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Cultural Psychology as Basic Science

Dialogues with Jaan Valsiner

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Preface of the Series Editors

Cultural Psychology: A New Science of the Human Nature

This book, thoughtfully edited by Maria Lyra and Marina Pinheiro, acknowledges the fruitful discourse between Jaan Valsiner and several generations of Brazilian researchers over the last several decades. The backbone of this work is built on three of Dr. Valsiner's previous texts, considered to be milestones of the most advanced reflections in the field of Cultural Psychology of Dynamic Semiosis, and the works of respondents who commented on and expanded Dr. Valsiner's thoughts. At the soul of this volume is a discussion of the special nature of what Cultural Psychology is, beyond the dialogical formation of these dedicated young scholars commenting on the three foundational papers.

This effort to define Cultural Psychology ties together all the contributions of the current volume as well as of its predecessors (Marsico & Valsiner, 2018; Valsiner, Marsico, Chaudhary, Sato & Dazzani, 2016; Raudsepp, 2017). However, what do we mean by "basic" here? Has it something to do with the investigation of the elementary component of psychological phenomena? Not at all!

The human psyche is complex, subjective, and meaningful. It cannot be explained by causal mechanisms of lower levels of organization (Valsiner, Marsico, Chaudhary, Sato & Dazzani, 2016). In the pages and chapters to follow, we delve into Cultural Psychology as a science of human forms of making oneself in one's environment and constructing meaning.

As the editors point out in the first chapter:

> The core of this perspective – conceived as a science of the universality of culture – is the semiotic dynamics that is constitutive of selves and cultural environment. The focus is on the high mental functions that include many human activities that have been neglected by psychology in present days, like the role of the body, all forms of art, music, rhythms and cadences, taste and smell, silence, overwhelming information, etc. (2018, p. 1)

The dialogue between Valsiner and the other contributors in this volume has a focal point: the human as culture maker, constantly striving for the meaning of experiences *that are not yet here but are coming*.

According to Valsiner—moving forward from the time-honored semiotic traditions of Charles Sanders Peirce—the core of the human psyche entails the simple feature that:

> …human beings make signs, use them to organize their lives to guide their move to the future, and abandon these signs when these are no longer necessary. Signs "stand in" for something (else than they themselves) in some capacity, and for some purpose. They are made to do this by the sign-makers—human beings—who act in order to "fit in" with the constantly changing environment. (2018, p. 518)

Yet, how should we study the person's feeling, thinking, and doing in our complex, mutable world? How do we keep the complexity of human conduct without reducing it to its subdimensions? How do we get generalized knowledge from the most obvious acts of everyday life? The goal of Cultural Psychology as a basic science is in the search for universal knowledge that goes from systemic analyses of single case to the generalized contexts of the abstracted features (Nedergaard, Valsiner & Marsico, 2015; Valsiner, 2016).

This is the theoretical and methodological preoccupation of Dr. Valsiner and his interlocutors. This book aims to offer a holistic and innovative way of dealing with the complexity of the human psyche. In this vein, memory *and* imagination, mundane *and* aesthetic, and construction *and* deconstruction are treated as wholes and become the arenas of semiosis. The dialogue among the authors of this volume helps to foster this theoretical model even further by also including methodological stances.

Cultural Psychology as Basic Science: Dialogues with Jaan Valsiner focuses, then, on the universal nature of context interdependency of psychological knowledge. The reader will be shown how generalized knowledge of psychological phenomena emerges from apparently impossible conditions for abstraction, that of the irreversibility of time and the context dependency of psyche.

Salvador, Brazil   Giuseppina Marsico

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Contents

About the Editors

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Jaan Valsiner is a cultural psychologist with a consistently developmental axiomatic base that is brought to analyses of any psychological or social phenomena. He is the Founding Editor (1995) of the Sage journal, *Culture & Psychology*. From 2013 to 2018, he was the Niels Bohr Professor of Cultural Psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark, where he continues his research on cultural psychology, in combination with collaboration with the University of Luxembourg and Sigmund Freud Privatuniversität Wien in Austria and in Berlin. He has published and edited more than 40 books, the most pertinent of which are *The Guided Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), *Culture in Minds and Societies* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), *An Invitation to Cultural Psychology* (London: Sage, 2014), and *Ornamented Lives* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2018). He has been awarded the *Alexander von Humboldt Prize* of 1995 in Germany and the *Hans-Kilian-Preis* of 2017 for his interdisciplinary work on human development. Previously while working in the United States, he was a recipient of a *Senior Fulbright Lecturing Award* in Brazil, 1995–1997. He has been a Visiting Professor in Brazil, Japan, Australia, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Since 2017 he is a *Foreign Member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences*.

Chapter 1
From Everyday Experiencing to Abstract Knowledge Through Approaching Semiotic Dynamics: An Introduction

Maria C. D. P. Lyra and Marina Assis Pinheiro

In this introduction, we highlight and discuss some of the fundamental concepts that compose the theoretical framework of *Cultural Psychology as Basic Science* which emerged through dialogues with Jaan Valsiner. We will approach some of the fundamental concepts proposed by Valsiner, focusing on the dynamics between human experiencing and the constructive fundamental role accomplished by the theoretical background offered by a cultural psychology. The core of this perspective – conceived as a science of the universality of culture – is the semiotic dynamics that is constitutive of selves and cultural environment. The focus is on the high mental functions that include many human activities that have been neglected by psychology in present days, like the role of the body, all forms of art, music, rhythms and cadences, taste and smell, silence, overwhelming information, etc. Persons and cultural world emerge and continuously change from the interdependence of a personal culture and a collective culture through an inclusive separation. Both selves and culture are dynamic forms of being as processes of becoming.

The *locus* of special interest is the border between dialogical self and cultural world, which means that we should focus on self–others and self–world exchanges and transformations of the semiotic activity happening through time in a continuously moving manner toward the future. *Cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics* is a developmental science with which development is guided by affectivity, thinking, and acting in the present envisaging the unknown future. In other words, cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics as a basic science is committed to understand the procedural character of human higher psychological functions relying in the mediation of signs. This sign activity is also constitutive of selves and culture, both

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as processes of becoming. Thus, it comprises the search to apprehend how human singularity emerges and develops and how cultural world, in which humans are immersed, develops and changes through these semiotic exchanges. Therefore, CPSD is in essence a developmental basic science as far as its aim is to capture the phenomena in the process of changing, in a time that never stops.

The corollary of the above is the uniqueness of empirical datum and the fact that the scientist's task is to create abstract models that apprehend these dynamics that constitute and change selves vis-a-vis others and sociocultural environment. Such a challenging scientific horizon requires a comprehension of, at least, two interpretative anchors for recognizing the centrality of human experience in psychology: the emergence of novelty, as the process of human becoming, and the sublime in the aesthetic experience, as the openness for human creation. In this chapter, we discuss these two anchors/axes as a fundamental approach in constructing valuable scientific abstract models based on the holistic and time-determined (in its irreversibility) human experience.

Emergence of Novelty

The emergence of novelty in human becoming is a guideline for any developmental psychology. However, the common research activity, most of the time, produces a kind of suppression of the most fundamental trait of transformation in human condition, which is the irreversible time. In terms of psychological process, we should assume that memory is a form of pre-presentation based on the past and imagination as preparation for adaptation to the future are the two fundamental human psychological processes that construct the here and now for the person.

The perennial movement of human beings toward future places is an adventure that aims to shape the uncertainty, the unknown. Such self-creative journey engages a process in which corporeality, effect, and language cannot be reduced one to another, at the same time that they are all together in a holistic experience. At this point, ambivalence and ambiguity are implied, but they cannot be understood as synonymous or, even, weakly defined expressions. As a prominent *affective* dimension of experience, the ambivalence, in a broader conception, can be seen as the simultaneous coexistence of two opposite feelings/affects addressed toward the same person or object. In the perspective of CPSD, considering the irreversible time, ambivalence is thus comprehended as a result from the two systems of infinity dualities, "past–future" and "inner–outer sociocultural environment," in which such oppositional affective vectors activate the semiotic dynamics. Thus, the individual and culture constantly create selves (constructing and destructing) of one another that, at the same time, create (constructing and destructing) the cultural world as processes of becoming, in an affective-driven process. This is one of the fundamental landmarks of CPSD here exposed in this book. Nevertheless, all this dynamic view relies on the semiotic processes.

Concerning ambiguity, it is well-known in linguistics or, even, philosophy of language that ambiguity is an inherent trait of the human sign system. Only in artificial language (e.g., computational language) that ambiguity is inexistent, once the system is closed in commands where metaphors could not be processed in terms of binary computational information (Bruner, 1990; Gardner, 1987). According to the *Wittgenstein II* (*Philosophical Investigations*, 1986), it is impossible to eradicate sign ambiguity; hence it would imply to take the language out of its contextual, cultural, language-game uses. It is understandable in a metatheoretical base, psychology discipline tends to obliterate its constitutive trait of human semiotic process, once the passion for meaning-making is traditionally used to decrease the role of all non-A field of meanings that participates in the emergence of an A sign. We will discuss the constant ambiguity inherent to each sign created by each individual in interacting with the others and immersed in a system of signs that compose the sociocultural processes that means culture. According to Valsiner (2014), the language sign is inherently ambiguous in the cultural reality considering also the multiplicity of personal constructions that are possible in the relationship between the self and the other, past and future dualities. Signs are the medium and the constitutive matter of both selves and culture. The coordination of the ambivalent task of human beings and the ambiguity of sign system are thus two key parameters for understanding the emergence of novelty. In an anecdotal example of the relationship between ambiguity and ambivalence in the emergence of novelty in human experience, we might think that a teenager in a psychotherapy process who used to refer to her mother's meals as "a poison" is not a static meaning related to the development of anorexia or even, necessarily, a sign concerning the feeling of being intoxicated by the mother's provision. The emergence of "poison" as a sign must be understood implying all of its opposite fields of meanings as well as the dynamics of ambivalent-affective transformation concerning the other and corporeality. The communicative illusion that the meanings can be "shared" is one of the reasons of reductionism of the holistic experience in current psychology. This misunderstanding can imply "meaning colonization" from the researcher toward his/her data. In this sense, data will be only a mirror of the epistemic subject expectations.

Sublime and Aesthetic Experiences

For Valsiner (this book, Chap. 5), the sublime emerges during the aesthetic experience at the moment that a person lives an affective tension. Such tension – provoked by the simultaneous coexistence of two opposed value-laden categories – can result in a new creation regarding the object focused or can return to the mundane everyday life, understood as a sphere of normativity, repetition, and ordinariness. In other words, the possibility of creation, getting out from the mundane life, occurs at the moment that categorical opposition between two value situations is outdated through a movement that negates this opposition creating subsequently a new solution that

negates the antecedent opposition. This metatheoretical proposal is built throughout a historical–epistemological construction from European philosophy, with its major thinkers such as Burke and Kant, up to contemporary discussions of CPSD and the assumption of the irreversible time. The chapter is illustrated in a beautiful patchwork of analytic examples from arts, music, and ordinary human action in the effort of shedding light in the centrality of aesthetic experience as a main issue in understanding a possible catalytic overlap between the role of ambivalence and ambiguity in emergence of novelty in human experience. The author claims that sublime is a border dimension between the mundane and the beautiful where pragmatic interests and disinterested interest (beauty) are suspended in order to give space to the irruption of a disquieting experience in which may emerge new signs. Valsiner also highlights cultural regulations in aesthetics that orient meaning-making process under cultural–affective contingencies.

According to Pinheiro and Azevedo and Feitosa (this book, Chap. 7), aesthetic experience is the creative condition that results from a deep affective jump – a surplus of feeling/excess – that triggers and creates new semiotic constructions throughout human becoming. In this sense, aesthetics is neither the pleasure of contemplation nor belonging to the domain of arts. It is a transformation of mundane through a subjective dynamic that symbolically transforms/transfigures the objects of the world resulting in an experience that is affective oriented. It is the totality of this kind of human experience that makes new signs emerge in both personal and collective culture. According to this perspective, the mundane, the beauty, and the sublime are all instances of this deep affective and transformative process of aesthetic experiencing.

The major distinction between these two conceptualizations of the sublime above and the aesthetic experience seems to be two distinct views regarding the role of sublime in aesthetic experience. In the second view, it seems to emerge from an inner explosion of the subject which forces (drives) are fundamentally internal. For this reason, this interpretation of aesthetic experience seems to highlight the uniqueness of the affective-subjective conditions for the creative transfigurations of the cultural shared reality. This is to be expected, in some sense due to its affiliation in psychoanalysis. For the other, the one proposed by Valsiner (this book, Chap. 5), the dynamics emerge from the confrontation of opposed value-laden categories that have their construction based on the history of the subject immersed in a semiotic–sociocultural word. Nevertheless, it is just this point that we claim, as an extension of the dynamics that makes them opposed, that seems to be missing or to be better stressed and integrated to the theoretical construction of CPSD.

These two abovementioned interpretative anchors/axes for the recognition of the human experience in psychology nowadays are fully discussed throughout this book, in which young researchers establish a rich interlocution among Valsiner's perspective in human sign activities. As a kaleidoscope of research subjects and empirical data, these Brazilian authors try to amplify possibilities of modeling, in abstract terms, the title of this book series: *Cultural Psychology as a Basic Science*.

The book is organized in three triads of essays, always consisted in a first Valsiner's chapter followed by two other chapters aiming to exemplify, from

research themes and empirical datum, a critical and empowering reading of the first one. Each section starts with a chapter written by Jaan Valsiner focusing on (A, Chap. 2) the nature of psyche as a semiotic constructive process; (B, Chap. 5) the primacy of affect as semiotic constructive processes, highlighting the role of the sublime as a border between mundane and aesthetic experience; and (C, Chap. 8) the ambivalent core of the human mind marked by the constructive and destructive semiosis.

In Chap. 2, entitled *Constructive Semiosis Is the Core of Human Psyche*, Valsiner promotes a semiotic conceptual frame of the dynamic stability of the sign. From the inherent ambiguity of the sign, the author constructs a theoretical model on how the uncertainty of the future within irreversible time plays a major role in the open-endedness of the human psyche through the unity of pre-constructive imagination and reconstructive memory processes.

Chapter 3, *The Tension A <-> Non-A in the Meaning-Making of a Chemical Element in a Sociogenetic Level* (Tenório and Macedo, in this book), presents an analysis of the historical development of the basic concept in chemistry regarding the movement from concrete–experiential toward abstraction. Considering science as human production, based on meaning-making in the act of understanding of the world, this essay proposes that the semiotic dynamics that governs human psychological processes is present in the modes of production of scientific ideas. Throughout science history focusing on the scientific concept of chemical element, the chapter discusses how chemistry developed beyond the tension A <-> non-A and achieved abstract levels to understanding its object of study.

Chapter 4 is entitled *Between the Psychology of Creative Processes and the Dynamics of Innovation in Culture: Semiotic Challenges in the Modeling of Creativity*, authored by Liberalquino, Braga, and Pinheiro. This ending chapter of the book's first section proposes a dialogue between the concept of creativity and innovation highlighting the hidden cultural roots of these topics as well as their meaning convergence and differentiation. Considering the challenges of creativity modeling and its differentiation from the innovation culture, the essay brings a fragment of Liberalquino's research (2018), which seeks to understand the dynamism of the creative process in the development of artifacts in an innovation institution. From this empirical extract, the authors explore the dilemma in situating, and thus differentiating, the emergence of novelty in between the psychology of creative process and innovation culture discourse.

Opening the second section of the book, Valsiner presents, as mentioned before, the very original piece of writing concerning the sublime as the locus of negotiation of the future and the past in the human constructive semiosis. Entitled *Human Psyche Between the Mundane and the Aesthetic: The Sublime as the Arena for Semiosis* (Chap. 5), the author proposes that the constructive semiosis is a universal human psychological process which takes place on that border, allowing the mundane to lead to the beautiful and turning the beautiful into mundane.

Lordelo (Chap. 6) explores a theoretical perspective in aesthetics – Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, which takes into account people's, artists and audience, personal and affective relation to works of art. In this essay called *The*

Sublime in Relational Art: Meaning-Making Process on the Move, the author looks into contemporary Brazilian artist Wagner Schwartz and one particular piece, "La Bête," to propose that genuine participation during an artistic work constitutes the main condition of transit. Participation would be, then, the locus of the sublime.

Pinheiro, Azevedo, and Feitosa (Chap. 7), *The Sublime and the Empirical Datum in Psychology: An Exercise of Conceptual Approximation*, discuss the possibility of bringing together the theorization of the aesthetic experience, in its sublime sphere, and the universe of data interpretation in empirical research in psychology. The authors analyze an essay of a student resignifying her school life. In her writing, the student presents a character attending sixth-grade lessons on her first day at a new school. The analysis of the essay suggests that the affective excesses played out through the body in movement, highlighted in relation to the context of the classes, may constitute a discursive marker, in its inherent ambiguity, of the sublime's experience.

The third and last section of the book is dedicated to the semiosis of construction and destruction. According to Valsiner, in *Human Psyche as Inherently Ambivalent: Semiosis of Construction and Destruction* (Chap. 8), cultural artifacts are built not only through a positively constructive enhancing process but also by destructive process of psyche. The destructive dimension of semiosis, as interpreted by the lens of future-oriented human actions, is discussed by the analysis of the role of ruins (from history of wars up to contemporary fashion) as a complex human sign which entangles the realm of sublime and its connection with the human infinites inner–outer and past–future.

Valério and Ferreira, in *Preserved Traces of Destroyed Sign Hierarchy: From Genetic Parenting to Adoptive* (Chap. 9), discuss and illustrate the construction–destruction semiosis of hierarchical semiotic systems, through the rupture experienced by a couple in the attempt to get pregnant. The authors explore the tension and ambivalence in the coordination of the two infinites (past–future, inner–outer) that promoted the change in point of view and the subsequent decision: to consider adoption as a way of becoming parents. This chapter emphasizes preserved traces of signs destroyed (semiotic ruin) in the emergence of the transition toward the decision to adopt and the creation of a new sign.

Closing the third and last section of the book, Lyra and Aguiar (Chap. 10) develop a text in which sublime moments are approached in its dynamics of destruction and construction of signs and meanings. This assumption is discussed throughout the life trajectory of an adolescent homosexual girl, highlighting the importance of the duality construction–destruction in the process of grasping sublime experiences as openness to the emergence of novelty in the relationship between the self and the others. *Sublime Moments on the Light of Developmental Trajectory: An Exploration on the Unit Analysis*, title of the chapter, also presents the concept of Avenues of Directive Meaning (ADM) as an interesting metaphor in the role of collective culture in reconstructive life trajectory.

The concluding chapter aims to foster new challenges intending the construction of *Cultural Psychology as a Basic Science*. We have chosen to highlight two standpoints: (a) the methodological challenges posed by the abstractive process of mean-

ing construction and (b) the challenges faced by this abstractive process regarding memory and imagination.

Along the theoretical–empirical discussions presented among these chapters, we wish that the reader of this book will envision the powerful centrality of human experience in constructing abstract knowledge in psychology. This volume is an attempt to (1) underline the fundamental role of the emergence of novelty in human becoming, (2) the basic semiotic-processual nature of human psyche dynamics, (3) the ambiguity of sign activity and the fundamental role of affect in its process of cognition and abstraction, and also (4) the role of the sublime and aesthetic in everyday life. Hopefully, this book will be an insightful journey of key aspects of human condition that are indeed necessary in the reinvention of *Cultural Psychology as a Basic Science*.

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Part I
Human Psyche

Chapter 2
Constructive Semiosis Is the Core of the Human *Psyche*

Jaan Valsiner

Let us begin at the entrance (Fig. 2.1). This church entrance is remarkable because it is in the state of being "half-cleaned." Yet that status is ambiguous—what does CLEAN mean in this case? Two meaning systems are in opposition and top each other in this case:

> "BEING CLEAN" (THE ONTOLOGICAL STATE): the church façade over the centuries has gathered dirt that obscures its original shape, which is now being restored—"made clean".

> "BEING HISTORICAL" (THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE): the church façade has developed over the centuries and has incorporated the "dirt" as a constitutive part of its identity. Its removal means vandalism against that identity. The authentic historical "clean" involves NOT removing the "dirt," as the latter has become an integral part of the identity of the church.

The fight of these two perspectives has been often the target of controversies in the restoration of objects of art.

The ambiguity of the meaning of CLEAN is a good example of the principle of dynamic stability of signs. Signs do not exist as objects—they are constantly constructed to present some other objects; an object A *becomes a sign* that presents object B once the sign-maker, the semiotic agent, sets it up to present B to somebody *in some capacity*. What that "capacity" is constitutes one of the crucial objects of investigation of the Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Dynamics (CPSD). Sign construction is teleogenetic—constructing goal orientations in the process of making of a sign.

