution. It is here that the notion of desexualization in sublimation receives a fundamental transformation: from a turn of sexual object investment into non-sexual to that of reversing object investment into narcissism, with a connection of life and death drives into libido. This implies a number of modifications. Earlier, it was believed that the sexual drive would bring about a transformation in the goal toward non-sexual objects, by means of a mechanism of support and conjunction with the drives of self-preservation. Now, in the context of the new drive dualism, this confluence operates on a more original level, that of connecting the death drive with the life drive in the relaxation of the drive trauma in its entrance into the psychic apparatus, which means that sublimation now begins to operate eroticization and libidization, no longer opposing it, as it was in the beginning. Moreover, in this original passage, a process of narcissistic identification would be at stake, a mechanism by which there would be a reversal of the investment of the object into the ego. Therefore, the emphasis would not be so much on its relation to repression, but on a mechanism that apparently would have preceded it.

It seems an articulation of a more original sublimation mechanism, linked to the regime of eroticization and narcissism, with a secondary or later sublimation mechanism, in which there would be substitution of the erotic goal for a more neutral goal and the within the scope of the objects of culture, in which the oedipal dimension and the repression would be the main features. However, the question is complicated because at this point in the Freudian work there is no clear discrimination between the formation of the ego ideal and the formation of the superego, and therefore between the moments of narcissistic and oedipal identification. Later in the text, the author makes it clear that the superego is also born of a process of desexualization and sublimation via identification, but now through the sadistic component of the superego in relation to the ego, in the form of unconscious feeling of guilt. In this way, the indication of a double articulation of sublimation with the processes

of identification and formation of the instances of the psychic apparatus, in which the ego taken as an object through identification is the necessary way of processing the transformation of drive investments' goal.

Thus, the general sketches of the conceptual framework organization of the second theory of sublimation are outlined, which remain operative until the end of the Freudian work. Following his works, the contribution of the text on the economic problem of masochism (Freud, 2004e) is the more detailed metapsychological description of the dynamics of the death drive in producing the effects of masochism, with the explicit characterization of the principle of nirvana, as already pointed out, but also with the important definition of the different types of masochism: erogenous, feminine and moral. As far as the present discussion is concerned, it is noted that the first level is what is originally articulated to the mechanisms of attachment of the death drive into libido. The novelty is that now the operation of death drive deflection to the outside is made explicit by means of the constitution of dominion and destruction impulses. But the dynamics of fusion and defusion mark all levels of masochism, until its final expression, in moral masochism, which is one that articulates properly to the production of the guilty feeling through the establishment of the ideal component of the superego. It would be in this general context that the sublimations would operate, operating derivations of the erotic and thanatological components throughout the development of the psychic apparatus.

Much of the general characterization that is made at this point reappears in the text on malaise in culture (Freud, 2010a). It addresses both the question of the deflection of the death drive in overcoming primary masochism and libidinal defusion, generating an unconscious feeling of guilt as an expression of the death drive and anguish as an expression of the life drive. In what concerns the discussion on sublimation, it appears initially and mostly in the characterization of different forms and resolutions in the face of the basic conflict between desire and social demands. Freud (2010a) describes some ways out of the conflict by isolating or transforming society, by psychopathological and symptomatic configurations, by suppression of drives, and finally by social derivatives in artistic, scientific, and moral institutions. In this context, sublimation appears linked to this latter destination, especially in the characterization of aesthetic pleasure, but also in the scope of love and knowledge. In any case, it is at the confluence of a drive destination with the task of civilization that the characterization of this essay is given. Although the sublimatory paths appear in a very diversified way, the emphasis is on a link between sublimation and erotization, which has as its central element the idea of a detour from direct sexual goal.