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Fig. 2.1 Cleaning of a church facade

The opposition clean <> non-clean (Fig. 2.2) would be a closed circle where the goal of CLEAN is reachable, but it cannot be maintained. Furthermore, it is reachable only under the conditions that the duality of the sign (the non-A part of the {A<>non-A} structure) is overlooked. For example, the chemicals we use in the act of cleaning may be themselves non-clean—dangerous to our bodies—and we keep our body involved in the act of cleaning from being contaminated by the chemicals that "clean" (Fig. 2.3).

Keeping us "safe" from the "cleaning" devices is an example of asymmetric mutuality in our relations with environments (Fig. 2.4). Most of our relations with the world are of such kind—symmetry is a rare case of temporary overcoming of asymmetries.

The CPSD operates under the axiomatic acceptance of the open-systemic nature of human psychological functioning. This involves (a) constant relating with environment (b) in irreversible time and (c) with the centrality of feed-FORWARD processes (Fig. 2.5).

Fig. 2.2 The eternal cycle
of CLEANING

non-"CLEAN"

"CLEAN"

emerging new
meaning

"DIRTY"

emerging new
meaning

non-"DIRTY"
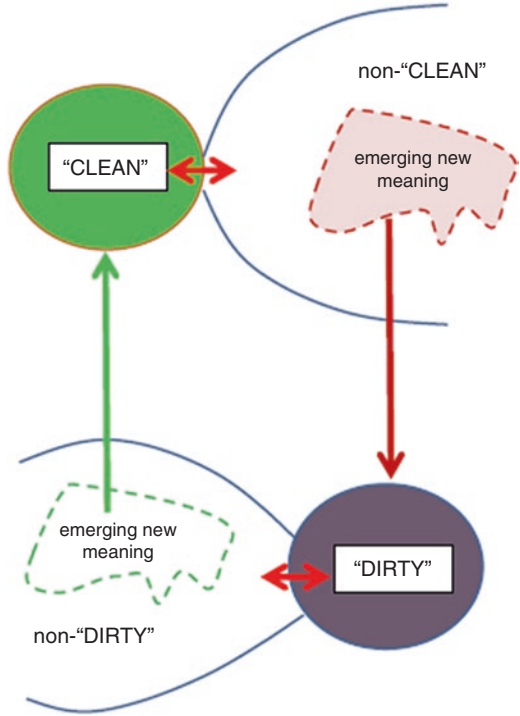
Fig. 2.3 A simple act of
cleaning—protecting skin
by gloves

A. Symmetry of mutuality

A feeds forward into B and B feeds forward into A
("I control you to control me"—Valsiner, 1999)

B. Asymmetry of mutuality

A feeds forward into B while blocking B's efforts to feed forward into A
("I control you, but your efforts to control me are blocked" i.e. the cleaning situation: "I
need to clean B without B endangering me")

Fig. 2.4 Two forms of mutualities

WILLFUL (goals-oriented)
ACT to alter current ENVIRONMENT

Person T1

ENVIRONMENT

FEED-FORWARD to the changing PERSON
From the structure of ALTERED ENVIRONMENT

Person T2
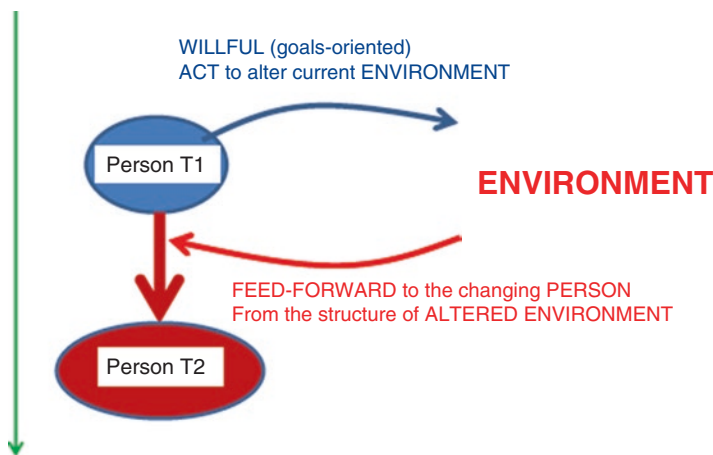
Fig. 2.5 The open-systemic nature of the human *psyche*

The open-systemic frame sets a very clear scenario up for human semiosis—it is necessarily always forward-oriented—even when it utilizes materials borrowed from the past (memory). The uses of memory are ***pre*-constructive**[1] for the future—

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[1] What is usually called "reconstructive memory" in the Bartlett-Wagoner perspective is actually pre-constructive within the CPSD framework. In classical psychology it is parallel to the act of *apperception.*
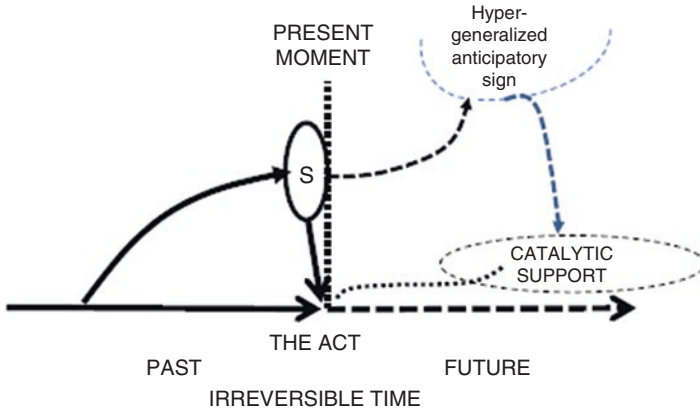
Fig. 2.6 Dual function of sign

memory feeds into the making of signs. Thus, each emerging sign (S) is dual in its function (Fig. 2.6).

Figure 2.6 schematizes the central notion of the CPSD—the **double function** of any sign that emerges—made by semiotic agent anew or borrowed from available repertoire, in the forward movement of semiosis in irreversible time. The sign first of all provides meaning to the act in the here-and-now setting (THE ACT in Fig. 2.6). Thus, the act of "I am rinsing my hands in the water, holding a piece of soap" becomes to be presented "I am CLEANING my hands" (without any evidence about the water being uncontaminated or the piece of soap not made of cancer-causing chemicals).

The second function of a sign is its forward-oriented hyper-generalized function as a field-like catalytic device—meant for meaning construction in some unknown future moment. That specific moment is unknown before the future has turned into a present. Yet all sign mediation in the present is oriented toward that future antici-pated moment. We make our lives meaningful for our living forward—into the unknown future. The social practice of cleaning our bodies as regulated by signs here and now is in the service of generalizing the value of "being clean" and extrap-olating it beyond the immediate bodily functions (Fig. 2.7).

Figure 2.7 demonstrates how the meaning construction process can transcend itself and lead to hyper-generalized sign fields that can operate in the future. A dedi-cation to keeping one's body cleaned can lead to viewing oneself as a clean, pure person or—on the other end—a dirty, disgusting one.

The hyper-generalization process is likely to lead to qualitative synthesis of meaning—through the process of double negation (Fig. 2.8). This form of think-ing—originating in dialectical philosophies of the turn of the eighteenth to nine-teenth centuries—involves a meta-negation superimposed on the regular (classical logical) negation (if A = A, then it is not true that A = non-A).

MULTIFINALITY OF THE MEANING-MAKING PROCESS

non-pure <> **PURE**

non-"CLEAN"

"CLEAN"

emerging new meaning

emerging new meaning

"DIRTY"

non-"DIRTY"

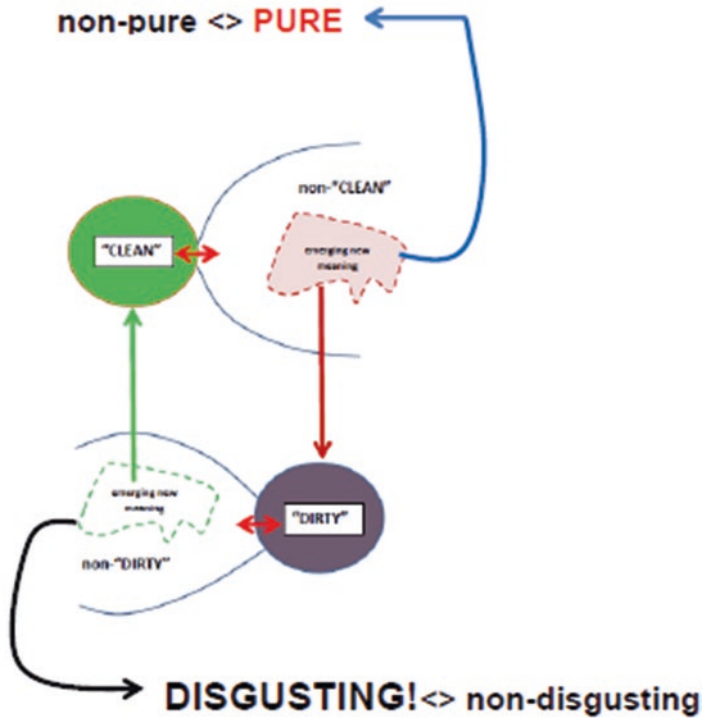**DISGUSTING!**<> non-disgusting

Fig. 2.7 Going beyond the "clean" as a given—here and now

THE KEY TO SOLUTION OF NOVEL WAYS OF USING DIALECTICS– inserting DOUBLE NEGATION INTO ANALYTIC SCHEMES

NEW FORM
SYNTHESIZED
FROM THE
SECOND
NEGATION

NEGATION

NEGATION 2
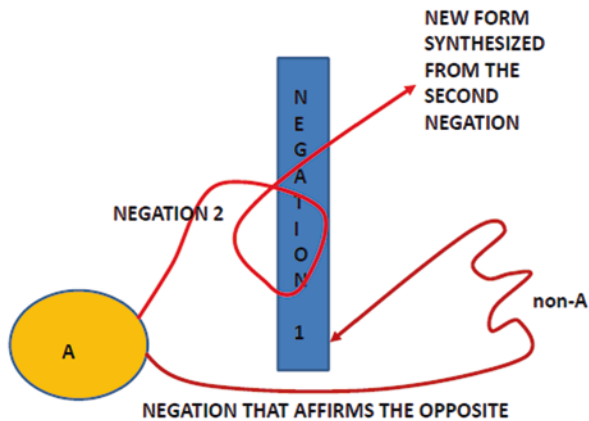
A

non-A

1

NEGATION THAT AFFIRMS THE OPPOSITE

Fig. 2.8 The structure of double negation

The second negation eliminates the first one, leading to a new, synthetic form. For example, start from the first negation:

A is the case, therefore not B. "This is a man; this is not a woman."
B is the case, therefore not A. "This is a woman; this is not a man."
   A PERSON is EITHER a man or a woman, but not both.

This is the result of the first (classical logical) negation. It is perfectly logical (in the classical sense), yet it misses the point of the function of making the distinction of A and B (men and women). It is the second negation that negates the first:

If A is the case and therefore B is not, both A and B exist, and A relates with B.
If B is the case and therefore A is not, both B and A exist, and B relates with A.

The existence of a man implies that a woman exists and vice versa
And a synthetic "jump":

Each of us is (simultaneously) a man and a woman, and in other terms

we are all androgynous (uniting male and female aspects) even if we belong to different classes of men and women.

The second negation is not reversal (denial) of the truthfulness of the first but an operation that provides unity of the previous mutually excluded opposites, with some possibility to "jump" to greater generalization. It is the second negation that opens the door for any generalization (beyond categorization—that is the end result of first negation).

Conclusion: Constructive Semiosis as Culture

Culture is a meta-level concept that unites all different disciplines and subdisciplines that investigate specifically human phenomena of persons, communities, societies, and the human species as a whole. In that meta-concept role, culture has no existence. It has also no agency—statements like "culture CAUSES X" or "X is due to CULTURE" are void of explanatory power. Human beings have agency and construct new artifacts—loosely also classified under the label "culture."

I treat "culture" as a classifying term that links my perspective of CPSD with other directions within cultural psychology. Yet CPSD differs from all others by (a) locating the semiosis within irreversible time (semiosis is forward-oriented; human beings live into the future); (b) semiosis is dynamic and hierarchical (signs regulate other signs, forming temporary hierarchies, and organize the ongoing experience), and (c) memory and imagination are similar presentational processes, one oriented toward the past, the other toward the future. Cultural psychology is a basic science about higher human psychological functions that are mediated by signs.

Chapter 3
The Tension A <-> non-A in the Meaning-Making of a Chemical Element in a Sociogenetic Level

João Roberto Ratis Tenório da Silva and Gabriel Fortes Macêdo

Introduction

In this chapter, we aim to reflect on how the dynamics of tension A <-> non-A, discussed by Valsiner, Chap. 2 in this volume, make us understand the process of meaning-making in science, taking as an example the concept of a chemical element. For Valsiner (1998, 2007), the construction of meanings occurs through the mediation of signs, which emerge from the action of the subject in the environment toward the future (taking into account the premise that time is irreversible). In this dynamic, the construction of a meaning A implies the existence of another non-A meaning, and there is a coexistence of both in the process of signification. The new meaning emerges from the tension between meanings A <-> non-A.

In Chap. 2 this volume, Valsiner presents the construction of the CLEAN meaning as an example, which implies the existence of the non-CLEAN opposition. The coexistence of these meanings regulates the action of the subject in the present (toward the future). That is, when one is cleaning a dirty sink, one understands that in order to remove the dirt, it is necessary to use certain cleaners that are supposed to be clean (meaning CLEAN). However, these same products can be dangerous due to their chemical composition (NON-CLEAN meaning), making it necessary to wear gloves to use them in the cleaning. The tension A <-> non-A, in this case represented by the meanings CLEAN <-> NON-CLEAN, regulates the action of the subject at present (cleaning the dirty sink). The construction of the meaning of CLEAN also implies the construction of the NON-CLEAN (dangerous, toxic, poisonous, etc.) meaning as demonstrated in Fig. 3.1 below.

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Fig. 3.1 Clean the sink
using products that are
clean (meaning A), with
hand protection due to the
toxic chemical composition
of the products (non-A
meaning). (Source:
Valsiner (Chap. 2 in this
volume))

Valsiner also points out that the tension A <-> non-A allows the generalization
and abstraction of meanings, from the moment there is an extrapolation of immediate experience, from hypergeneralized function of signs, destined to construct meanings at some point in an unknown future. The action of daily bathing to be clean
(CLEAN), for example, is directed to immediate futures, when we will be in environments where, in case we are dirty or sweaty (NON-CLEAN), we will not make a
good impression (e.g., to be in an important meeting without bathing and be visibly
dirty would not be acceptable). Thus, the CLEAN <-> NON-CLEAN tension, in this
case, regulates the action of bathing reaching a level of abstraction going beyond
concrete experience (there is no need to "test" not bathing to see if it would be a
good idea or not), regulating our actions toward the future.

In a previous work, Valsiner (2007) discusses the projections of purity and bestiality for an indigenous native, which coexist side by side. An "innocent native" (A)
can also be a "dangerous wild" (non-A). The tension A <-> non-A, at this time, can
regulate the action of a person who is interacting with an aboriginal native for the
first time. The image of the native's innocence in tension with the possibility of
being surprised by a sudden attack regulates the careful movements and attempts of
interaction between the person and the aboriginal. Similar situations are commonly
seen in adventure films, in which early contacts between adventurers and indigenous natives are depicted. Therefore, we understand that meaning A and non-A,
which coexist in tension, can be attributed to the sign through the action of the
interpreter (active subject in the environment), allowing the emergence of new
meanings toward the future.

Taking into account that the construction of meanings permeates all human
action, from arts to science, based on the examples and arguments presented so far,
we intend to discuss how meanings attributed to the concept of chemical element
were constructed in some moments of history by starting from tension A <-> non-
A. Furthermore, we intend to discuss how scientific theories are constructed in sci-

ence, moving beyond the epistemological discussions on the nature of the development of scientific knowledge (Kuhn, 1970; Popper, 1959).

Considering science as a product of human activity of constructing meanings (from the proposition of ideas, theories, and models) in the understanding of the world, we will notice that the semiotic dynamics that governs human psychological processes is present in the modes of production of scientific ideas, understanding them as endowed with relative semiotic stability with uses within a complex system in academic and everyday practices. Just as in human development, science can be understood as a constantly changing dialectic process in A <-> non-A tensions. Thus, in the next section, we will discuss how the dynamics of meaning-making from the emergence of the new in tension A <-> non-A can explain the construction of meanings in science.

Psychological Dynamics and Scientific Knowledge: Elements of Human Development

In this chapter, we establish a relationship between psychological dynamics within the prism of Cultural Psychology of Dynamic Semiosis (CPDS) and the development of scientific concepts, especially in natural sciences, bringing light to the dynamics of tension A <->non-A as part of a concrete human experience and as a foundation for the construction of knowledge. Therefore, we present a theoretical model that guides the discussion about human development within the framework of the cultural and semiotic dynamics that we have adopted. From this, we will present a few examples to discuss how the relative stability of scientific concepts in natural sciences can be understood precisely by the coexistence of meanings A <-> non-A in the process of elaboration of models that explain the concept of a chemical element.

The CPDS, as well as other scientific approaches, seeks to construct models to understand phenomena related to human psyche. Valsiner presents, Chap. 2 in this volume, a model that attempts, precisely, to abstract phenomena of the human mind from concrete actions by placing tension A <-> non-A to explain the dynamics of the construction of meanings in a culture. Valsiner (Chap. 2 in this volume) presents a model that tries, precisely, to abstract, from concrete actions, phenomena of the human mind, placing the CPDS as a basic science, on the same level of physics, chemistry, or biology, differing only from its object of study. It is in this sense that Valsiner argues that the CPDS needs abstraction or needs to reach the same level of abstraction that makes the generalization of its construction possible as found in these other sciences.

Scientific concepts, as we know it today, have gone through a long process of elaboration and development. This evolutionary process is characterized by influences of social and cultural aspects found in several historical contexts existing within a sociogenetic domain (Werscth, 1985).

Mortimer and El-Hani (2014) argue that there are several ways of thinking concepts, which can be accessed from different ways of speaking. These forms of speech express ways of thinking concepts that are externalized and shared through signs, expressing meanings constructed by the subject at work in the environment. These shared meanings present a certain level of stability allowing communication in a given community (e.g., scientific). While looking at the historical development of a scientific concept, we noticed several moments of relative stability, in which tensions were created and smoothed over time (similar to the model A <-> non-A proposed by Valsiner). Thus, we will present how such model explains the phenomenon of construction, abstraction, and generalization of meanings in science from the historical development of the concept of a chemical element.

Meaning-Making of Chemical Element and Tension A <-> non-A

One of the earliest records on the concept of element (still without the status of a chemical element) dates back to the Old Age, in the thinking of philosophers and prophets who sought to understand the origin of all things in nature. In this historical moment, we can identify a few examples on how tension A <-> non-A expressed the construction of meanings in the proposition of the first models to explain the composition of a matter.

Empedocles of Agrigento (490 BC–430 BC) proposed the theory of the four elements – water, earth, air, and fire – arguing that these would be the principles of nature (Partington, 1989). Kingsley (1994) argues that Empedocles proposes the four elements from the idea that these would be the roots of things, associating them to mythological gods. In this sense, fire was associated to Zeus, earth to the goddess Hera, air to Hades, and water to the goddess Persephone. The tension A <-> non-A, in this case, is represented by the constructed meaning about the abstraction of the elements (ABSTRACT <-> NOT ABSTRACT). The idea presented by Empedocles that the elements were principles (ABSTRACT) related to gods also implies in the conception that such principles exist in the concrete world (NON-ABSTRACT), making them possible to be observed and manipulated in nature as shown in Fig. 3.2 below.

Thus the divine nature of the elements justified the existence of such principles in the composition of a matter. Moreover, as these elements were found in nature in a concrete way, making it possible to experience them empirically, this became a valid argument that everything in nature has been formed by them. The tension ABSTRACT <-> non-ABSTRACT allowed the conception of the idea that, in fact, the four elements (water, earth, air, and fire) were in the constitution of nature.

The tension A <-> non-A can also be seen in the ideas of Zoroaster (600–583 BC), the Persian prophet, in the concept of element. He also proposed the notion that nature was formed by the combination of water, earth, air, and fire, hence having, probably, inspired the ideas of Empedocles (Habashi, 2000). According to Zoroaster, the elements were also sacred because of their influence over human life. According to Habashi (2000), this influence was not only shown in the form of benefits (air
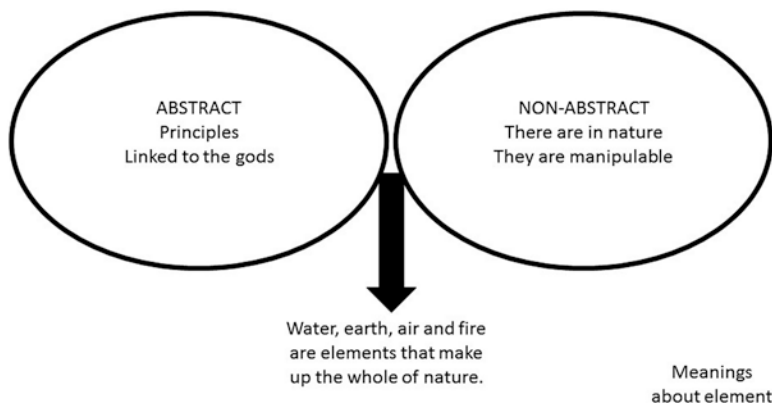
Fig. 3.2 Tension A <-> non-A in Empedocles' theory of the four elements

allowed the living beings to have energy, water was a source of life, fire allowed the cooking of food, and earth was necessary for plants to grow) but also in the form of divine manifestations such as rain in abundance (related to the element of water) or earthquakes – common in the region of Persia at that time (related to the earth element). These manifestations represented divine blessings or punishments (Habashi, 2000). Thus, the tension A <-> non-A can be understood by the meanings constructed by the SACRED <-> NON-SACRED duality or TERRENE<-> NON-TERRENE duality for the element concept. In both cases, the meanings for the element emerge from the understanding that water, earth, air, and fire are concrete entities and exist in nature (TERRENE), where human beings can benefit (SACRED) from them and, at the same time, they are ways in which the gods can manifest some punishment or curse (NON-SACRED) characterizing themselves as entities that go beyond earthly nature (NON-TERRENE). These constructed meanings regulated the actions of people at the time, especially in their relations with nature, when dealing with water, earth, air, and fire with devotion. Fire, for example, was a sacred element for the followers of Zoroastrianism (Habashi, 2000) as depicted in Fig. 3.3 below.

Still in the Old Age, Aristotle (384–322), in his work *Metaphysics*, proposes that the material world was formed by the four elements, air, water, earth, and fire, with the addition of the fifth element (or quintessence), called ether, a substance that would be found in the composition of bodies in the celestial world. Aristotle (1995) established that each element was formed by qualities: fire (dry and hot), air (wet and hot), water (wet and cold), and earth (dry and cold). Again, in Aristotle's ideas, the construction of meanings on the concept of an element in its proposed model revolves around the ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension. This tension is observed when the Greek philosopher defines what elements are. For him, the elements (water, earth, air, and fire) were principles, being the essence (from the Greek word *Ousia*) of all things. Thus, for Aristotle (1995) element/substance means simple bodies, such as earth, fire, water, and the like, and, in general, bodies and their components and animal and divine things. For him, that which is present

Fig. 3.3 Priest of Zoroastrianism in worship of fire (sacred element of nature). (Source: Alamy (https://www.alamy.pt/fotos-imagens/zoroastrianism.html, preview))

in such things is the cause of their being (essence), as, for example, in the animal, in which the soul is the cause of its being (essence).

In his definition, we note that the Greek philosopher considers that the elements (in their words, called substances – essence) are simple/indivisible bodies (water, earth, air, and fire) and therefore possessing a concrete nature. However, such meaning also implies the conception that the elements, besides forming nature, are there in the composition of divine things (ABSTRACT). The ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension is also characterized when Aristotle claims that the soul (ABSTRACT), for example, is the cause of the being of animals (the soul, in this case, would be the element/essence/substance of animals). In this case, understanding that the elements are simple bodies and that they are present in the composition of nature also implies in NON-A meaning, in which there is an understanding that the divine things, including the soul, are also elements. The Aristotelian model explains that the composition of nature emerges from the existence of the ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension in the psychological process of the construction of meaning.

Throughout history, the idea that nature was composed of four elements was refuted by several studies, especially from the sixteenth/seventeenth century, with the alchemist Van Helmont (1580–1644) and the proposition of the concept of chemical element by Robert Boyle (1628–1681). The modern conception of the concept arose at the end of the eighteenth century, with the operational notion of material simplicity introduced by Lavoisier (1743–1794) in his classic work *Traité Elementaire de Chimie*. In this book, the French chemist claims that a material is considered elementary, that is, a chemical element, when it cannot be decomposed by chemical means. In the construction of these meanings, the ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension continued to regulate how these models were proposed in the scientific context. Both ideas, by Boyle and Lavoisier, were proposals based on empiricism, from the experimentation and observation of the behavior of matter. Therefore, we can consider that the foundation of these models was the concrete experience of the subject in the environment, through scientific methods. However, in the psychological process of constructing meanings, along with the idea of concreteness of the elements (EMPIRICAL), the meaning of those that were still abstract (NON-EMPIRICAL) regulated how ideas about the composition of matter were proposed in science.

From the contributions by Robert Boyle and Lavoisier, we emphasized the notion of decomposition that asserts a stability related to the concept of a chemical element. If a particular material could be decomposed, we would reach the element until the moment we reached a stage where decomposition by chemical means would be impossible. That was an idea based on empiricism, on the idea that elements are material that is tangible and manipulative (EMPIRICAL). However, by taking Lavoisier's work (1789) as an example, we noticed that he considers water not to be a simple substance (through the empirical basis of his proposed experiment) and at the same time considers that elements like hydrogen and oxygen are present in the water, even though their properties cannot be observed separately (NON-EMPIRICAL). In other words, we understand that hydrogen and oxygen (chemical elements) are in the composition of water (empirically observable – EMPIRICAL), even being aware it is not possible to observe them when they are combined (forming water). We can consider that in the process of constructing meanings, in the model proposed by Lavoisier, the EMPIRICAL <-> non-EMPIRICAL tension emerges as an unfolding of the ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension as follows in Fig. 3.4.

Similar tensions in the meaning-making process of a chemical element conceptualization are seen in scientific context, as one observes in posterior models' proposition. The idea of a chemical element being an entity that no longer can be decomposed gave place to an abstraction, even though it is based on something empirical (observable).

Studies on atomism were advancing in the nineteenth century with John Dalton's (1766–1844) and J. J. Thomson's (1856–1940) models. These studies demonstrated that there were even more elementary chemical entities, the atoms, making decomposition (through chemical means) an insufficient criteria for chemical element definition. At this moment, we notice how this tension enables, through meaning-
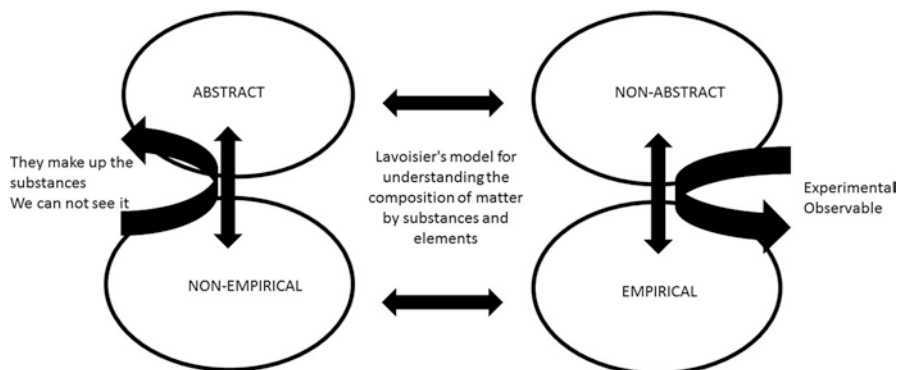
Fig. 3.4 Tension A <-> non-A in the proposition of a model that explains the composition of the matter by Lavoisier

making processes, the proposition of generalization of models, achieving certain level of abstraction in scientific field to explain many different phenomena. This generalization is characterized by making certain nature behaviors prevision possible when that explicative model is applied. One example of this is the development of the periodic table, which had as collaborator the Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev (1834–1907).

Mendeleev proposed to make the association between chemical element and atom, separating therefore the idea of elements as simple bodies. To him, in order to be considered an element, it also needed to be present in the composition of elementary substances, that is, the atom itself. At this point, a chemical element is no longer a palpable, manipulable thing, but an abstraction (we can't see or touch atoms). The generalization level of his model emerges when such a conception foresees the existence of chemical elements yet to be discovered. In such case, the law precedes the fact making it possible to abstract and generalize a model that explains the concept of chemical element (Bachelard, 1975).

In more recent chemical element models, the tension A <->NON-A is seen, above all, in the emergence of new meaning attached to this concept in different situations. The idea that elements are abstract entities seems to be a consensus in scientific literature (Silva & Silva, 2017). As we already highlighted, the assertion that chemical elements are abstracts (A-meaning) implies the existence of a non-A meaning (concrete). Currently, this tension can be seen when chemical element properties are studied. Even when one considers that chemical elements are abstract and don't exist in the real world, its concreteness is considered when its properties, such as electronegativity, electropositivity, atomic ray, density, etc., are studied (Atkins & de Paula, 2006). After all, a property can only be measured by manipulating materials in the concrete world. Therefore, there's a consideration that chemical elements can be represented by simple substances (elementary substances). This tension takes us back to the meaning constructed at the Fig. 3.4 cycle, now presented at Fig. 3.5:
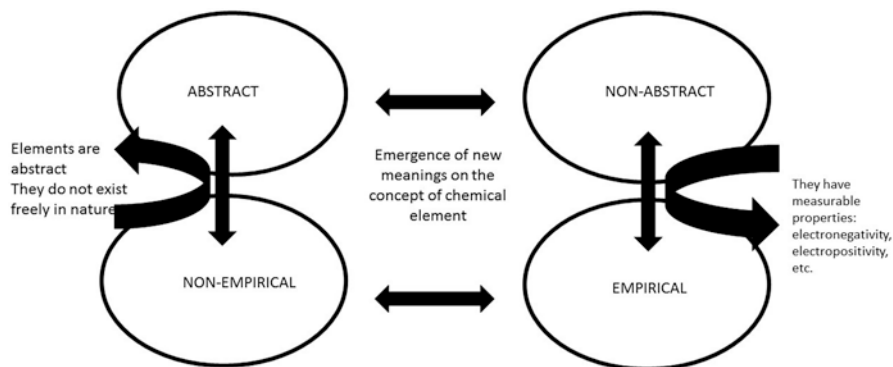
Fig. 3.5 Construction of meanings for the concept of element from tensions

Fig. 3.6 Protection against radioactive substances in the preparation of cancer treatment – chemotherapy. (Source: Dreamstime (https://pt.dreamstime.com/foto-de-stock-preparando-quimioterapia-image73244411))

New meanings emerge from the tensions represented in Fig. 3.6 as it is proposed in Valsiner's A <-> non-A model. This regulates present meaning-making oriented for future preparation. In this case, the constructed meanings revolve around how we deal with chemical elements in our daily lives.

One example of such a thing is the careful manipulating of substances formed by radioactive elements. Generally, there's a concern to use several materials for protection against radiation when a professional manipulates such a substance (Fig. 3.6). We learn, since primary school, that radioactive substances are dangerous, and, therefore, we must be careful manipulating them.

Such attentive manipulation of radioactive substances is due to malicious effects that certain elements composing these substances may cause, being these effects the manifestation of it (abstract entities) in our concrete world. So, the tension ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT regulates how we deal with chemical materials in most different ways in our lives preparing us for the immediate future (we can see that it in Valsiner's example – Chap. 2 in this volume and earlier in this chapter – of the protective gloves while cleaning a dirty sink). There's also the BENEFIT <-> NON-BENEFIT tension, specifically in radioactive substances. Radioactive substances are used in medical treatment, as against cancer, for example (BENEFIT). However, the same radioactive substance must be administered with caution for because of the harm it might cause (NON-BENEFIT). The same applies to other drugs/substances used in any medical treatment, as medicine, for example.

Semiotic Experiences Are Concrete and Abstract

An additional point to be made is how this semiotic organization follows an internal hierarchy in the triadic relationship of subject-sign-experience. When Valsiner (2013) reflects on how social representations are formed following a semiotic dynamics path, we might think it is also applicable to the process of concept formation (not only social and personal identities). While reflecting on this process, Valsiner proposes that sign mediation might have an internal hierarchy dynamics that enables signs to become (and fade from it) dominant depending on what other signs are involved in each situation (depending on each situation, signs might become subordinate to others in the regulation of tension A <-> NON-A).

This hierarchy principle allows us to understand how this semiotic tension orients human experience to a decrease of uncertainty in reality. In the radioactive substance case, it is the uncertainty level (over risks, benefits, technical knowledge, and common sense) that mediates the momentary tension resolution. Even if it is superficial, this shows us how semiotic systems tend to a hierarchical and autoregulated resolution of the A <-> NON-A momentary resolution. This reasoning helps us to understand in which way dominant signs in certain situation (chemical elements = clean/safe) might transit to a subordinate or negative form (chemical elements = dirty/dangerous).

What draws our attention to this process is that this dynamics goes further than the technical or instrumental knowledge of elements. We highlight that beyond the instrumental uses of the signs (as mental tools), what we see is that the semiotic dynamics orients our experience of reality to a "less" uncertain future – sings are, in this way, part of how decisions are made. This relative gain on "certainty" is not

only part of an instrumental means of sign mediation; it is also part of how we experience reality.

Following our discussion, we then consider that the concept of a chemical element is both abstract and non-abstract (see the concept of double negation in Valsiner – Chap. 2 in this volume). The ABSTRACT <-> NON-ABSTRACT tension accompanies the historical development of the chemical element concept unfolding itself in other tensions such as the ones presented in Fig. 3.5 (EMPIRICAL <-> NON-EMPIRICAL). From these tensions, new meanings have been constructed for this concept throughout history based on its sociogenesis and being the foundation in scientific explanation models. In this sense this concept development became part of real-life experience and fundamental to the modeling of abstract thoughts.

Final Considerations

The semiotic dynamics involved in psychological development processes may offer us an alternative for how to think about how knowledge is constructed in science. If the A <-> NON-A tension is an integral part of human experience in reality, foremost, if it is central to human psych's development, its meaning has to build scientific models that exclude or reject any of the tension "poles" as they are central to meaning-making processes in general. This chapter, as discussed, had the objective to discuss how A <->NON-A tension is part of the knowledge construction dynamics of science in a sociogenetic level throughout a single concept development.

We believe that this tension goes beyond the dialogic formation of concepts (Mortimer & El-Hani, 2014). While this proposal stretches the knowledge about how scientific concepts are held in a spectrum of uses (from common sense to technical knowledge), our reflection goes into the idea that scientific knowledge construction can't be reduced to its context-dependent instrumental means (dialogic or not). As opposed to that, we state that the semiotic dynamics (following the A <->NON-A tension) that builds the architecture of human experience also allows us to a semiotic experience of scientific knowledge construction. Along with this line of thought, we understand knowledge construction not as an instrument to deal with reality, but as a particular mode of experiment reality from momentary (relative stability) semiotic tension resolution (even when it is local, it obeys certain rules of sign dynamics).

If in psychological experiences of being in front of semiotic and semiotisized reality means to be always whole, in science what one sees is that it requires effort to create models that conjoint elements of tension A <->NON-A as part of conceptual knowledge construction that serves as foundation to theoretical models because in psychological dynamics, knowledge construction is marked by historical and ideological movements that were transformed throughout time in relatively stable signs shared by a determined community.

To what it concerns, specifically, in the concept of a chemical element, we observe how A <->NON-A tension is the foundation to the emergence of different

meanings be it from propositions of concepts and models and be it in ancient philosophy to modern chemistry. Epistemologically, we tried to show how the historical development of this concept is related to the meaning-making processes on which scientists ground their experiences of surrounding phenomena, shaping it through A <->NON-A tension. Such view shows us that a scientific concept always carries an A <->NON-A tension, featured in new synthesis constructed from these tensions. We can't summarize the chemical element concept as the ABSTRACT<-> NON-ABSTRACT tension, as pointed before. As for our findings, this was the most evident tension (also related to the EMPIRICAL<-> NON-EMPIRICAL tension). But, other types of A <->NON-A tensions might arise in people's (scientists or not) meaning-making processes, which will regulate to modeling propositions to explain nature's phenomena. One example of that is the BENEFIT<-> NON-BENEFIT tension in signifying the consequences (and actions to be taken) of manipulating radioactive substances.

In conclusion, we consider that this discussion might also be useful in education. In learning settings, students construct meaning A around a specific scientific concept in tension with a NON-A. This process is oriented to the future, over a horizon of possible learning projected from imaginative processes (Zittoun & Cherchia, 2013). Therefore, we encourage more epistemological discussion in the light of the CPDS and empirical research on how meaning-making is constructed in classrooms around A <->NON-A tensions.

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Chapter 4
Between the Psychology of Creative Processes and the Dynamics of Innovation in Culture: Semiotic Challenges in the Modeling of Creativity

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Creativity in Cultural Psychology

Understanding creativity as an object of psychological study is a rather complex task. First of all, as Valsiner (2017) warns us, creativity is not a scientific concept per se but a term coined in culture, widely loaded with common sense meanings, which aims to define a certain phenomenon – which, in our perspective, is the emergence of the novelty. In general terms, the creative act could be understood as a goal-oriented act that establishes a partial rupture with what is traditionally offered in response to a given situation.

Based on cultural psychology, Glăveanu's studies (2008, 2009, 2010, 2015) aim to develop an interpretation of creativity anchored in its sociocultural genesis, highlighting three key concepts: *We-Paradigm*, *5As*, and *Distributed Creative Action*. The *We-Paradigm* emerged from the late 1970s, when studies began to search for a social nature of creativity, conceiving the environment as a context of strengthen and/or limiting creative abilities. It arose in response to the *He-Paradigm*, in which we find *creativity associated with* the figure of the genius and revolutionary, quite distinct from ordinary subjects, and the *I-Paradigm*, in which creativity is thought as a *potential that exists* in every individual and can be developed in different ways through socialization.

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The *5As*, *Actor*, *Audience*, *Action*, *Artifact*, and *Affordance*, coexist contextually and dynamically, expanding the possibilities of action and perspectivation. They can be identified in a variety of situations, as we are constantly subjected to circumstances that require us to respond to perspectives of our audiences, in which we make use of the resources available in the context for the construction of something, leading us to the third concept: the concept of *Distributed Creative Action*. In this perspective, creativity concerns to the generation of new artifacts in a specific cultural contingency. Space and time relationship and intersubjective construction over the alterity of the world are fundamental in understanding the creative-imaginative actions involving the actor, artifact, and audience that drive the generation of a new object, understandings, or its uses for significant purpose.

Cultural Psychology uses the concept of perspective as fundamental baseline to understand the process of constructing and transforming actions. The perspective is understood as a social and evaluative position, which is subject to multiple interactional possibilities between person, object, and context, allowing innumerable alternatives of action and, among them, the creative action. This process involves social actors in interactions and present or virtual-semiotic materialities, which enable them to recover memories and project results in a unique and unrepeatable way. For this reason, perspectivation is understood as the ability to move between evaluative positions in a process of meaning reorganization/recreation opening a space to the emergence of the novelty. Creativity is, in this aspect, dynamic, built/reconstructed circumstantially, subject to the moment and to the otherness in terms of actions that allow temporal displacements through recoveries (past), prospections (future), and panoramic repositioning, using available resources seeking for an equilibrium in the produced meanings for the sake of an achievement.

Creativity is therefore inseparable from the cultural and semiotic context because it is through interactions with the multiple alterities that we transform ourselves, just as we re-signify our particular meanings. This transformation, in our significations, occurs through the perspectivation, articulated mainly through communication: in thinking, speaking, acting, feeling, wishing, etc. in its spatial-temporal uniqueness.

This transformation of the human psyche is based on symbolic activity. According to the concepts of Vygotsky (1996), language works as an organizing system capable of producing new forms of behavior, in which the sign emerges as a psychological instrument, producing and stabilizing a network of semantic-psychological meanings through socio-historical-cultural relations.

Creativity and Innovation: Semiotic Challenges

The shifting of creativity from its historical focus on the individual *to a more dialogical approach* puts it in tension with the process of innovation. Despite the investigation of the resonances of the new in culture, innovation studies are *also* dedicated to the understanding of its emersion. The impasse of differentiation between the

signs and grammars of creativity, in the psychological culture, and of innovation, in the culture of contemporary organizations, seems particularly relevant to be analyzed in so far as innovation becomes a frequent object of study with an increase in published materials in the period from 2009 to 2011 (Bruno-Faria & Fonseca, 2014). This expansion of the theme especially involved the organizational question of the *culture of innovation* in institutions such as the company and the school.

Innovation has been seen as a competitive organizational element, enhancing the performance of an organizational entity, leading to better economic results (Dobni, 2008). Organizations and leaders are trying to create an institutional framework in which creativity and innovation are accepted as basic cultural norms. It has become clear that the "unwritten rules of the game" (norms of behavior) and shared values influence the moral, performance, and the application of creativity and innovation in different ways (Martins & Martins, 2002).