However, this overall impression in the sense of harmonization is not the keynote of the essay and the interesting thing is that the problem of sublimation is not taken up significantly to address the issues that are confined to the main thesis of the text, which is precisely the destination of malaise. The central question in the second theory of sublimation is the ways of desexualization in the constitution of the psychic instances, generating the most varied effects of libidinal fusion and defusion, from the most original level of primary masochism to the effects of superegoic sadism (Metzger & Silva Junior, 2010). However, this is little developed by the author at that time. In regard to the destinations of destructiveness, Freud (2010a) affirms that it is the privileged outlet of the death drive, but that this deflection for the social sphere is a complicator of social relations and where moral imperatives concentrate, so that the social demands end up causing, through the superego, the destructiveness to return to the ego. Hence the idea that the destination of the death drive reflects on the subject in the form of malaise according to the civilizing pact and, mainly, that this internalized destructiveness has difficulties of finding sublimatory exits in the sense

of substitute objects valued socially. This route of Freud's argumentation then leads to the indication that the death drive could not ultimately be sublimated, since from the onset it opposes the effort of *Eros* and civilization and therefore would always have a final portion refractory to any possibility of sublimation. This last point is the other more explicit contribution of this Freudian essay and perhaps the most controversial point of the discussion on sublimation, since it is often cited as the limit for the collective elaboration of destructive impulses (Loffredo, 2014; Campos, 2013b; Green, 2010). In any case, it ends by confirming the general line that the sublimatory mechanism is aligned with a general conception of adequacy to socially instituted moral values.

In this sense, the general line of exposure of this text with regard to sublimation seems to appear much more linked to socially valued objects destinies, as a privileged exit in the harmonization of the individual desire with the social and moral demands. The affirmations of sublimation linked to the outlets in the sense of cultural ideals and the impossibility of sublimation of the death drive help to restore the general lines of the first theory of sublimation. It also points out that the discussion about sublimation itself appears marginally and secondarily in the text, as opposed to what is expected, since from the beginning in Freud's sublimation theorization appears closely related to the ethical-moral dilemma of the conflict between individual and society.

In view of this, it is possible to affirm that there is a significant backspace in the original points of the second theory of sublimation, in which the dimension of narcissistic identifications in the production of the libidinal circuit and of the ego are lost. In fact, following the Freudian texts, the characterization of sublimation will follow the general lines of the first theory, always emphasizing the descriptive characterization in terms of goal and object, emphasizing its dimension of deviation and transformation in opposition to the inhibition of desire (Freud, 2010b). In these final texts, even by its synthetic nature, such as the new introductory lectures and the outline of psychoanalysis, the emphasis becomes more descriptive than metapsychologic, that is, the characterization of sublimation is further accentuated as the effect or end of a process than the description of the details of its processing. In addition, there is also an emphasis on the notion of a constitutional provision for the establishment of sublimatory exits, which ends up making it difficult to clarify the meanderings of the metapsychological process, since it ends up being referred in block to a generic notion of constitution with the risk of affirming an innate character of the drive dispositions as determinant of their individual and social destinations. This is how the question of sublimation reappears in the final outline of psychoanalysis (Freud, 2018b), so that the summary definition of sublimation imposes itself at the end of the Freudian work as a modification of the goal and object in reference to social values and also losing the richness of conceptual enhancement of the second moment of sublimation theory with the emphasis on identificatory processes and a desexualization that focuses more on the level of ego-driven fusion and defusion than on the meeting of objective libidinal destinations in culture.

### **Articulating the Two Times: primary and secondary sublimation**

At the end of this historical-chronological path one can confirm the "[...] nodal position occupied by sublimation in metapsychological architecture" (Loffredo, 2014, p. 195), one that is a conception dealing with the management of drive investments by means of multiple ways, involving both the individual as well as the collective, through transformations in their goals and objects. It is a conception that has not received a theoretical conclusion on the

part of Freud and remains in a paradoxical intersection in the outline of the fundamental conflict between desire and culture, having a double face in its general characterization, which refers, in its notion of sublime, to the field of morality and aesthetics. Its conceptual network in metapsychology is very diversified and broad, in the proximity and articulation with a series of concepts and notions, constituting a multifaceted range that inspires the metaphor proposed by Loffredo (2011, 2014) of 'sublimation figures' rather than a systematic theory.