It is pertinent to note that the terms creativity and innovation are used in similar forms in contemporary culture. Such similarity occurs once both notions share a social character in its inner nature (Glăveanu, 2009). In this sense psychology and innovation culture share a similar object of investigation, asking for answer about how a practice or new product can emerge from a particular social arrangement, in the case of innovation: from an organizational entity. The notion of innovation, therefore, becomes attentive to the emergence of the newness from social arrangements and the interaction of a subject with a cultural structure, which must be able to accept this breakthrough of novelty and must be ready to foster it and to generate a good space of exchange between subject and society. According to Pinheiro and Meira (2016):

> Inspired by the conceptions of Schumpeter (1988) and Kelley (2005), we understand innovation as a novelty capable of triggering in society the emergence of new ways of acting and communicating, based on the use of artifacts, processes and services specially designed and distributed through of high performance channels. A novelty is innovation only when it responds to demands, dialogues with expectations and effectively resolves problems experienced by any social group. (p. 223)

But then, how to differentiate the concepts of innovation and creativity? This is a challenge that, based on semiotic cultural psychology (Valsiner, 2014), we aim to address as a sustainable way to analyze the phenomenon of the constitution of creativity and innovation as symbolic productions that try to account for the emergence of the novelty in the world of life and science.

Fragments for Discussion About Creative Processes in an Innovation Institution

In order to give shape to the challenges of creativity modeling and its differentiation from the innovation culture, we bring a fragment of Melo's research (2018), which seeks to understand the dynamism of the creative process in the development of artifacts in an innovation institution. In the analyzed data, professionals from

different areas of knowledge and work at the institution were brought into dialogue to bring to the discussion the points of view of those who work in the operation, customer service, *and* systems planning *in* search of a synthesis that meets the needs of *stakeholders*. Subsequently, the narrative of one of the subjects*, who was* characteristically questioning and, thus, important *in the* guiding of knowledge in the elaboration process of the presented result, was explored. We selected two passages of his narrative, produced by an interview, in order to problematize, from the participant's speech, the possible tensions and approximations of the grammar of innovation and creativity in the field of subjective experience.

> E: Now I wanted you to complete the sentence with what comes to mind: working on *the name of the institution* is like:

> S: (...) (Laughter) It's like? It's a comparison, right? Right. It's like a metaphor. You want a metaphor. (...) It's like ... It's like working in a car machine shop, there's always something for (...) there's a problem to solve, I do not know (laughs).

In this interaction, it is interesting to observe that the interviewee – an engineer – uses a metaphor of the popular imagination of engineering, a mechanical work field (a car machine shop), in this case, a place of fixing and repairing and a place where it is known how things work and how they are produced. This statement, provoked in the interaction with the researcher, seems to emerge in speech as an important signification for his activity that on the one hand could allude to the set of meanings at play in the grammar of repair, restoration, maintenance of the order of things, and, in the other hand, a solving problem field, which could indicate the recognition of the emergence of the new in the process involved in the construction of the solution. If the present answer does not allow us to infer an opposition in terms of the significations that the participant constructs for his activity, later in the interview, we find the following formulation:

> Q: And what do you mean by technological innovation?

> S: Technological innovation is technology innovation, it's not what we do in [name of the institution that he works]. Or it is very little what we do there. Technological innovation is what the university does, is what some leading research laboratory does, which is to advance in the state of the art, to advance in the state of technology, what we do is not this. For example, you develop a new material, a new way of (..), like, I am studying about batteries for electric cars, right? So there are labs in the world that are developing new materials to use on cathode and battery anode, on battery terminals, that this improves battery life, improves shelf life, such as graphene and other revolutionary materials there, so this is technological innovation for me, this is the university's role, laboratories… what we do here is open innovation, we use these technological innovations as a tool to solve real problems.

In this passage, the interviewee uses a differentiation between technological innovation and open or applied innovation, seeking to situate his activity in the universe of fluidity between institution and the market, as opposed to the closed, pure, technical innovation, inside the laboratories, in a disruptive relationship to external demand. It seems that here comes a differentiated meaning that obeys the objectivity of the action taken to meet the demands, where innovation gains degrees of classification and open innovation uses closed or technological innovation for practical

applications. Further on, commenting on the process of ideation of the solution in which he was participant, *he* states:

> S: [...] And this project has nothing challenging, it's just work, that's the way it is, it's not a different thing from what we do here, so that was the vision I wanted to show them, it's an engineering project and we have a process to follow.

In this context, the opposition previously addressed in an abstract, static way, now acquires acuity in the universe of the interviewee's understanding of his doing, characterizing it as non-challenging, procedural, of the engineers' office, despite requiring information from other sectors of the company. In this sense we can infer *that*, through the statements in the speech of the participant, two oppositions emerge: the first of a more static and limited nature, open and closed innovation, having as definer element the market demand (virtualized/perspectivized by the interviewee), and a second one, between the procedural, work, routine, and challenge-oriented innovation grammar, which subverts familiar repertoires for the construction of solution.

In making the differentiation between technological and applied innovation, the engineer's discourse brings to light meanings produced according to the recognition of the actions: being technological if the amplitude of this new one is more generalized in terms of applicabilities and hovering in a level of signification pure and high. On the other hand, the applied innovation is directed to the fulfillment of demands, approaching techniques of problem-solving, being remarkable/expressive the term *process* to designate the adoption of a method to be followed for the achievement of objectives.

It is interesting to note that innovation, in a broader sense, seems to play a place at the same time as precious, value, and axiological; on the other hand, it is not recognized in the ordinariness of the processes – the understanding of the requirements of the task, etc. In this context, the domain of engineering emerges as a point of negotiation of meanings, while reaffirming its difference, about the activity with the other actors involved in the project (non-me) who participate in the daily life of an open innovation company. Based on the reflective turn promoted by the interview situation about the daily life of his activity, the interviewee perspectives his work through the signs of his personal culture, producing new meanings. The emergence of the novelty would, thus, be conducted by a shift from his position in the routine of his professional doing to one in which he becomes an audience of himself. In this sense, engineering becomes not only an identity but also a triggering affordance of constructive actions of significant dualities in the agent's experience such as open and closed innovation, work and challenge, and solution and innovation.

In this perspective, according to Valsiner (in the present book), culture is a meta-concept accessible only through agentive semiosis that occurs in the relation between subject and culture. In this sense, in the participant's experience, it is as if the grammars of identities and domains of knowledge were more resistant and less open to dialectical syntheses as proposed in the Valsiner model (in this book). A problem could not be engineering and non-engineering simultaneously. However, in innovation, these differentiation edges become open, caring on some porousity, due

to the market place, the appropriation of the requirements, the necessary fluidity of the dialogues to understand the problem and build the solution.

In the interviewee's speech, creativity is a term that does not appear on its expressive vocabulary but in terms of its dynamics seems to be oriented between the tensions between its technical domain and everything that stands as distinct from the grammar of engineering with its procedures, as we can see in the following section:

> [...] Regarding the issue of creativity, really this story I do not know if this exists in Germany (..) they always try to understand how the business has been done in the past, what went right, what went wrong, is a different way to think, right? Nobody thinks much (..) is (..) does not have other visions, so, you know? You do not try to bring to the discussion different profiles, they are always engineers, engineers, engineers, engineers, have already done that, already done it, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, so it is very traditional [...]

We perceive that, in this understanding, creativity departs, in the participant's language game, from the usual engineering environment, in which the solutions arise in response to analytical and technical reapplications. This may be due to the cultural charge of recognition of creativity only in great deeds and great works. So, his perception concerning his own work is lost, in terms of creative activity, once it faces the task procedural executions in the search for solutions or in attending demands according to technical process prescribed by engineering scientific discipline. However, there is a certain recognition of the relevance of the participants in the act of engaging in this process when it refers to the insertion of different profiles for the discussion. The temporality, in turn, acts here as a guide in the rescue of experiences configured in the game of right and wrong. Even though that novelty emerges in technological and practical innovation as well as in creativity psychological research, it seems that the participant takes its meaning according to the contextualization involved in its production, changing its social recognition in organizational practices.

Innovation is therefore a divergent notion of creativity, but not antagonistic. It seems to be connected to an organizational culture that gives it meaning in terms of reaching expected results, while creativity would be positioned in the modes of dialogues, coordination, integration, and perspectivation of the alterities that participate in a certain field of action.

Final Considerations

The novelty's emergence which creativity seeks to account falls into an area not necessarily structured but circumstantial and dynamic, produced by a significant interaction between subject and culture. Creativity is present in art, science, and everyday life through metaphor's construction established in dialogues of quotidian context, in the conception of products, in the solution of problems, and represents the mark of a singular production, temporally situated, co-constructed and using semiotic resources and imaginative projection for to consolidate. However, the

novelty of innovation culture aims to achieve a zone of revolutionary significance, organized enough to remain in culture and continuously modify the practices of a given subject in relation to its ethos. Therefor, the novelty of innovation culture is a new metaphor that proposes itself to be crystallized over time, to become the new consolidated form of use/relationship.

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Part II
Sublime as Border

Chapter 5
Human *Psyche* Between the Mundane and the Aesthetic: The Sublime as the Arena for Semiosis

Jaan Valsiner

We feel *into* the world. A slight paraphrase of an all too often repeated cliché—*we feel, therefore we think*—may be the deeply ambivalent general push for us to prove to ourselves that we are rational, thinking beings, *sapiens* at its best. I claim that this feature of our thinking is due to the absolute constraint upon our being—that of constant becoming, between the rapidly passing present (into the past) and the equally rapidly looming future—to move through the present to become past. This aspect of our living makes it impossible to operate with the primacy of the rational (cognitive) side of our psychological functioning. This affective primacy is encoded into the affective nature of the simplest building blocks of our psyche—sensations. The most elementary sensations that specify "something is out there" are flavored with feeling—they have *Gefühlston*.

The *Gefühlston* as the Basis for All *Einfühlung*

Figure 5.1 specifies the functioning of the *Gefühlston* – "the tone-of-feeling." It is on the one hand a constructive reaction to the sensation trigger that leads to immediate subjective reply and constitutes the material for generalization (and, eventually, hyper-generalization) processes. The sense-feeling occurs necessarily in irreversible time and may cover time periods of varied extensions—always extending from present time 1 (as the sensation is triggered) to present time 2 (when it becomes extinguished). The *Gefühlston* of the given sensation is the immediate affective tone the sensation acquires. The reply of the human subjectivity to physiological sensations triggered is affective—the sensation becomes filled with sense.

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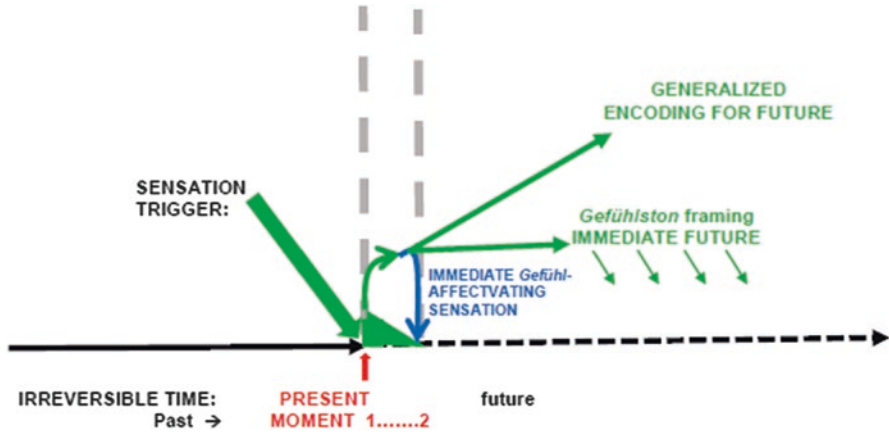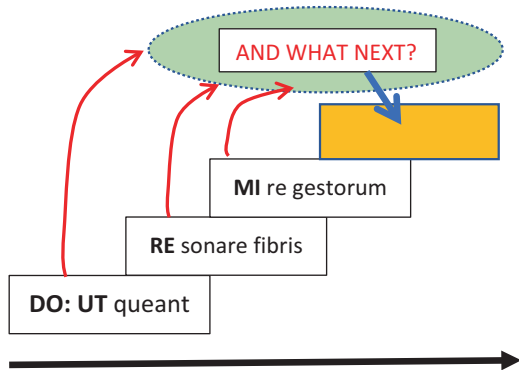
Fig. 5.1 The *Gefühlston* in the context of experiencing

Fig. 5.2 "When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything"—a local sign constructed and acting forward (specifying "what must come next")

The sensefulness of the here-and-now proceeding sensation can be simultaneously functional in three ways. First, it can participate in the extinguishing of the sensation. Second, it can escalate the feeling from the duration in which it emerged (time 1–time 2) and set up expectation for similar experiences to emerge. Recognition of a melody that is prepared by the opening notes of the music—the basic proof of the Gestalt organization of the human *psyche*—can be explained through the formation of a *local sign* that can anticipate the next notes of the melody to come (Fig. 5.2). The introduction of syllabic translations of musical notation in the eleventh-century solmization by Guido d'Arezzo was a memory technique operating at the intersection of the pleromatic reality of music (Gregorian chant) and the schematization of the self-regulatory signs to remember the chant.

Musical improvisation make it possible for a *Gefühlston* to obtain continuity across irreversible time by moving from a tone to the making of a melody. Thus, a

single sensation—with escalated local affect—may lead to the establishment of a long-term sign field that would flavor the person's handling of similar situations in the future. It is an example of "constructing memory for the future." It is the function of imagination to lead in this construction.

Aesthetic Philosophy in the Making

The whole notion of aesthetic thinking is built on the notion of disinterested affect—we appreciate something from a distance, without relating to it in any functional way—just for the pleasure of experiencing the beautiful. Such appreciation is supposed to be without demands on the person—it is silent and contemplative turning of the affect upon the object, beautiful in itself (Fig. 5.3). The *Blonde Odalisque* of Francois Boucher—painted first in 1751 and in a second version a year later—is for us in the twenty-first century as art lovers freed from the context of the mundane everyday possible habit of enjoying being naked on a living room sofa. The painting belongs to the real of art and becomes appreciated for its aesthetic characteristics.
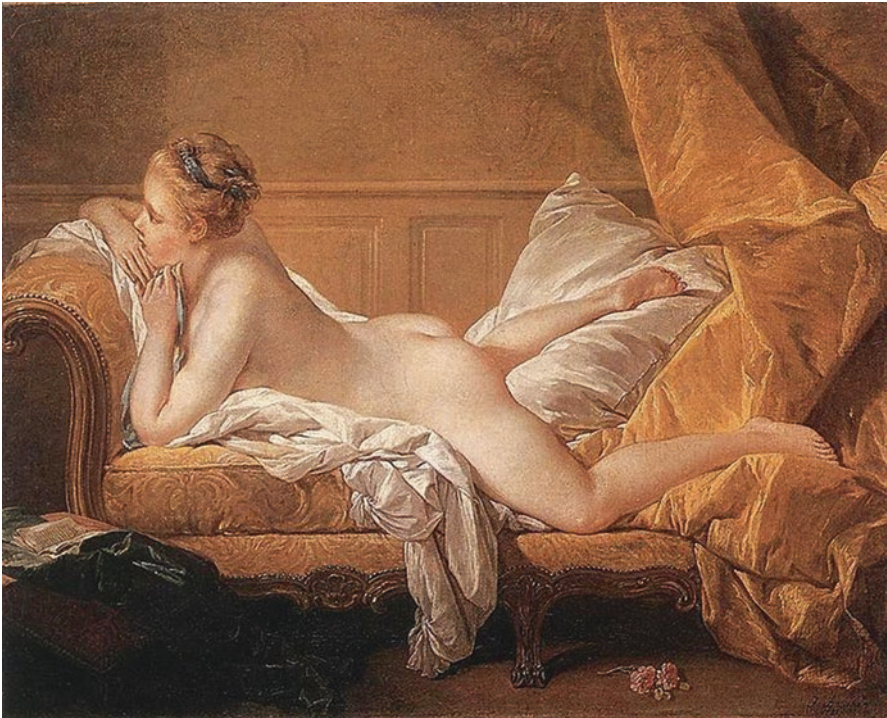

Fig. 5.3 Aesthetic experience as based on disinterested affect. (Francois Boucher *The Blonde Odalisque,* 1752)

However, around the time Boucher (b. 1704 d.1770) painted the image of the reclining blonde young woman; the context of making such painting was not entirely that of the art domain. The model—Marie-Louise O'Murphy (b. 1737 d 1814)— was one of the mistresses of the French King Louis XV, and the painting was designated to belong to him and not for the wide art-loving public, which at that time did not exist. Now—located in Alte Pinakothek in München—it is classified as a *landscape painting* (see http://www.francoisboucher.org/Blond-Odalisque-%28L'Odalisque-Blonde%29-1752.html). This classification indicates the relevance of the disinterested gaze of the viewer (focus on the aesthetics of the bedsheets) ahead of the primary focus on the nude body. Obviously the latter was more important for the King.

Neither was the notion of affective *disinterestedness* well developed in the mid-eighteenth-century Europe. The notion of disinterestedness was brought into European philosophy by Anthony Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its introduction made it possible for the philosophers in the eighteenth century to develop the separate domain of aesthetic philosophy. This led to the emergence of the distinction between the mundane and the aesthetic—and their border area, the sublime.

The Key Historical Figure in Understanding the Sublime: Edmund Burke

Edmund Burke (1729–1797) is better known for his role as a politician. His *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Burke, 1757)—written in his late 20s—remains his only philosophical treatise. Nevertheless this is the one that became a main source for Immanuel Kant to take further the notion of the sublime[1] into European philosophy.

Burke introduced the central core of the focus on the sublime:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant of terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is the source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. When in danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible: but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience. (Burke, 1757, pp. 13–14, added underlining)

This kind of understanding of the making of the sublime by the human *psyche* gives us interesting possibilities for formal presentations of the affect in terms of emerging helical dynamics of the feeling tone (Fig. 5.4). The original distinction made by opposition pain<>pleasure—which can be viewed as linear—becomes under

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[1] The roots of the interest in the sublime go back to the Hellenistic philosopher Dionysius Longinus (third century AD) but were then linked with oratorical skills—which way speakers could create an affective tension in the listeners through exaggerations that were not easy to reject.
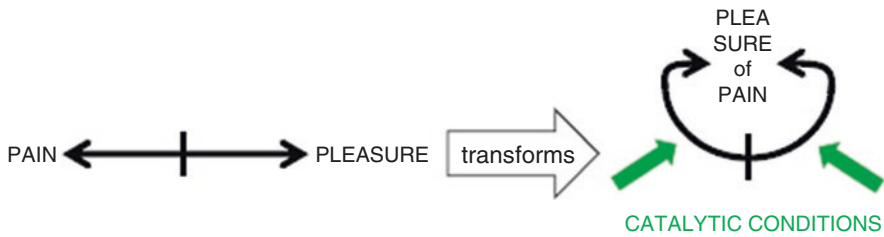
Fig. 5.4 From a linear opposition into a curvilinear whole (or the death of a rating scale)

circumstances (unattainable desire) curvilinear, until the original seemingly distant opposite meet in a new relationship, the tension of *pain<that feels > pleasurable* (or its equivalent reverse *pleasure < that feels > painful*). Such tensions—based on the de-linearizing the original linear opposition—produce the sublime.

Figure 5.4 presents two scenarios for psychology. First, it demonstrates the limitation that the superimposition of linear rating scales—the most widespread method in the social sciences—does to the phenomena. The latter are rarely (if ever) in linear form—it is the curvilinearity that dominates the world of open systems, from biological to sociological. If linear forms of methods are forced upon the nonlinear phenomena of psychological kind, the resulting data would not represent the nonlinearity of the phenomena and are thus simply a part of "error of the misfitting methods."

The basic nonlinearity of psychological phenomena is overwhelming. It is a necessary outcome of the open-systemic nature of the phenomena (covered in Target Paper 1) as the constant exchange relationship with the environment leads to the *sign-mediated reflection* upon that relationship. The result is a meaningful whole—the particular event in the relationship subordinated to the meaning of it as the whole. The meaning subordinates the relationship, not vice versa.

Beautiful pain: practices of self-flagellation Developing self-reflexivity in the human system leads to new forms of unity of the opposites. The notion of "taking the *discipline*" has been an accepted reference to the practice of self-flagellation in the Catholic traditions. It is a deeply spiritual act—connected with the self-inflicted bodily pain. The instrument for the whipping was presented within the unquestionably accepted meaning system (Fig. 5.5).

The act of self-flagellation was complex. The monastic tradition of self-flagellation for purification purposes emerged in the Christian religion slowly—out of the punishment of others. By the eleventh century, it became part of the test of one's spiritual purity, as advocated by St. Peter Damianus. In the centuries that followed, the practices of collective self-purification through regular whipping of oneself proliferated all over Europe. It was at first a strictly monastic tradition that took place within the confines of monasteries. However, by the mid-13th and 14th centuries, it episodically turned into public ritual practices in different times in Europe with the aim of preventing plague. The practices of valued self-injuries would

Fig. 5.5 The flagellant.
(Albrecht Dürer, 1510)
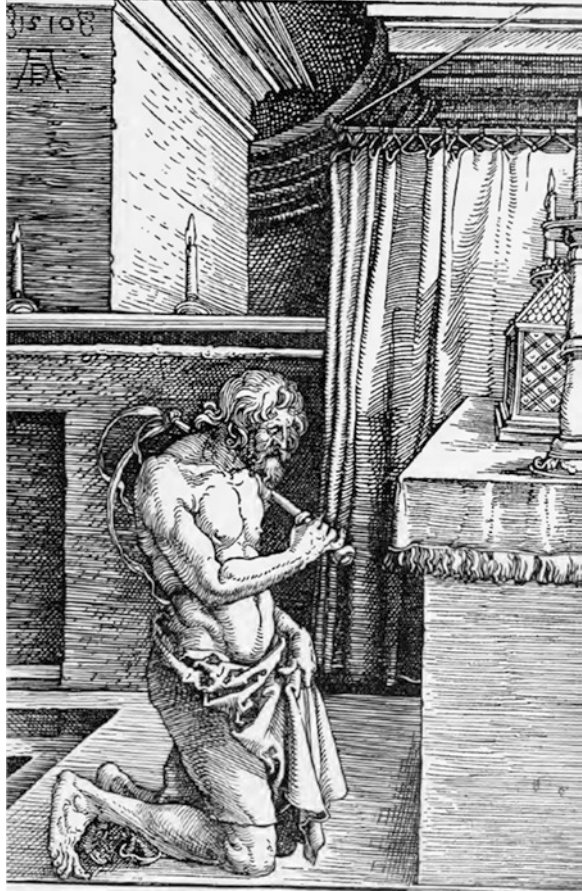
become externalized to be publicly visible—in the public processions of the *disci-plinantes* in the local communities.

The historical practice of self-flagellation is a good illustration of the transformation of a linear opposition (pleasure as opposed to pain) into the nonlinear complex (the pleasure-out-of-pain—right side of Fig. 5.4). The catalytic condition of religious devotion made such transformation possible. Such practices are examples of self-generated sublime. After elaborating on different forms of the sublime, Burke reached a general understanding of the sublime:

> … sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation. That it is therefore one of the most affecting we have. That its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress, and that no positive or absolute pleasure belongs to it. (Burke, 1757, p. 72)

Instead, it is the distressful pleasure that keeps a person in a continuous relation to the given object. The latter is appealing and horrifying at the same time. The affective anticipation of the unreachable—horrifying, yet in principle possible—creates the specific sublime state of the object.

Burke's comparison of the sublime with the beautiful reflection of his belief of "eternal distinction" between them:

> …sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great- rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly: the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should never be obscure; the great should be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great should be solid and even massive. (Burke, 1757, p. 115)

The contrast obviously here applies to sizes of objects. The same person whose image is turned into a monumental sculpture becomes emphasized as "great" and operates as a sublime object, while its miniature counterpart can be beautiful. A 33-meter-high monument to a famous person is sublime (Fig. 5.6.a.)—terrifying and appealing at the same time. The same image in the form of a small porcelain figure on one's table is beautiful (Fig. 5.6.b). It cannot feel

Fig. 5.6 The very big and the very small images of Jesus. (**a**) Swiebodzin statue (height 33 meters). (**b**) Lladro figurine (size 20 × 39 cm)

threatening—although its iconic presentation is similar to that in Fig. 5.6.a. Yet miniaturizing further the already minimal size figure would bring its impact to the sublime zone.

Immanuel Kant and the Relation of the Sublime and the Beautiful

Kant was in his early 40s when he took on the issue of beauty—after thinking through planetary systems (1755) and becoming a librarian in Königsberg. He had interesting interlocutors before him—Alexander Baumgarten and his student Georg Maier, as well as William Hogarth, Edmund Burke, Christian Wolff, and others. He was in a position of overcoming the limits of all of his predecessors, given his genre of developing critiques of the others.

Yet there were everyday realities—not to be forgotten in our understanding of "the classics." The 1760s for Kant was filled with heavy lecturing to earn his income—which set the stage for typically Kantian "critique" genre of lecturing, leading to his substantive monographs later on. Kant would lecture on the basis on another scholar's book, providing incisive and thorough critique of the target author's ideas. His lecturing this way was popular with his audience—the Prussian students liked the *kritik* as a genre of discourse. As a seasoned private tutor (*Hauslehrer*) prior to becoming a librarian, Kant was meticulous in his coverage of the topics that emerged as themes for his lectures. He was directly paid for his work by the students—a feature of academic life that our twenty-first-century universities are only mildly emulating through all kinds of "student evaluations."

The first source where the issues of the sublime and beautiful were treated—*Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1766)—is a good indication of the polemic style of the librarian-lecturer. It is in the first seven pages where Kant introduces the notions of *Erhabene* and *Schöne*, spending the rest of the text (pp. 8–62— Kant, 1873/1766) in describing differences between human character and of the prototypical features of national character, in terms of the sublime and the beautiful. So, for example, the reader finds out that Italians are characterized by the feelings of beauty more than the Spaniards but are more sublime than the French (Kant, 1766/1873, p. 49). Kant's text reads almost like a result of our contemporary cross-cultural psychology account of the differences between "cultures" (national characters). Even more curious is Kant's comparison of persons as wholes (*Gestalt der Person*). In his comment, persons with brown skin color and dark eyes are sublime, while white and blue-eyed persons are beautiful (Kant, 1766/1873, p. 10). Setting the stigmatization barrier between the beautiful and the sublime brings the aesthetics to bear upon classificatory oppositions between races—a common practice in Europe of the eighteenth century.

Translation Paradoxes: Mixing the "Before" and "Out There"

English translations of most German classic texts need to be constantly surveyed for their accuracy of nuances. To understand the full function of the sublime in the human *psyche*, we need to overcome imprecision that has occurred in the move from the German concept (*Erhabene*) to that in English (sublime):

> We may describe the Sublime thus: it is an object (of nature) *the representation of which determines the mind to think the unattainability of nature regarded as a presentation of ideas*. (Kant, 1914/1790, p. 134,)

> Wir kann das Erhabene so beschreiben: es is ein Gegenstand (der Natur), *dessen Vorstellung das Gemüt bestimmt, sich bei Unreichbarkeit der Natur als Darstellung von Ideen zu Denken*. (Kant, 1922/1790, p. 114 underlining added)

The English translation reverses the prefixes of *vor*[2]- and *dar*[3]- in front of the *-stellung*. Kant's German original is clear: some object presents itself to us (here and now), but our mind cannot reach it because of some existing idea (representation). The result is a tension between the presentation (*Vorstellung*) and mind-mediating representation (*Darstellung*). Here the time sequence is accepted—object presents, the mind is in tension because of its unattainability. The English translation eliminates the sequence (pre-post), and with it the process nature of the sublime (tension between the given and the new) is eliminated.

Erhabene in Everyday Experiences

Everyday experiences are built on the sublime. Referencing a traveler to Egypt,[4] Kant outlined the distance factor in the relating with the object of observation—pyramids:

> …we must keep from going very near the Pyramids just as we keep from too far from them, in order to get the full emotional effect from their size. For if we are too far away, the parts to be apprehended (the stones lying one over the other) are only obscurely presented [*vorgestellt*], and the presentation [*Vorstellung*] of them produces no effect upon the aesthetical judgment of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the *bottom up to the apex*; and the first tiers are always partly forgotten before the Imagination has taken in the last…. (Kant, 1914/1790, p. 112; 1922, p. 96)

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[2] *vor*- (Old German *fora*) indicating "before" (Kluge, 1891, p. 379). If looking backwards in time, one can refer to the "before" in the past (e.g., *Vorgeschichte*) but the time focus (this X, pre-X was before X)

[3] *dar*- (Old German *dara*) indicating "there" (Kluge, 1891, p. 51). No time represented here.

[4] Count Jean-Marie Savary, participant in the French military campaign in Egypt and later Napoleon I's minister. Yet the example of the pyramids was used by Kant in 1766 (p. 6) referencing the travels by the Swedish explorer Fredrik Hasselqvist to Egypt in the 1750s, made available in German translation in 1762.

The focus on the perspective taking on behalf of the experiencing person is crucial here—the sublime feeling emerges only under some conditions, which can be as simple as those of viewing distance.

Kant was known never to have travelled far from his native Königsberg. Yet, using others' travel accounts, he could sensitively feel into the experiences of others. He claimed that while entering Saint Peter's in Rome for the first time, there is:

> …a feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the ideas of the whole, wherein the imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, sinks back into itself [*in sich selbst zurücksinkt*], by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced. (ibid)

The feeling of "sinking back into itself" is an indicator of the sublime nature of the experience. Architecture presents many forms that support the triggering of the sublime.

In contrast, the notion of beautiful is freed from the tension of the object being in some direct relation to the self's needs. As a concept, it structures the immediate experience—in Kant's scheme of transcendental deduction, it guides the thinker to appreciate the object in terms of its own qualities. The object is perceived as beautiful in itself—not in relation to the perceiver who has a need for it, kept in the tension of unattainability.

In comparison with the sublime,

> The Beautiful prepares us *to love disinterestedly something*, even nature itself; the Sublime prepares us to esteem something highly even in opposition to our own (sensible) interest.[5] (Kant, 1914/1790, p. 134, added emphasis).

Overcoming one's interest is thus the dividing line of the sublime and the beautiful. In Kant's time and within the ontologically oriented philosophical realms, it was the distinction between the two that was crucial. It was important for Kant also for the general purposes of linking the a priori with the experienced through the processes of apperception. Yet the developmental question was not raised—how would one turn into the other? How can the beautiful emerge from the sublime and disappear again—through the sublime— into the mundane world?

*Refocusing our Attention: From Opposition {*Beautiful *Versus* Mundane*} to the Dynamics of the Sublime*

The general mode of thinking in the eighteenth-century philosophy was ontological—and hence categorical. The making of the difference between the beautiful and the sublime was a major task for Kant—even as he himself indicated the existence of the border zone between the two. The potential transformational relation—a developmental approach—to the relationship was not yet available or

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[5] In German original: "*Das Schöne bereitet uns vor, etwas, die Natur ohne Interesse zu lieben; das Erhabene, es selbst wieder unser (sinnliches) Interesse hochzuschatzen*"(Kant, 1922/1790, p. 114).

accepted (by Kant and his many followers). It became available at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries through the work of J. G. Fichte on "double negation"—the negation ("A is not non-A" and "non-A-is not A") becoming itself negated (the claim "A is not non-A" is itself not a valid claim). The second negation dismisses the importance of making class differences ("the beautiful is not sublime" and "the sublime is not beautiful") and opens the door to asking questions about their relationships—**under which conditions** **could the sublime become beautiful**, and, conversely, **under what conditions** **could the beautiful become sublime**?

The key in these transformations is the border of emergence of the feeling of disinterest:

"I feel this *appealing (and threatening) object* is of my interest"

⬇

"This appealing object is *beautiful in itself*"
(I can appreciate the beauty, but I *do not need it*").

Such emergence of *interest in disinteresting objects*—the claim of "not needing it"—in pragmatic sense equals the emergence of a new need, the *need for beauty* (which requires disinterest in the pragmatic sense). The objects of art—paintings or sculptures in museums—do not need to be owned by a person who revisits the museum to enjoy the art objects.

The feeling of disinterest emerges through the act of hyper-generalization within the increasing psychological distance (Fig. 5.7). The quantity (feeling of increasing distance) at a certain moment crosses a boundary, and we observe qualitative breakthrough—loss of immediate interest. What has happened is the emergence of a new interest—in an object that now is interesting for the person because of the distancing from the functional interest in it. The object is "beautiful in itself" and therefore interesting. It is no longer "threateningly interesting" (i.e., as sublime). *The sublime is the transit zone between the mundane and the beautiful*. As such, it constitutes the border between pragmatic interests (the mundane) and the disinterested interest (the beautiful). I cut flowers from the flowerbed in my garden—which is de facto an act of killing the biological object—and put them into a vase in my living room, where, even with abundant water, they will slowly die out and end in the garbage can. My fascination with the beauty of flowers allows me to overlook the act of "killing" the living flower (as beautiful as ever on the flower bed) and bringing the "dead" flower to my living room. Mundane actions bypass possible sublime relation to the flowers here.

The situation would be very different if I saw a beautiful flower in a cemetery and very much wanted to take it home to my vase. The flower would be just a flower—as beautiful there as in any other location. Yet it is the precise location and its meaning that would create a subliminal tension—desiring the beauty while being horrified by the connection of *that* flower with the symbolic necropolis. And I shiver at the sacrilegious thought of mine and go home empty-handed.
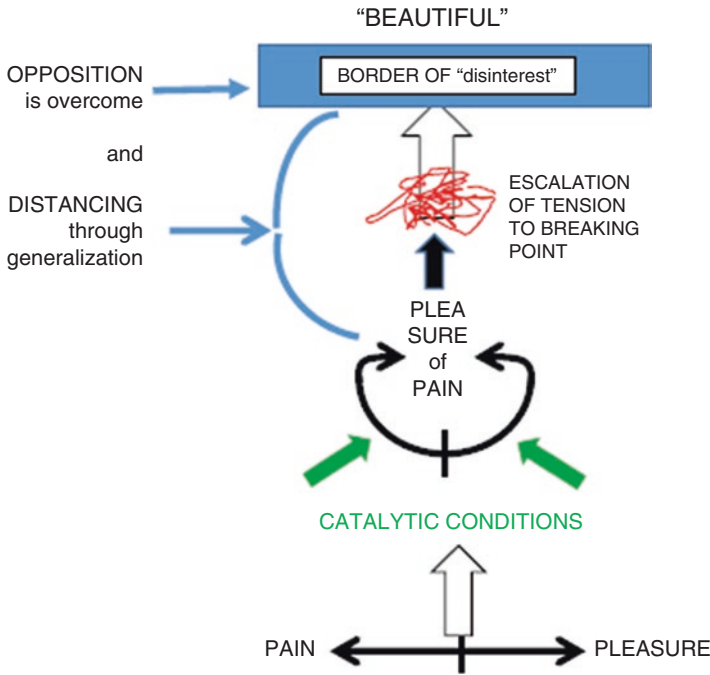
Fig. 5.7 The dialectical transition from the sublime to the beautiful (elaboration of Fig. 5.4)

Genetic Dramatisms: *The Fearful Courage of Ordinary Living*

The subliminal nature of this hypothetical episode of taking flowers from the cemetery illustrates the role of *genetic dramatisms* in human cultural way of living. Human beings in their intentional actions—wanting to bring flowers to their loved ones—*set themselves up in crossing borders that they themselves are hesitant or fearful to cross*. The flowers located in a cemetery are as beautiful as similar flowers in a flower shop right in front of the cemetery. Yet their location and its symbolic significance—linkage with the dead that has been created by the living (who bought these flowers in the shop in front of the cemetery and brought them to decorate the grave)—creates the feeling of the sublime. That feeling regulates our ordinary living—our social worlds set up "semiotic traps" that we enter into with pleasure (e.g., advertising of the options of going to a cinema and pay money to enjoy a horror movie or to enlist in an army to go to the battlefield to get killed for the abstract value of the honor of one's country). It is the creation of new human experiences within the zone of the sublime—beyond the mundane and under the threshold of the beautiful (Fig. 5.7 above), that is, the arena for our ordinary human living. While recognizing the beautiful (aesthetic), we do not cross the border of disinterestedness that it entails but continue to tease ourselves in the domain of the sublime, this creating the personal dramatic interest in living forward.

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Chapter 6
The Sublime in Relational Art: Meaning-Making Processes on the Move

Lia da Rocha Lordelo

Cultural Psychology and New Perspectives on Human Development

Cultural Psychology has been increasingly viewed as a multidisciplinary field on the borders of psychology, semiotics, and cultural studies focusing on how individuals make their experiences meaningful (Cabell & Valsiner, 2014). With that thought in mind, it is the purpose of this chapter to use a theoretical approach in aesthetics to discuss meaning-making processes in human trajectories, in other words, to link aesthetics to a developmental approach in Cultural Psychology.

We have previously acknowledged a change of theoretical perspective (Lordelo, 2017), identifying, in Cultural Psychology, a challenging, but highly productive, concept of development. Robinson and Freeman (1990) have, now a few decades ago, argued that the idea of development (expanding its focus on childhood and especially considering adulthood) has been generally conceived in terms of already prescribed ends, as in normative models, or in terms of complete absence of ends. In contrast, the authors suggest development to be better conceived in terms of progressive transformation of ends (Robinson & Freeman, 1990). The idea of progressive transformation of ends is consonant with recent claims of cultural psychologists: they have been conceiving development as the property of open systems to undergo qualitative transformations, under constant relating with the environment within irreversible time (Zittoun et al., 2013). Flexibility and open-endedness are crucial characteristics of that developmental process, and they are guaranteed by a shift in perspective: for Valsiner (2008), the reliance on an ontological discourse, both in psychology and in education, is misfitting. We must move from the static *ontology of being*, which asks "what is X?," to the *epistemology of becoming*, which asks

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57

"what is X becoming," or yet, "how is X becoming Y?" or "how is X changing?" This is the question which characterizes the very own nature of development. Once we start to deal with that problem, not only will we view development in a less normative, programmed way, but we will also need to think of different techniques and methods to study it, as well as theories to describe it.

In that change of perspective, two processes become central to human development: meaning-making and imagination (Zittoun et al., 2013). Meaning-making is the expression of what we could refer to as a semiotic function basic to human beings. Zittoun and colleagues claim that, although other animals are able to coordinate themselves, "the phylogenetic development of the semiotic abilities allowed humans to develop culture (art and science), representations of the future," and more sophisticated forms of coordination (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 03). Through that semiotic function, we are able to interact with the environment in a mediated way – this means we are able to go beyond the linearity of the here-and-now (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 03). To put that semiotic function in very simple terms, it is to say that "as we *react to* and *act upon* the world in the middle of which we live, we construct it as *meaningful for ourselves"* (Valsiner, 2014). In strict relation to that process, those complex semiotic abilities, together with the existence of cultural artifacts and semiotic systems inherited throughout generations, enable humans to develop a unique capacity for imagination. Imagination, here, is generally conceived as a constant process of expansion of the present, along three dimensions – time, space, and degrees of reality (Zittoun et al., 2013).

Relational Aesthetics: The Work of Brazilian Artist Wagner Schwartz

Taking into account this developmental perspective, I wish to explore a theoretical perspective in aesthetics – Bourriaud's relational aesthetics – which takes into account both artists and audience, as they relate personally, particularly affectively relate to works of art. Art researcher and curator Nicolas Bourriaud has dedicated himself to studying artists and their practices which have been, mainly since the second half of the twentieth century, consciously engaging in learning to "inhabit the world in a better way" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13); in these practices, people are not only pointing at or forming utopian realities but actually being these ways of living and models of action within existing reality.

Bourriaud's theorizing refers to a paradigmatic shift in artistic practices which can be simply called relational art – from the early 1960s on, works of art in which the spectator's participation became central, such as performances, installations, happenings, and so on (Glusberg, 2009; Bishop, 2006). Relational art, according to the author, points to an upheaval of the aesthetic, political, and cultural goals introduced by modern art (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 14). If up to the beginning of the twentieth century, a modern accomplishment of art theoreticians and thinkers within the field of aesthetics and history of art would have been precisely its independent status – art

as a field of knowledges and practices with their own theories, distinctions, and laws of functioning – from that moment on, artists would have begun to defy that very status, by questioning some conventional understandings, such as the notion of individual geniuses, the distance between artist and public, and the idea that art should depict or represent reality exactly as it was. Provoked by that crisis of the representational paradigm, artists and theoreticians locate, at the first decades of the twentieth century, a deep transformation in the arts (Benjamin, 2013), reorganizing the distinction among artistic languages and mainly witnessing the birth of new artistic expressions.

More than straightening the gap between audience and artists, for relational art works, the spectator's "participation" becomes the core of a work of art; and consequently, intersubjectivity becomes the very essence of artistic practice (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 22). In a broader sense, he claims, the artist starts to concentrate on inventing new models of sociability (p. 28).