In this way, the general notion of desexualization marks the keynote of a process that deals with transformations in the scope of erotization, but in this way the sublimation brings a series of articulations. At the dynamic level it breaks down: within the scope of investments in the network of representations of the psychic apparatus through the notions of deviation and inhibition of the goal and of object modification; within the scope of the defense mechanisms and their consequences, with the repression and the symptoms, besides the reactive formation and idealization; in the scope of identifications, with the narcissistic and oedipal identifications. At the topical level it is initially articulated to a special mode of passage from the unconscious to the conscious, but later it involves all levels of psychic apparatus: from the passage of the id to the ego, the constitution of the ego and also of the ideal instances of the ego, as well as passages from the superego to the ego. At the economic level, it initially involves the support of sexuality in the self-preservation drives, but then the drive fusion and defusion in various scopes. In any case, it is possible to identify 'three main axes' of referral in this problem: the transition from sexual to non-sexual, the implications of narcissism, and closeness to repression (Loffredo, 2011, 2014).

A whole view makes it possible to affirm that the Freudian conception of sublimation is much broader and more complex than is usually supposed in its more superficial presentations. First, because it is not a mere descriptive judgment of the value of a drive destiny on an object, that is, sublimation is not only a description that can be given to a successful exit to the psychic conflict, in cultural appreciation and recognition. It is not the final effect of a process, but a legitimate and specific dynamic process. Hence the justification for the need to recover its metapsychological characterization, as proposed in this article. Secondly, because from the dynamic point of view, it is neither a specific defense mechanism nor an unfolding or effect of repression. It articulates closely to this, but it is not confused with it, because it is a path with its own characteristics. Nor is it a mere effect of displacements and transpositions of investments in representations and objects, because it fundamentally involves a qualitative transformation in the drive tendencies, which is precisely the idea of goal transformation and desexualization. But this does not refer only to the passage from a sexual desire to a more sublime one, in fact it consists of a broader process with many branches. In this sense, the main contribution of the second moment of sublimation is to re-signify the very concept of desexualization, withdrawing the focus of moral value for the genesis of the instances of the psychic apparatus, through identification processes.

Another point is that the general shift from emphasis towards erogenization turns the general framework of sublimation into its ontological and ethical-moral implications. As it was pointed out in the beginning, the problem of sublimation focuses on the fundamental dilemma of the tragic condition of man as a cultural being. At first, sublimation would indicate this particular condition of transposing the barrier of the limit to the desire by harmonizing the individual and social registers. But in extending the scope of *Eros*, including these two registers and repositioning the problem on a more archaic level, that of helplessness in the face of the death drive, the problem of sublimation ends up within the scope of the origin of

the libidinal circuits. This not only places the question on the merits of the genesis of psychic instances and creativity in libidinal investments, but also restores a fundamental ethical position because it is through the alteritary mobilization of the human object that the libidinal ties can occur both in the individual and in the social register.

This is the position advocated by Birman (2000, 2008, 2010), which emphasizes, as highlighted in the introduction above, especially the rescue of the political developments of this conception, but that reflects in some referrals. A first way is to think of sublimation as a form of management of social abandonment by fostering fraternal function (Kehl, 2000; Campos, 2013b). This proposition comes to operate an alternative to the crisis of the paternal imago and the vertical axis of the paternal function in the identificatory mobilization of groups, which operates in an implosion and explosion of violence through the drive defusions operated in the context of a sublimation regressive to the masochism (Metzger & Silva Junior, 2010). A second way is the proposition of Castiel (2007), whose main thesis is that the development of the theory of sublimation in its last moment, the one in which the object change is emphasized, would inaugurate a properly alteritary and creative perspective for the theory of sublimation, with direct reflex to a clinics in which the sublimation could operate like creative process of drive destinies in individual and collective scope, instead of mere adaptation production. In this sense, the question of sublimation as a fundamental beacon of psychoanalytic clinical practice is taken up again.