A series of artists have worked under this kind of inspiration; in Brazil, visual artist Lygia Clark[1] (1920–1988) was one of our most prominent figures within that aesthetic paradigm. Clark arose from Brazilian neoconcretist visual arts movement to progressively relational works, such as "Caminhando[2]" (1963), in which she proposed that the spectator, already co-authoring the piece, created, from a piece of paper, a Moebius strip and cut it in all its extension, allowing him/her to live the experience of continuity between inside and out.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she created a series called "relational objects," when she took participation to a more radical degree. In one of her letters to fellow artist Hélio Oiticica, she confesses, "the object for me has lost its significance, and if I still use it, it is so that it becomes a mediator for participation (Clark & Oiticica, 2006, p. 110). To this series, belong, for example, the "grande colchão" (big mattress), a great translucent mattress full of Styrofoam on which a person would lie, until his/her body would be "conform" to the surface and a group of small plastic bags containing different elements such as water, air, pebbles, and so on be manipulated by people, one person at a time.

Lygia Clark slowly radicalized the relational nature of her works, actually becoming a therapist and doing clinical work during the 1980s (Rolnik, 1997). Now, many Brazilian artists have been strongly influenced by Clark's work. In particular, we will look into contemporary artist Wagner Schwartz, born in 1972, and his piece *La Bête*.

Born in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Schwartz's works are much influenced by literature, problematizing the experiences of the foreigner between languages, cultures, cities, and institutions through a task he defines as "the dramaturgy of migration" (Bio, 2017). Schwartz has been using compositions of texts, sounds, and images to show clearly the physicality of his experiments. In *La Bête*, the artist takes

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[1] Lygia Clark is an internationally acknowledged Brazilian artist and had a great retrospective exhibition of her works in MOMA – Museum of Modern Art – in New York, in 2014. The exhibition was called *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948–1988*.

[2] "Caminhando": walking, in Portuguese.

a replica of a sculpture from Lygia Clark's series Bichos (Creatures, 1960). While in Clark's sculptures geometrical metal constructions are articulated by hinges which require the spectator's participation, in Schwartz's dance piece, the creature replica is manipulated by the artist, who also puts himself, through his naked body, up to manipulation by the public.

Schwartz evokes the experiential dimension of Clark's works, by embodying one of her multidimensional, malleable creatures – not in metal but now in flesh and blood. Multiple creator-creature relations are inverted and resignified in this manipulation game. And the piece happens in its potentiality and strength precisely when this situation is activated.

It is exactly in this period of time, in this duration, that the work of art must present itself in a relational approach; it must present itself as "an opening to unlimited discussion" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 15). In that sense, the objects exposed in that relational performance – the paper creature and the human creature – are only initial pretexts for what is going to take place. The work of art is exactly this: something that takes place or something that happens between people.

Aesthetic and Developmental Approaches: Interconnections

As we have learned from sociocultural, dialogical approaches in psychology (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, 2001; Rosa & Valsiner, 2007; Valsiner, 2007), it is mainly through that interaction that semiosis occurs. Semiosis is the human process of creating signs, in order to make sense of the reality that surrounds us. That ability to interact with the environment (cultural artifacts and people included) in a mediated way enables us, as already mentioned (see first section of this paper), to go beyond the linearity of the here-and-now (Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 03). As we have also seen, in Cultural Psychology, this also constitutes an approach to human development.

Looking at a contemporary aesthetic phenomenon as the art piece *La Bête* produces some theoretical dislocations in our previous aesthetic understandings. Valsiner (2018) traces the origins of modern aesthetic thinking to the eighteenth century, particularly with the notion of disinterested affect – the idea that we can appreciate something from a distance, without relating to it in any functional way – just for the pleasure of experiencing the beautiful. It is from the works of philosophers such as Edmund Burke (1729–1797), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) that philosophical aesthetics was conceived and developed as a separate domain. These efforts led to a distinction between the mundane and the aesthetic – and its transitional zone, the sublime.

The sublime in Schwartz's *La Bête* is actualized in the interaction between artist and audience. And Valsiner's question "under which conditions could the sublime become beautiful, and, conversely—under what conditions could the beautiful become sublime"? (this book, Chap. 5) is looked at under different conditions. In a relational work of art, nothing is disinterested. It is perhaps genuine participation

during the artistic work which constitutes the main condition of transit. Participation is the locus of the sublime.

To claim that participation is the locus of the sublime leads to a specific developmental implication: once we acknowledge, within that approach, that art pieces exist as actions and more especially as interactions between artists and audiences, they become central tools for the continuous constitution and transformation of our selves. They impact our trajectories just like so many other everyday experiences and move us into taking decisions and heading ourselves into our future.

Concluding Thoughts

Far from a semiotic analysis of a work of art, this text aimed to propose articulations between aesthetic and cultural developmental approaches, through the outline of a contemporary aesthetic theory grounded on the principles of participation and social interaction – Bourriaud's relational aesthetics – showing such principles through the case of an art piece by a contemporary Brazilian artist, Wagner Schwartz.

Working under the framework of relational aesthetics makes us stand precisely on the transitional point where the artist's piece can be considered something mundane and, at the same time, profoundly beautiful and poetic. The notion of the work of art must present itself as "an opening to unlimited discussion," as Bourriaud puts it (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 15), which enables the existence of that transitional space. And, as Valsiner himself reminds us, in opposition of the ontological, categorical mode of thinking of the eighteenth-century philosophy (this book, Chap. 5), what is at stake here is a developmental approach to aesthetic phenomena, centered in that potential transformational relation. Standing on the transition is cultivating the sublime, for it is when and where multiple possible meanings are constructed by us and can push us onto different developmental directions, depending on people's goals and the surrounding context. The sublime is the meaning-making process on the move.

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Chapter 7
The Sublime and the Empirical Datum in Psychology: An Exercise of Conceptual Approximation

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This chapter discusses the possibility of bringing together the theorisation of the aesthetic experience, in its sublime sphere, and the universe of data interpretation in empirical research in Psychology. Even though the aesthetic dimension is recognised as a trait of human singularity as opposed to the world's alterity (Frayze-Pereira, 2006; Tateo, 2017; Valsiner, 2014), we consider that such understanding takes on more axiomatic and hermeneutical features than specifically analytical markers for its investigation or methodological access. For this reason, the present chapter intends to shed some light concerning the method and aesthetics on psychological data analysis, considering the centrality of the relationship between body, affect and language in human experiences.

As is known, Philosophy and Aesthetics shares a discursive field precursory to the birth of Psychology as a science. Being the interfacing field between Philosophy and Arts, the universe of Aesthetics traditionally dealt with the domain of sensitivity, perception, feelings and imagination from the perspective of the beautiful. In the context of the emergence of Psychology as a scientific subject, Fechner's 1876 inductive aesthetics stood in opposition to the deductive, metaphysical aesthetics of Philosophy.[1] In this sense, it is interesting to note that a Philosophy of aesthetic

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[1] Appropriation of the beautiful takes the form of a philosophy of the faculty of feeling, so that Aesthetics refers to a science of sensibility, that is, the science of the sensible way of knowing the object. In this way, aesthetics is an epistemology of sensibility, and the beautiful is considered the sensible manifestation, the phenomenal evidence, of the perfection of an object. It is a mode of knowledge because the thing is beautiful because the internal unity is apparent or sensitive. Having said that, the beautiful is the sign of the adequacy of the sensible appearance and the essence of the thing. In this sense, the beautiful is the quality or the qualities of the bodies, which are responsible for causing the most diverse feelings, be it love or violent/terrible feelings.

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experience remained in the shadows throughout an enunciative hiatus in the history of the subject, born in the late nineteenth century.

> The initial project of Psychology was to observe/describe the subjective aspects of the experience, but because of the place of the experimental method, this young science had ended up by focusing more and more on the objective aspects such as the perception of sounds, lines, volumes, rhythms, proportion, symmetry, etc. (…) At a certain point in history Psychology becomes the science of the empirical and perceptive bases of thinking. Thus, half of human experience is obliterated. (Pinheiro, Silva & Tateo, in press, p. 2)

In contemporary times, it can be posited that the aesthetic experience, as a field of inquiry of Psychology, has mainly orbited theoretical horizons of a clinical nature, be they psychoanalytic, gestaltic or antipsychiatrically inspired. These mentioned fields work on reinforcing the centrality of the singularity in human experience which connects its theories to an inquire on the affective surplus, proper to the aesthetics experience. According to Fayze-Pereira (2006), the approximation between psychoanalysis and aesthetic experience occurs when we are able to recognise that both universes operate on the basis of approaching a silent slit, an alteritarian universe of feeling, that aims to gain shape in the process of human becoming through a semiotic universe.

The reader of this piece of writing may be asking, what specifically is meant by aesthetic experience in Psychology? What does it mean actually? In an attempt to at least, partially, answer this question, it needs to be assumed that the aesthetic dimension of psychological experience should not be seen as the pleasure of contemplation or artistic forms of human expression. Very different from it, we assume that aesthetic experience can be understood as a complex psychological process in which the ordinarity and mundane sphere of the existence is transformed by a subjective dynamic, replacing the "objectivity of the object" of experience in a construction that is at the same time creative, affective and symbolic. Such process requires a comprehension that the unity of analysis of human condition is made the wholeness of aesthetic experience in the emergence of new signs in personal and collective culture. In this sense, the mundane, the beauty and the sublime are not considered as dichotomic and qualifying categories but a symbolic-affective process, which takes place at the irreversible time, participating on the emergence of new signs in the uniqueness of human experience.

In this chapter, through the analysis of an essay, part of the research corpus about changing schools (Azevedo, 2017), we discuss three possible discourse markers that might point towards one of the major dimensions of aesthetic experience, which can be called *sublime*, namely, (1) the emergence of an intense discursive ambiguity, signing the place of an affective ambivalence; (2) the impossibility of "meaning stabilisation", in other words, the "undecidability" between the possible meanings; and the (3) symbolically marked body in the experience of the research subject through her writing. Thus, before developing our interpretive proposal, there should be a brief presentation about the history of and a few meanings attached to the notion of "sublime" in Philosophy up to its reconstruction in Cultural Psychology.

From the Sublime to a Psychology of Aesthetic Experience

The eighteenth century was an effervescent backdrop for discussions about the sublime and the beautiful. In Burke's work (1797/ 2015, p. 188) – *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* – a "union between science and admiration" is proposed (p. 52) through an analysis that the author thought capable of undoing the conceptual confusion around the word "sublime":

> (...) from a diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions; and from a sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties are capable of affecting the body, and thus of exciting our passions. (2015, p. 188)

In this sense, since Burke, the body is fundamental to the understanding of the experience, once the passions, the inexpressible and excessive dimension of that which was lived, would find their arena, conceived through sensualistic lenses, in corporeity. For the author, the beautiful could be represented as a feeling of positive pleasure that results in relaxation. In opposition to that, the sublime would be characterised by muscle tension/hypertonus or nervousness. Lyotard (1993) put forward the following perspective based on Burke's work:

> Here, then, is an account of the sublime feeling: a very big, very powerful object threatens to deprive the soul of any 'it happens', strikes it with 'astonishment' (at lower intensities the soul is seized with admiration, veneration, respect). The soul is thus dumb, immobilised, as good as dead. Art, by distancing this menace, procures a pleasure of relief, of delight. Thanks to art, the soul is returned to the agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is its health and its life. For Burke, the sublime was no longer a matter of intensification. (p. 43)

In the above-mentioned interpretation, it is important to note that the dimension of pushing tension away, withdrawing from it through the mediation of art, is seen as a catalysing agent of the order of the beautiful and of the homeostatic balance previously upset by the emergence of the sublime. If in Burke the sublime is a matter of intensification, of formless grandeur, we can infer that it generates a special kind of suppression, however transitory, of the differentiation between the subject and the object. Thus, in addition to inducing lack of form and paralysing fascination, the sublime would connote a dimension of the suprasensitive.

In his work *Critique of Judgment*, in the *Analytic of the Sublime* book, Kant (2005) describes the sublime as an object of nature "the representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas" (p. 115). In the impossibility of such presentation of ideas, the "mind's regard" would be comparable to upheaval:

> The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness(…). (Kant, 2005, p. 90)

The Kantian sublime, as an extrapolation to the imaginative capacity, would apprehend human finitude through the ambiguous feelings of pleasure and pain. Thus the sublime would be a "negative transcendental feeling that makes man feel his impotence before the intelligible absolute" (Céron & Reis, 1998, p. 79).

Introducing a concept that comes from other subjects to Psychology is always a difficult task, between metaphorical and literal use (Tateo & Marsico, 2014). Thus Valsiner (2014) proposes the sublime as the border area between the mundane and the beautiful, which understands the semiotic dynamics that individuals produce through shared and organised signs, not intended to construct descriptive categories:

> The sublime is the locus of negotiation of the future and the past in the human constructive semiosis. Known since the 18th century in European aesthetic philosophy, the sublime was being recognised as the border area of the mundane and the aesthetic. Yet, as a border, its function as the connector of the ordinary and the beautiful domains has been overlooked. I posit that the constructive semiosis as universal human psychological process takes place on that border, allowing the mundane to lead to the beautiful and turning the beautiful into mundane. (Valsiner, 2018, chapter 5)

By placing the sublime as the border between the ordinary and the beautiful as well as the sphere of negotiation between past and future in semiotic construction, the author introduces evidence of our fundamental dimensions for its understanding as a psyche-related phenomenon: (1) the maximum ambiguity, the unspeakability of significations as being inherent to aesthetic impaction, in which past significations would lose their continent/reconstructive role about the uncertainty of the future; (2) the presentification of a corporeity marked by an unspeakable, unsettling affective excess that would refer to the vertigo associated to the suspension of the field of meaning; (3) the temporary suspension of the subject-object duality of experience (intensity); and (4) the production of catalytic syntheses like the pleasure of pain or the pain of pleasure given the non-linearity of human phenomena (Valsiner, *ibid*). Still according to the author, the beautiful would be the product of disinterested interest, and the ordinary/mundane would be the universe of pragmatic interests. The dynamics at stake in this process between withdrawal and investment of "interest" may be some of the most challenging or idiosyncratic points in the theoretical examination and modelling of the aesthetic dimension in human experience. In other words, the bordering dimension of the sublime between the mundane and the beauty is an instigating and ambitious interface in its theoretical-methodological grasp.

In the following section, we present three possible indicators for the inference of the sublime in the analysis of the data of a research on imaginative processes (Azevedo, 2017). The data consists of an essay by an elementary school teenager about a character on her first day at a new school.

An Approximation: The Sublime and the Empirical Datum in Psychology

The approximation between thoughts on the sublime and empirical research in Psychology is peppered with quandaries. In this sense, the question is: How might the pragmatic/rationalising dimension of the investigating subject's analysis access and/or reconstruct the sublime dimension, evanescently produced in the singularity

of the author/research participants before the alterity of their own verbal production? In being aware of the impossibility of a simple resolution to this question, we focused on the interpretative writing inspired by the previously proposed markers of the sublime as a temporary and preliminary exercise to the debate on the subject.

Three fragments of a student's essay, used in research about imaginative processes and changing schools (Azevedo, 2017), were selected for the present exercise. The participant's name is Laila,[2] who is 11 years old and experiences a double transition: she leaves the fifth grade for the sixth grade in a new school, located in the urban area of Recife, a city in north-eastern Brazil. We analysed this student's writing, 1 month into the school year, based on a theme suggested during Portuguese language class by the teacher: "a character that changes schools". The essay has a narrator who describes the saga of the protagonist, who is also called Laila, in each of the classes undertaken in the new school. In reading the essay, we understand how the process of imagining and describing the first day of school might represent an aesthetic experience, i.e. a semiotic, affective construction, embodied in circumstances permeated by intensities. The world, such as Laila (re)signifies and is affected by it, is reconstructed in writing through playfulness and exaggerated body movements.

The three excerpts used are the descriptions of the Physical Education, Science and Mathematics classes on the first day of school for Laila, the character. The choice of fragments was based on three discursive indicators guided by the discussion carried out in the previous section of this chapter. They are (1) the presentification of a symbolically striking body in the situations experienced, (2) the emergence of maximum ambiguity consubstantiated by the signs used and (3) the consequence of the previous axis: the "undecidability" between the possible meanings when reading and interpreting the essay. The reader may wonder why these markers do not include sensory catalytic syntheses (e.g. pleasure of pain or its opposite) and temporary suspension of the distance between the subject and object. These two axes cannot be fully contemplated from a methodological point of view, since they are more resistant to objectivation on a verbal aspect, according to the nature of the empirical data used in the present discussion. We further believe that these aspects allude to the dimensions of experience which are non-reducible to analytic modelling, at least in the methodological context that originated the case in discussion. They would perhaps be inferred/hypothesised based on the understanding of the three most symbolic-discursive criteria selected in this section, as well as through the intersubjective resonances of the researcher's reading.

In the student's essay, we observe several instances in which the author constructs a spectacular narrative about "a character that changes schools" (instructions given to the subject in question). Below are the segments of the essay[3] analysed in this chapter.

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[2] Fictitious name for research purposes

[3] To access the essay, see Azevedo (2017, pp.78-82).

Segment 1

Their first class was Physical Education; the teacher greeted them (her name was Gabriela) and said:

"Today we are going to run a lot!"

Everyone was excited. Suddenly she lets out a dragon from a cage and shouts:

"Run!"

Everyone panics and runs hard. After 50 minutes of "running", she "calls" to the dragon with food and puts it back in the cage.

"So, did you like the class?" asks Gabriela.

"Noooooo!" say the children, in unison.

"You guys are too soft, only 50 minutes", says Gabriela; "Bye, see you next time."

"May next time never come!" says one of the kids. Everyone laughs.

Segment 2

Time for the Science class.

"Hi, my name is Manuela, I'm your Science teacher and today's class is about animals. The first one is the lion". She lowers a lever and a lion comes out of a cage. "Study this animal". Everyone runs. She then says:

"Dig the earth over here". They all go dig and find loads of worms. They were terribly disgusted and ran off.

Segment 3

Then it was time for Mathematics. The teacher said:

"My name is Eric, and I'm your Math teacher. In today's class we will calculate distances using this…" He takes a bow and arrow from his bag. Suddenly he shoots at the "point" objectivation causing Laila to do a "Matrix dodge", so as not to be hit by the arrow. Everyone shoots arrows and the class ends.

As can be inferred from the reading, the very expressive creative writing, which recreates everyday school culture, puts forward as one of its fundamental characteristics the embellishment of the challenges inherent to school subjects. It is striking how the guiding signs of each of the classes are explored in amplification/exaggeration causing a hiatus, or even a pendular movement between a simultaneously comic and distressing, disturbing effect, in which the corporeity of the characters is agentively responsive.

In the described classes, we perceive bodies that move actively and incessantly. The characters run and have to be adept at escaping imminent danger. The sensoriality of this symbolic body is also put forth by signs such as the "disgust" in the excavation of the earth in Science class, the "panic" in the flight from the lion in the Physical Education class or even the act of "dodging" to avoid being struck by an arrow in Math class. The classes present challenges that terrify the students, and their bodies are at their maximum vulnerability and also maximum strength, allowing them to distance themselves from danger and thus continue to attend the classes at the new school. With their bodies, the students escape from the dragon

(Segment 1), the lion and earthworms (Segment 2) and in Segment 3, Laila, the protagonist, is able to dodge the arrow shot by the Math teacher. We realise that the student characters in the narrative are constantly overwhelmed and put to the test at all times. The "laughter" sign (Segment 1) appears in the text, as proposed by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1999; Faraco, 2003) on the carnavalisation of literature, as an allegorical softening of the weight of the future or even the experienced affective excesses. Laughter would thus signal a moment of pendular detachment, an a posteriori of the discursive act, as opposed to the deep immersion in the exaggerated drama staged in class.

The language chosen by the author is pregnant with ambiguous meanings. For example, *running* announces something expected in a Physical Education class. "Today we are going to run a lot! Everyone was excited". However the teachers' statements never announce what would be expected in similar contexts. The language of the teacher character turns out to be misleading, rich in equivocity, that is, the simultaneous coexistence of distinct meanings in the same sign. "Suddenly she [the teacher] lets out a dragon from a cage and shouts: Run! Everyone panics and runs hard". In this fragment of textual production, the sign "run" presents itself in a polysemy of an impossible decision on the more convergent meaning, that which concentrates the sense of discursive action. "Running" varies in meanings ranging from a physical-recreational activity to a threat, a flight for survival from the threat.

Thus, the language used by the author to speak about the classes at the new school strikes the reader-researcher with the "excesses" that the signs carry, almost approaching a dream language, given the surrealism of the situations narrated on a school day. As was aforementioned, the student characters are always surprised by the meaning of the teacher's enunciative act. Studying animals and calculating distances are prerogatives of Science and Mathematics classes, respectively. However, studying animals in Science class means having to face a lion, and calculating distances in Math class translates into the shooting of arrows. The teachers' statements are loaded with meanings pregnant with dialogic ambiguity and refractions. Teacher Gabriela, for example, makes the students "run from a dragon" for 50 min, asks if they like the class and calls the students "soft" on top of it all.

Given the data, we question if the school transition narrated in the textual production indicates the written in amplification as aesthetic refraction in its sublime transmutation in the face of the negotiation between past and future, the undecidability and ambiguity of senses captured as well as the fundamental and affective-sensorial agentivity of the body in the protagonist's experience.

It is important to point out that, as the narrative unfolds, the reader is captured by the author's passion for pain and terror which, according to Burke (2015, p. 163), are modified so as to be harmless and capable of producing delight, a sort of tranquillity permeated by terror. Danger is presented by the author as an aesthetic experience that, in its clash with the mundane (the school daily routine), triggers the feelings of pleasure and horror that become the sublime, revealed in the reading of Laila's narrative. In our encounter with the text of the character who changes schools, we are affected by the language, by the emerging signs of Laila's writing. With this in mind, it is interesting to take another look at Burke's thoughts (2015, p. 163) on the impact of the words:

> [...] they [the words] seem to me to affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture; yet words have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as many of those, and sometimes a much greater than any of them [...]. (p. 199)

If words are thus so intense so as to deeply touch those who read them, the feelings of passion/upheaval surfacing in the reader, could one then say that the experience of the sublime can be recovered by the reader? In other words, to what extent could we speak of another's experience of the sublime based on our own resonances and interpretations?

Final Considerations

This chapter intends to construe an analysis on the interpretative possibilities of Psychology data related to the experience of the sublime as the border between the mundane and the beautiful (Valsiner, 2018). The undertaken exercise throws light on possible discursive markers of the experience of the sublime, yet it still pinpoints challenging, if not impeding, vicissitudes that emerge at the crossroads between the pragmatic objectivity of method and the affective, corporeal and semiotic intersubjectivity of the interpretation of the sublime.

Despite being a well-known theme since the eighteenth century in Europe, through Aesthetic Philosophy, the concept of sublime was recognised as the frontier area of the worldly and the beautiful and more recently transformed from Valsiner (2018). For other theorists from Philosophy, such as Lyotard (1993), the sublime lies in the idea of the inexpressible and the unrepresentable found in the here and now, just like in Kantian and Burke's aesthetic discussions. These theories become essential for aesthetic thinking.

Valsiner's (2018) proposal is taken up by a holistic, psychological and cultural perspective of the subject's experience in the world. He argues that the psychological process occurs at the border between the mundane, the sublime and the beauty. At this point of hermeneutical horizon, we recognise a theoretical reflection that investigates the complexity of lived life, in which the sublime provokes the transit of back and forth between past and future, through the creation of new experiences and signs throughout the sublime. In this way, Psychology may achieve the human aesthetic-creative sign construction as a response to life uncertainties or, even, as a way of dealing with feelings that emerge among the irreversible time. We hope, therefore, to entice the reader into broadening the research field on the aesthetic and sublime aspect of human becoming, strengthening the articulations and uniqueness between science, life and art.

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Part III
Ambivalence as a Norm for Encountering the Sublime

Chapter 8
Human *Psyche* As Inherently Ambivalent: Semiosis of Construction and Destruction

Jaan Valsiner

Of course it is nice to be positive. Psychology as science is not only positivist in its methodology—as the imperative to quantify any phenomenon to arrive at the data shows—but also to be naively positive in its major construal of the human *psyche*. What is being emphasized is solving (rather than creating) "problems", adapting to (rather transforming of) "environmental demands", and "becoming and being rich"—in the mind and in one's assets. This is a monological view of human living.

There can also be a dialogical view. Each human act takes place at the intersection of two dualities (called "infinities")—those of INTERNAL EXTERNAL and FUTURE PAST kind (Fig. 8.1). We actively explore our environments—aiming to reach the horizon and beyond (an impossible task)—and through that, we explore the vast areas of our subjective interiors. We live towards the future—making it up and turning into the instantaneous present (that vanishes into the past) through the support of reconstructing the past in our confabulatory ways—as Frederic Bartlett and Brady Wagoner have amply demonstrated. We are in constant movement—even if it seems that we just are as we are—being in a static state. Our self-reflection about our being as we are (ontological assumption) masks the reality of constant dynamic regulation of the steady state.

This *double* duality of human acts indicates that the normal state of any human psychological phenomenon is *at least* two-dimensional ambivalence. This is granted by the *Gegenstand*—an old German notion of "object" which includes an actor who goal—which directedly acts in relation to a border (limit) that resists to its being transcended (Fig. 8.2).

The abstract minimal structure of Fig. 8.2b can take very realistic form (Fig. 8.3) if some person is not permitted to enter into a room—such as the painter Gustave

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75
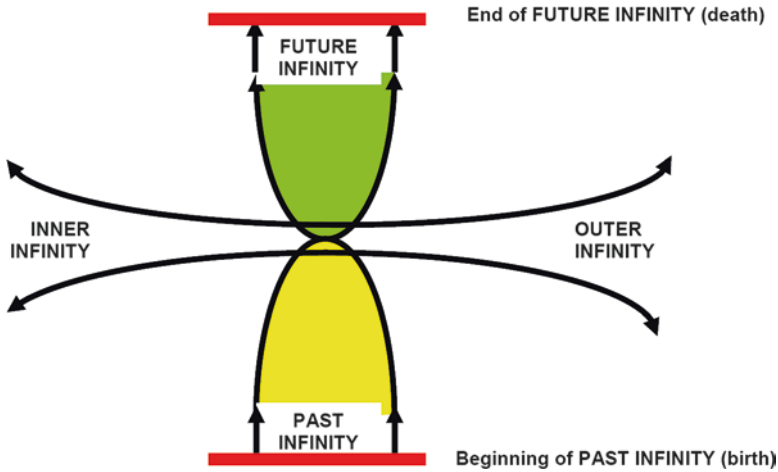
Fig. 8.1 The unity of two dual infinities

Fig. 8.2 The basic notion of *Gegenstand* (**b**) in contrast to thing (**a**). (**a**) Projection of THING. (**b**) Presentation of *Gegenstand* into the *psyche*
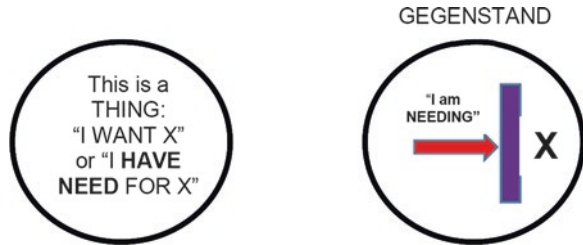
Courbet who was excluded from exhibiting in Paris *Salon* in the 1870s, or when you yourself try to keep some unpleasant ideas from your own subconscious reservoir of anything and everything. Or you make sure your apartment door is locked. We create selectively passable borders every day, every moment, and every domain of the four infinities (Fig. 8.1).

Such conditionally passable borders operate as *membranes*—regulating the exchange relations between adjacent parts of the system. You lock your apartment door so that nobody can enter without your permission—but in front of it, you put out a floor mat with "WELCOME" written on it. Such border messages can be graphically complex and renovated every day—as South Indian *kolam* chalk or rice paste drawings wear off under the feet of people (Fig. 8.4). The daily renewed ornaments on the doorstep are welcoming others into the home where happiness resides—presented as the result of women's diligent work in keeping up both the atmosphere and well-being of the home and the entrance message as it wears off.

Mapping the Gegenstand Structure onto the Mindscape of Infinities Where (and how) does semiotic mediation proceed, beyond the simple marking of the *Umwelt*[1]

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[1] *Umwelt* is the functional part of the environment that is used by the organism. In the human case, it includes the meaningful structures of the environment.

Fig. 8.3 *Gegenstand* in real opposition—fellow artists block the entrance of Gustave Courbet into the *Salon*

to make it meaningful? Human beings transcend the here-and-now setting through inventing signs that make sense of other signs—on the way toward generalization and hyper-generalization. Figure 8.5 illustrates the semiotic mechanism of arrival at the hyper-generalized feeling field of SAUDADE—as a result of inserted *Gegenstand* structures to each of the four directions of inquiry into the infinities. The result is the deeply meaningful feeling of I—that can end if any of the four barriers to the respective infinities become permeable. Thus, if—in the state of feeling *saudade*—a "promise" of "future happiness" (e.g., a winning lottery ticket) becomes known, the person moves from the bliss of the deep feeling into a different bliss of impending pleasure of the purchases with the help of the unexpected arrival of the money. Sudden enrichment kills *saudade*. Likewise, a similar elimination of the current overwhelming feeling would occur if the exploration of the outer infinity becomes opened (e.g., in the form of a new boy- or girlfriend) or by an ideational devotion (removing the barrier to inner infinity in Fig. 8.5). *Saudade* is a result of hyper-generalization of feeling into a pleromatic sign with infinite borders under condition of local blocking of all exploration possibilities (blocks A, B, C, and D in Fig. 8.5).

Fig. 8.4 A *kolam* pattern drawn in front of a house

Human lives are organized by semiotic mediation that happens in irreversible time (Target Paper 1) and thus necessarily entail the mutually linked processes of construction of something new and its corresponding destruction—via decay or active elimination—of something that had been created before. Most immediately, it is the emerging sign hierarchies themselves that can be destroyed at an instant (Fig. 8.6). This flexibility of sign hierarchies is crucial for effective *anticipatory preadaptation* to the imagined conditions of the immediate future.

Flexibility of the sign hierarchies is granted by the mutually interdependent processes of construction (of the hierarchy upward) and destruction (elimination of the constructed hierarchy in full, e.g., "*the ideas I have just had in my mind do not matter*"). This involves a dynamic dialogue in the meaning-making process: continue to the next level ($X + 1$)? or stay at the given level (X)? or demolish the whole constructed meaning and proceed further to direct experience?

The unity of construction and destruction is of course a standard aspect of human living. We use resources—and proceed to throw away the waste that we produce through such uses. We plan to build a new high-rise apartment building and demolish an old historic house to make the room for the new. We conquer the territory of our opponents, tear down their sacred temple, and build our own precisely on that
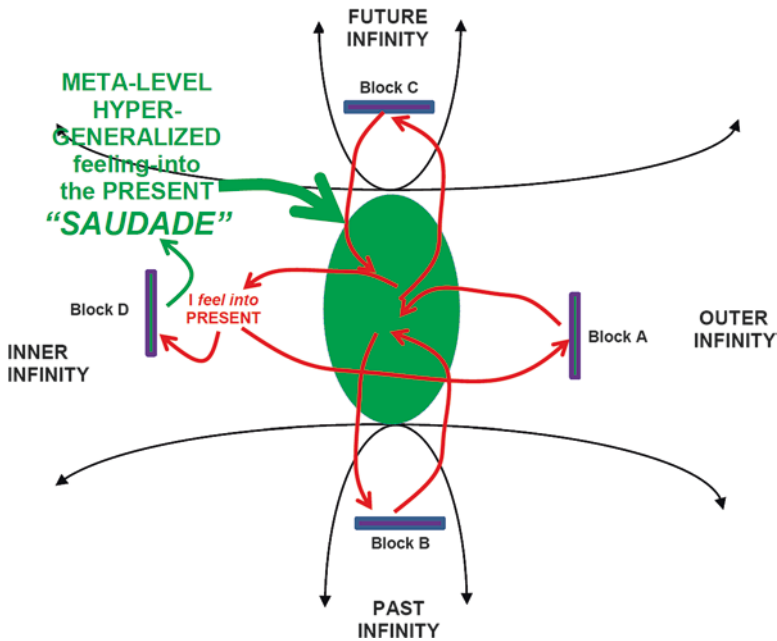
Fig. 8.5 Emergence of the sign-based third dimension of the dual infinities: the case of *SAUDADE*

spot—leading to symbolic controversies for centuries after that act of purposeful cultural vandalism by the force of power. We kill representatives of other animal species and prepare special foods from their bodies—and *stop in horror at the very thought* of possible cannibalism of our own kind. Yet we annihilate out enemies on battlefields and genocides with *giving them human respect* by building war cemeteries. Like the Hindu deity of Kali/Durga (Fig. 8.7), we are creators and destroyers at the same time—*construction and destruction are opposite processes within the same open system* of human ways of living.

The image in Fig. 8.7 is an iconic-symbolic sign—widespread in India—of the mythical female character of the goddess who is both a killer (of demons, depicted by the collection of heads cut off from their owners that she carries as trophies) and the loving mother who gives birth—creates new generation of human beings. For that she needs a husband (even goddesses should adhere to conventional moral norms, at times), and in her role as wife, Kali/Durga becomes subdominant to him when the circumstances trigger it. Figure 8.7 captures such circumstance—the man onto whom she is about to step is her husband, and that act about to happen triggers the feeling of *lajja* (approximate equivalent of shame) indicated by the protruded tongue. She stops her killing spree and reenters the role of loving wife and mother. The current violence is stopped by a sign—but it can be reactivated any time. Human beings create both life and ruins of life.
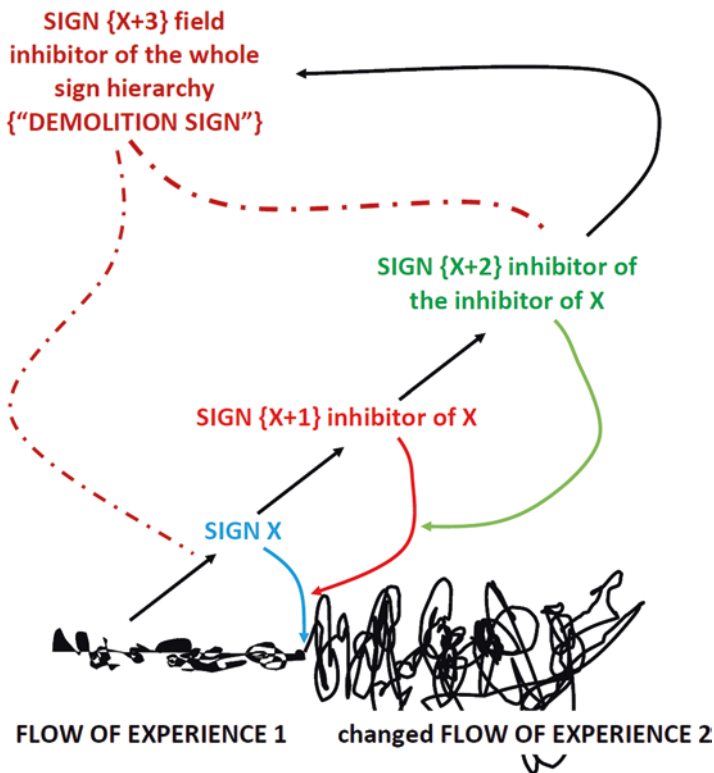
Fig. 8.6 The construction and destruction of dynamic sign hierarchies

Paradoxes of Relating to Destruction: The Values in Ruins

Ruins are destroyed or decaying—formerly functional—objects created and used by human beings. A tree fallen down in a forest and no longer growing is not a "ruin of a tree" but just old tree—now possibly usable as firewood or lumber. In contrast, a marble column once erected as a part of a temple, now lying down in disuse as the temple is destroyed ("ruined"), constitutes a ruin. That act of destruction could have been purposeful (military action—Fig. 8.8) or a result of mere abandonment of the upkeep of the object. Human cultural construction and subsequent destruction of objects result in ruins, while natural decay of an organism after its death is not a ruin. We do not eat *siri mole* and think that we are eating ruins—we eat the deliciously prepared food in Brasilia Teimosa.

In military conflicts the purpose of the act is to produce devastation—which results in ruins. After these acts are over, people passing the results of such devastation are reminded by the destroyed objects (indexical signs in C.S. Peirce's sense) of the act of destruction. They can rebuild the objects as these were before destruction (*Frauenkirche* in Dresden is an example of a meticulous success of this

Fig. 8.7   The image of Kali/Durga

endeavor), build something new on the spot, or let the devastated object stay in the social role of a ruin as a symbolic sign reminding the new generations of the one-time devastation (the Berlin *Gedächtniskirche* was left purposefully as a ruin after 1945 to be a monument to war devastations).

Ruins are destroyed and decaying objects of human former function that acquire new meanings for the present meaning-making for the future. In the eighteenth-century Europe—at the time of the emergence of philosophical discourses on aesthetics—the artistic depiction of ruins in various romanticized fashions became notable (Fig. 8.9).

Fig. 8.8 Proud production of ruins by precision bombing. (British Royal Air Force public display of action in Libya in 2011)

Fig. 8.9 Hubert Robert's painting of a landscape with ruins

Obviously such landscapes as in Fig. 8.9 did not exist in practice—they were creations of the artist's imagination. Yet from imagination comes novelty—with such combining of images, what made it of interest to the artist and to the audiences to become exposed to the visual depiction of ruins in painting?

The story becomes even more interesting if the imagined ruins are direct transformations on canvas of the artist's own immediate life or work *Umwelt*. There also exists a remarkable illustration of such kind—Hubert Robert painting in 1796 on the imaginary ruin of the Central Gallery of the Louvre art museum (the curator of which he himself was). The imaginary central gallery has devastated roof through which stormy clouds can be seen. The interior is completely deformed, and horrified people are trying to escape the devastation. Importantly that painting was made in 1796—3 years after Robert himself had been condemned to death (for painting another real devastation scene—French revolutionaries' purposeful devastation of the sanctuary of the French kinds in St. Denis Cathedral). He escaped the death sentence by a bureaucratic error in the executioners' bookkeeping and returned to his job as the curator of the Louvre art museum when the times became less destructive to the French society. Yet the image of the Louvre as a ruin was not a simple readout of his personal prison experiences—he had painted another picture of a slightly different kind of the same theme in the 1780s. It is the imagination of the artist who considers the interplay of the AS-IS and AS-IF (as-could-be) states of affairs.

Seen as signs of the possible, ruins as sign complexes are for the future. This basic principle is observable if we consider the practical use in everyday life of purposefully ruined objects that acquire surplus value by that act of ruining (Fig. 8.10). It is a good example of the unity of construction and destruction—in this case constructing an object by creating it with markers on destruction included.

Why would anybody in one's sane mind wear jeans with holes *specifically made in them* before they are purchased? And proudly worn in daily life—without the slightest embarrassment of wearing *ruined* clothing? The same person may feel very embarrassed if stains of oil appear on the t-shirt on top of the jeans as a result of careless eating—the t-shirt is "ruined" by the "dirty spots," while the jeans below are valued because of the "fashionable holes." Reference to "fashion" here does not explain the psychological reasons for the fashion—why would the holes become "fashionable" but "dirty spots" on t-shirts not?

An answer may be found in the processes of human movement into the realm of the sublime (Target Paper 2). The move to the "ruined image" is an example of the border zone of the mundane and the aesthetic—the latter notion is not applicable to the jeans, yet the holes bring the jeans out of the mundane realm and make them "special."

What would happen if a ruin itself is turned into a ruin—which may take the form of a fully restored replica of the original object (Fig. 8.11)? The *Frauenkirche* in Dresden has been restored to the image of what it was like before World War II. Some of the stones in the reconstruction (visible by their dark color in the building in Fig. 8.11) come from the ruined original. The oth-

Fig. 8.10 The ruin of the ordinary object—in practical use

ers are new. The whole *Gestalt* of the church is carefully reconstructed. This is a ruin of a ruin—a meta-ruin—that restores the building into its original form with new content.

How would the church in Dresden compare with the jeans (Fig. 8.10)? The rarity of the original stones in the building (Fig. 8.11) makes it almost the opposite of the dominance of the orderly over the "holes." Or maybe the original stones are the equivalent of the holes in the jeans—allowing the viewer to get a glimpse of the original object wrapped into new textures? The examples of holes in jeans—very visible in the public places—abound in high variety. Of course fashion shows are special arenas for exercising human imagination between the mundane and the beautiful. It is not only in the case of examples of jeans which are a conglomerate of holes but also in many other extreme creations of fashions that are useless for everyday wear that are appreciated with the feeling of awe—and not that of beauty. The fashions displayed may be mind-boggling, rather than beautiful, and through that they perform their function of exposing the viewers to the realm of the sublime (Target Paper 2).

Fig. 8.11 Is rebuilding of a ruin into the replica of the original a meta-ruin?

General Conclusion: Ambivalence of Construction and Destruction in Creating Arenas for Encountering the Sublime

To summarize my message across the three Target Papers of this volume, *it is not the beautiful, but the sublime, that is central for human cultural development* as a species. More precisely—by forward-oriented semiosis—we put ourselves into new settings where we encounter the sublime, experience it affectively, and continue our mundane living along the trajectories of the life courses that are subjectively comfortable for the persons. The ambivalence of striving for the beautiful and unknown (*Fernweh* in terms of Ernst E. Boesch) and the known and "safe" (*Heimweh* in Boesch's terms) is constantly a process of being proactively tried out, experienced, and transformed. Ambivalence within the system of dualities of infinities (Fig. 8.1) is the root for all human development. In other terms, development is made possible through the border of the past and future through the processes of anticipatory imagination that regulate the transformation of the present ambivalence into a new form.