Nevertheless, this general axiological change in the theory of sublimation also has fundamental metapsychological implications. One of them, which was pointed out by Laplanche (1989), also involves the emphasis on the original dimension of libidinal binding production, which the author calls the neogenesis of the drive. We understand that although this is the great originality in the transposition to the second model of sublimation, its understanding and metapsychological articulation is actually much broader than the original dimension of the drive circuit that the author emphasizes (Campos, 2013a). In this sense, we argue that these two models will in fact be articulated in a more comprehensive theoretical formulation. What can be noticed through this route is a wide range of sublimatory operations, which are related in the production of diverse affective effects, from the most erotic to the sadistic and destructive side. This is because sublimations fundamentally perform operations on the fundamental drive quality, merging death drive and life drive into libido, but also defusing them. In this sense, sublimation is what allows the overcoming of primary masochism, through the connection in libido and deflection of the death drive to the outside, but also that which produces secondary masochism, through the unconscious feeling of guilt. It is a process that articulates with the production of the structures of the psychic apparatus, in the ego, through narcissistic identifications, and in the superego, via oedipal identifications. In the first case, privileged by the sublimation of the life drives and the second involving the sublimation of the death drives.

An overview of these figures of sublimation that respects its complexity was initially proposed by Loffredo (2011, 2014). Considering what has been explained so far, we can endorse the proposal to think of the two-way articulation of sublimation in the dynamics and constitution of the psychic apparatus. In the first place, there would be a 'primary sublimation', articulated to the primary narcissistic identifications and the demand of connection and libidization of the death drive through the relation with otherness. At this level, the original erogenization of attachment in libido and also of constitution of the ego and of the ego ideal in the dynamics of narcissism would take place. It would involve the transformation of the death drive into the libido and also the libido of the object into the libido of the ego. A second moment is that of 'secondary sublimation', which would properly occur

in the context of triangular relations, establishing itself from the resolution of the Oedipus complex. It would be articulated both to the logic of repression and to the identificatory paths of paternal ideals installed in the superego. In this second level different forms of desexualization and re-sexualization of the libido in the relation with the objects would be present, both in the sense of obtaining new object outflows for the libido as well as in the production of anguish, feelings of guilt and malaise.

## Final considerations

We can conclude that sublimation is truly of the order of a drive destiny and, above all, a process of transformation of the drive qualities that is articulated at all levels of the psychosexual development and structuring of the psychic apparatus, with multiple and varied destinations. Our particular contribution to this problem lies in trying to outline and sustain the proposition of a broader theoretical model that articulates two distinct times of the sublimation processes: a primary sublimation, which occurs in the direction of the ego and under the registry of narcissism, and a secondary sublimation, which occurs in the direction of cultural objects, under the logic of repression and under the registry of Oedipus. It is important to emphasize, however, that these dimensions involve both erogenization and attachment operations, as well as the cessation and production of malaise and suffering. This means that sublimation acts both in the direction of the link between the most instinctual of the drive in the libido to the most sublime of cultural objects, and also in the opposite direction, in the sense of the disinvestment of the object and the drive defusion towards egoic masochism and traumatism of the pure death drive.

In terms of a general metapsychological characterization of sublimation, we can conclude that it is a drive destiny whose essence is the transformation of its qualities, in a change of its 'goal' of satisfaction by means of variations in its 'objects'. At the topic level, it refers to the dynamics of the ego in its relationship of commitment to id demands, the superego and reality. At the dynamic level, it is characterized by reference to the defensive and identificatory processes that unfold at different moments of development, both in the narcissistic and in the oedipal record, but always marked by the relations between the ego and the objects of reality through references of the ideal instances. At the economic level, it occurs through a general notion of 'desexualization', which unfolds at various levels of the conflict between the life and death drives in operations of libidinal fusion and defusion.

Finally, this metapsychological conception has general implications for the Freudian conception of man, pointing to the dimensions of helplessness and alterity as founders of individual and social libidinal bonds, repositioning the values discussion in the problematic of sublimation and shifting it from a merely moralizing or adaptive dimension to an ethical dimension of openness to difference and creativity. The sublime and properly paradoxical in the human condition is that the attachment to the socially valued object necessarily passes through the creation of oneself, showing that psychic and objective reality are not opposed, but are mutually constituted in response to an impersonal pulsar that crosses them.

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