Chapter 9
Preserved Traces of Destroyed Sign Hierarchy: From Genetic Parenting to Adoptive Parenting

Tatiana Valério and Nathaly M. Ferreira-Novaes

Human lives develop and are organized semiotically, resulting in opposing interconnected processes that construct and destruct hierarchical sign systems.[1] Jaan Valsiner (Chap. 8 in this volume) argues that this destructive movement is inherent to the ambivalent nature of the human psyche and gives rise to new semiotic hierarchies whose flexibility is preadaptive to future conditions imagined in the development of human life trajectories.

In this chapter we propose to discuss and illustrate the construction-destruction semiosis of such hierarchical systems, emphasizing *preserved traces* of destroyed signs (valuation of genetic affiliation) in the emergence of the transition toward the decision to adopt and the creation of a new sign (adoptive filiation being feasible) which occur in the process. We will approach the trajectory of a heterosexual couple – from the rupture with their desire to get pregnant with their first biological child to their decision to adopt a child. The study of the process took place through the analysis of the symbolic resignifications made by the couple once facing (1) rupture with the desire to get pregnant after several unsuccessful attempts and (2) the perspective that adoption had become the only possibility for them to become parents.

According to Riley and Van Vleet (2012), in anthropological and sociological views, adoption as a cultural system reflects the various social structures and their specific forms of organization, including within private family frameworks. According to these authors, we can, through adoption, (a) gain important insight about the process individuals face and the norms they maintain or chal-

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[1] On hierarchical sign systems, see Valsiner, 2007, 2014.

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lenge in the construction of their families and (b) observe that families are not simply private entities or interpersonal relationships but are also culturally guided. We add that adoption is marked by beliefs that integrate the semiotic regulation system, which constructs personal meanings toward deciding, or not, to build a family through adoption. Throughout the human trajectories that shape this decision, dynamic sign systems undergo hierarchical reconfigurations at different levels, which allow resignifications regarding adoption and, consequently, accomplishing it.

To illustrate this phenomenon, we analyzed data gathered during the three interviews (I.1, I.2, and I.3). The interval from one interview to another was approximately 40 days, due to the availability of participants. I.1 addressed the couple's desire to have children, not considering adoption an option. I.2 and I.3 followed up addressing the couple's new outlook on adoption, once it became the only possibility for them to become parents. It was during the interview period that the interviewees faced the rupture with pregnancy, which was decisive for them to consider the decision to adopt. Meaning it was possible for us to access the destruction process of the sign hierarchy that regulated the couple toward the decision to become parents through pregnancy and the emergence of the transition process that led to the acceptance of adoption as a way to become parents in the future.

Our analysis of the case study draws on the quadratic unit proposed by Valsiner (2014, 2018). In it, it is understood that the human psyche is constantly negotiated through the process of constructing meanings, occurring in the present (semiotic border) and the intersection of two dualities (or infinities): future < > past/inner < > outer. From this perspective, from the rupture experienced by the couple in the attempt to get pregnant, we explored the tension and ambivalence in the coordination of the two infinities that promoted the change in point of view and the subsequent decision: to consider adoption as a way of becoming parents, although the decision had not yet been consolidated by the couple.

"We Do not Want to Adopt": The Valuation of Pregnancy as a Regulating Sign of the Desire to Become Parents

Ryan (39) and Sarah (40), Brazilian, have been married for 5 years and do not have children but want to realize the dream of getting pregnant. Six months after getting married, they made several unsuccessful attempts to get pregnant naturally. After some time, they investigated what was preventing their success and underwent surgical interventions (he for varicocele and she for fallopian tube obstruction). However, still unable to become pregnant, they opted for artificial insemination, since it is the only assisted reproduction treatment allowed by the Roman Catholic Church – a religious community they participate in – leaving aside other methods that current technological advances in medicine could provide them with. At the time of I.1, they were contemplating a third artificial insemination attempt. At that

time, adoption was not yet a desired option by the couple, although the Church did present it as one of the possibilities for them to have children.

The couple shared affective fields[2] (Valsiner, 2007) which set the tone for their personal interpretation of human reproduction, regulated by a Christian point of view or rather the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church. Once the couple had to redefine how to get pregnant, they had to ask a religious leader, Father Tom, as representative of that cultural system, for guidance regarding assisted reproduction procedures. They sought not to contradict the teachings of that institution, indicating religiosity as an important regulator of their social practices, as shown in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1:

Ryan: Yeah... we researched, and... we had Father Tom's support. He did all the religious research, what could be done, what couldn't, how far it could go, how the procedure was... and we had friends who had done it, including people here in town that were successful.

The frustration of reproduction by sexual means did not prevent them from pursuing the pregnancy; it only mobilized the couple to investigate and opt for other strategies that would lead them toward it. Faced with infertility, they find in the priest's narrative two new possibilities to fulfill their desire to be parents: adoption and artificial insemination. The quote above shows that, after religious permission, directing which paths would be "correct," the success of their friends with artificial insemination appears as a sign that promotes Sarah and Ryan's choice for the method, increasing their hopes to get pregnant this way. They wanted to exhaust their chances of attempting a pregnancy before they considered adoption.

In this process, two aspects, at more abstract levels, are identified as the regulatory signs for the maintenance of the desire for pregnancy, which directed the couple to artificial insemination, instead of considering adoption:

(a) *The value of the pregnancy for the couple*: Ryan states that "the ego... to beget a child, the fact that it came from you... it has its weight." And Sarah outlines her motivation for wanting to get pregnant and become a mother: "It's a matter of... fulfillment, because I'm a woman."
(b) *The personal meaning of adoption as consolation prize*: the couple reports their intimate friends' adoption suggestion, as an immediate solution to infertility, since they know of the existent desire to become parents, as described below:

Excerpt 2:

Sarah: There are also people who advise us to adopt as if adoption were, you know, a consolation prize. And it is not just from this angle that we would like to adopt. 'Ah, you can't get pregnant, so... adopt.' [...] I understand their point of view, since they see our desire, and they want us to be happy, so they try and find a solution right away.

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[2] "The notion of affective fields suggests that living situations which were attributed a specific feeling – for example, 'adoption is a problem' or 'adoption is good' – will regulate (semiotic regulation) future encounters between this person and the social environment" (Valério, 2013).

As we can see in Ryan's speech, the ability to beget a child is valued in the role of increasing his self-esteem, his "ego." For Sarah, such valorization is directly related to the feeling of "fulfillment," the completeness of "being a woman." Their speeches mark the desire to be a biological father and mother as a synthesis of the gender conceptions, the feminine and masculine internalized by individuals throughout their development.

Nascimento (2006) emphasizes that the experience of the impossibility of generating a child occurs differently for men and women due to the social roles that are culturally reserved for them. According to the author, "it is inevitably concluded that women tend to further define their identity through motherhood, while men question their potency and virility in infertility" (p. 15), it being common in married couples or in those in a stable relationship, a strong relation between the notions of fatherhood and masculinity. Thus, these meanings dialogue and strengthen each other, being a key part of the personal constructions of being man, for Ryan, and of being woman, for Sarah.

Under these conditions, such meanings are usually resistant and persistent, not unchangeable, however. Thus, although possible, the destruction of the semiotic set that structures them is more difficult to happen, even in the face of the infertility troubles experienced initially by the couple. This is shown in the continued search for pregnancy and the resistance toward adoption when sexual intercourse attempts are frustrated, thus moving toward the option of artificial insemination.

Consistent with this perspective, the way Sarah interpreted the social suggestions for adoption outlines a certain meaning that circulates in the collective culture and is also shared by the couple. The desire to exhaust all possibilities of getting pregnant, biologically, before choosing adoption, dialogues with the idea of valuing the biological child and not the adoptive child. Only when convinced that pregnancy is unattainable and, therefore, that it is impossible to give birth to a biological child, the choice to become adoptive parents comes into okay, as will be shown below.

"We Wanted to Get Pregnant, but Now Adoption Is in Our Plans": Impossible Pregnancy and the Continued Dream of Becoming Parents

In their life trajectories, people experience regularities and moments in which those are interrupted (Zittoun, 2012). To discover that a child cannot be generated biologically, for example, is a disruptive event in the life course of those who wish to become pregnant. Studies that investigate developmental processes of human life seek to identify specifically the ruptures in life trajectories (Zittoun, 2006) and, consequently, their resulting transitions, which require resignification and reorientation of that trajectory (Zittoun, 2012).

Ryan and Sarah, in I.2 and I.3, expose the anxieties and tensions present in the experience of the rupture and the initial process of transition that they now experience, culminating in considering adoption as a possibility to fulfill their desire to become parents. The transformation of the regulatory sign system of personal experiences, when it comes to the desire of having a child, was remarkable in the process. After the third attempt at artificial insemination failed, there were no more chances to become pregnant, and they understood that as a rupture in their lives. Until then the ruptures experienced had kept them looking for a pregnancy, and therefore were not perceived as such. Experienced ruptures require substantial, profound changes and adjustment processes between the individual and his/her environment (Zittoun, 2012). The way for Sarah and Ryan, then, would be to rethink what to do and how to do it to keep up with the goal of becoming parents in life. At no point during the rupture-transition experience did the couple consider the possibility of giving up being parents because of the inability to biologically generate a child. The possibilities listed by them, regulated by the Church, were artificial insemination and adoption.

As we have already discussed, the desire to be parents is socially constructed. In it are implied historical and cultural constructions of the identities of being a man and being a woman. For example, in Western society, motherhood is an established role for women, which often ends up being understood as natural. In the process of socialization of girls, their playtime is often filled with games with dolls that reproduce the role of a mother, thus defaulting motherhood to the feminine gender. The same is not usually true for boys.

These interactions that children establish in sociocultural spaces constitute subjectivities, which dialogue and readjust throughout their development, according to demands that arise in their paths. There is, therefore, a confluence of these ideas with the motivations presented by Sarah to get pregnant, as previously mentioned. In the interviewee's speech, the naturalization of motherhood merges with the idea of a fulfilled woman – an internalized cultural construction. Given the weight this carries within Sarah's self, as a unique being inside a given society, what to do before the impossibility of a pregnancy?

The frustration of the third artificial insemination, associated with the awareness of infertility, steered the couple toward adoption as the only possible alternative (which didn't go against the religious discourse) to coping with the rupture. That is, adoption would be the possibility that would allow for the maintenance and viability of the desire for parenthood. These conditions catalyzed dynamics for the resignification of such parenthood, through the necessary destruction of the hierarchical configuration of the signs that regulated personal meanings – both those related to pregnancy and those against adoption. Dialogically, a new semiotic organization was configured, able to bear new meanings, now pro-adoption, partially disengaging the desire for parenthood from pregnancy. This process, therefore, shows change but also permanence, in the coexistence of previous configurations with the most recent ones.

Below is a quotation that illustrates the tension experienced by Sarah and new way of dealing with adoption, exhibiting the process of emergence of a new sign about becoming a mother:

Excerpt 3:

Sarah (I.2): I think, of the two of us, I resisted a lot more, because of... fulfillment, for being a woman, and everything else... But from the moment I realized that he was totally open to adoption, I started opening up too. And my previous way of thinking: "I'm not adopting right now, I'm not going to think about adoption" because people would think: "Oh, she couldn't get pregnant, so she adopted" to... 'make up for it'... No, I changed my mind... I don't even want to know what people are or aren't thinking! [laughs] Let them think what they want I... What I want today, really, is... to find, embrace a child whom I will love with all my heart... [both get emotional].

It is the process of constructing meanings about lived experiences that reveal a flexibility that is crucial in the hierarchy of signs for an effective preadaptation of the imagined conditions of the future – in the case of Ryan and Sarah, becoming parents. It is in the coordination of the two dualities (inner-outer/future-past) of the semiosis of construction-destruction that borders can be crossed and exploited, since it is a human act (Marsico, 2011). In this case, the exploitation of the "future infinity" (becoming parents) hails adoption as a possibility of parental relationship. Figure 9.1, proposed by Valsiner (Chap. 8 in this volume, p. 80), helps us understand
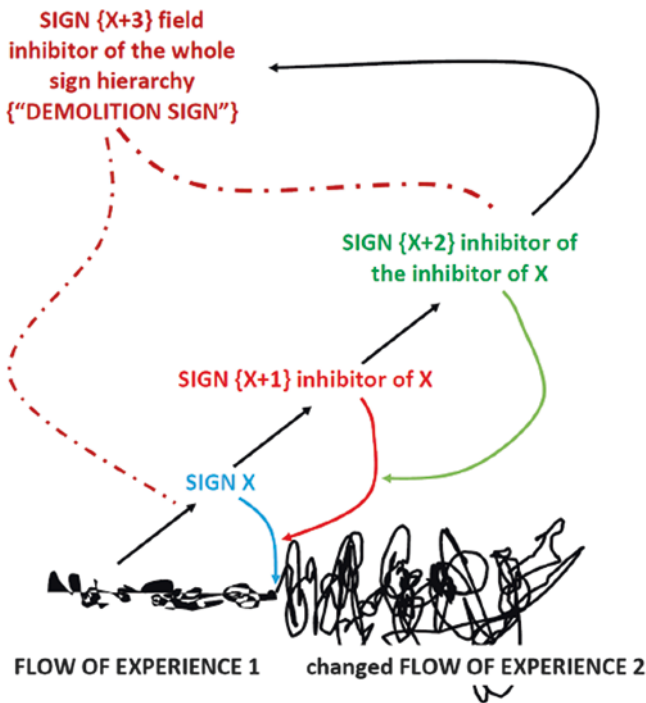
Fig. 9.1 The construction and destruction of dynamic sign hierarchies (Valsine, Chap. 8 in this volume, p. 80)

the destruction of the sign hierarchy that occurs in the dialogical relationship between the imagined future and past experiences.

For the couple, SIGN X, "becoming parents by getting pregnant naturally," is inhibited by SIGN {X + 1}, "having physiological limitations – varicocele (him) and blocked tubes (her)." Thus, SIGN {X + 1} generates resistance and inhibits the achievement of pregnancy (value directly linked to the idea of genetic parenting) for the couple. The couple undergoes the necessary surgical interventions, and the problem is not resolved. Thus, "not being able to conceive either naturally or through artificial insemination," SIGN {X + 2} acts as an inhibitor of SIGN {X + 1} in this dynamic. Only after the third unsuccessful artificial insemination attempt does the couple accept the condition of their infertility. According to Valsiner's proposal presented in Figure 9.1, SIGN {X + 3}, infertility, is the sign which destructs the hierarchy of SIGN X, SIGN {X + 1}, and SIGN {X + 2}, because it destroys, in semiotic terms, that which supported SIGN X – in the present case, the values, feelings, and meanings that valued genetic affiliation and the necessity of a pregnancy to become parents, as opposed to adoption as an authentic form of parenting. This process then gives rise to the construction of a new sign: "it is possible to become parents through adoption, and not only through the biological path" – SIGN Y.

In the semiotic process of building a new meaning on becoming parents, the other duality (inner-outer) is coordinated with that (future-past) which we referred to earlier. And it is in this coordination that ambivalence presents as inherently constitutive of the process, revealing that even when the couple turns to adoption, *preserved traces* of the destroyed sign – here represented by the value of genetic parenting – leave marks in the construction of the new SIGN Y (I can become a parent through adoption), as we shall see later.

From Excerpt 3 we gather that Ryan's attitude of considering adoption as a form of parenting before Sarah seems to have acted as a sign that prompted her to also consider adopting as a possible way for them to become parents, especially now that pregnancy was a nonexistent possibility to fulfill her desire of being a mother. She claims that noticing his interest in finding a child available for adoption – even as they were waiting for the result of the second artificial insemination attempt – "kind of motivated me to seek adoption as well."

For Ryan the feeling came over him in his parish, when he met a little boy, during the visit of a group of nuns who ran an orphanage in a neighboring city. This boy, about 18 months old, also called Ryan, lived with the nuns and was available for adoption. Ryan says that when he saw him, he imagined being the one to adopt him: "At the time, I... I kept to myself... Then I thought, well, I could adopt that child." This event seems to have been a catalyst sign for Ryan, in that it created the necessary circumstances for something to happen – in this case, the change in his line of thought. Cabell and Valsiner (2014) point out that:

> Semiotic catalyzers are a noninvasive intervention (whereas regulators are invasive). They are the conditional or contextual support within which something occurs. Any cause and effect, stimulus and response, or two associated phenomena work in so much as they have the proper conditions to do so. They provide directional flavoring and support, aid, and enablement, and without them certain meditational processes (i.e., certain semiotic regulators) cannot operate. (p. 12)

Thus, the catalyst sign for Ryan's personal dynamics seems to have been the experience he had with a child available for adoption, which made him think and consider the possibility the child being made his through adoption. During I.2, recalling this distal experience (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2014) allowed the couple to let memories, meanings, and feelings from that distant context to invade the immediate context, integrating the distal experience to the proximal experience. On the one hand, this integrative dynamic reveals the dialogicity of the human mind (Marková, 2003; Zittoun, 2013) occurring between the future-past infinities. On the other hand, this event, at the time, triggered in Ryan feelings and a process of thought and new constructions of meaning about the possibility of becoming a parent through adoption, revealing itself in the inner-outer infinities present in this dynamic. Thus, in the coordination of the dualities future (adoption) < > past (pregnancy) and inner (values connected to genetic filiation vs pro-adoption line of thought) < > outer (meanings for and against adoption existent in society), the couple opens up a semiotic passage which enables them to consider adoption as a future condition for becoming parents.

Faced with a choice that had not yet been considered, Sarah and Ryan initiate a movement to re-signify both the condition of not being able to biologically generate a child and the condition of becoming parents through adoption. In the face of successive ruptures and the realization of the impossibility of the desired pregnancy, they feel more strained, and in order to deal with that, they resort to symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2012) which assist in the distancing from the here and now and in the construction of new meanings:

Excerpt 4:

Ryan (I.2): But you also have got to understand God's project… Maybe it was not this way that we would have this child... Maybe... It was... It was difficult for me to accept that I would not be able to beget a child. [...] He (the priest) said that we… we should pay attention to what God was trying to do, and that, in fact, Sarah and I would adopt a child. And that, perhaps, now we would have understood, in our mind's eye, what God wanted from us... [...] In a way, he [the priest]... made me understand and have this desire for adoption... He led me to create, in my heart, the desire for adoption.

Excerpt 5:

Sarah (I.2): [...] I want to understand God's plans. [...] That's the way I think today. I no longer intend to pursue insemination. From today on I give up on the insemination thing. I will not seek more human help... My help will come from God's will... I will put my faith in that.

Two classes of symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2012), *institutional* (church) and *interpersonal relations* (priest), can clearly be identified in Excerpts 4. and 5, above. The meaning constructed over the infertility experience points them toward the other possibility recommended by the Church – adoption. Given the circumstances, it became possible for the couple to re-signify their desire to be parents, and adoption became a possibility for the couple. However, it is important to note that Sarah, even when she started considering adoption, never abandoned totally her desire for pregnancy. So she attributes the resolution of the impossible presented by reality to the

Divine, everything can be, if it is also His will. This fact denotes the persistence of preserved traces of destroyed signs coexisting with the emergence of other new signs, in the process of semiotic regulation that acts upon Sarah's desire to be a mother.

The two excerpts below illustrate what we call *preserved traces* of destroyed signs in the emergence of constructing a new meaning about being parents:

Excerpt 6:

Sarah (I.3): What made it change, [...] I began to [...] observe people... and see happiness, in both. In the adopting mother, who acted just *as if it were a biological child*, and also the joy of the child in treating her as a mother. So... all these thoughts started at the moment I began to observe... when things started to go wrong, you know, or could possibly go wrong... Because I started to observe before the 3rd insemination... I thought "if it works, okay, if it goes wrong"... I had to have... other views too... so I started to observe more. The issue of adoption became... closer to my heart. It became... more present in my life.

Excerpt 7:

Ryan (I.2): Today, I would love it the same way I would *if it were a child of my… a biological child*. [...] I used to think that I could love, but would have reservations... because of it not being biologically mine. He could have traits of the father, of the mother, you see?

In Excerpt 6, there is evidence of the ambivalent dynamics of the restructuring of the ideas about adoption. Observing the happiness of mothers with adoptive children, both being invested in the relationship, helped Sarah to reconsider this other way of exercising her motherhood, though strongly marked by the presence of values attributed to adoptive filiation as if it were second class or fictitious, as seen through the expression "as if it were a biological child," also identified in Excerpt 7, when mentioned by Ryan. Here, we identify the preserved traces of the destroyed sign, which is linked to biological or genetic parenthood.

This data corroborates with Modell (1997) when affirming that biological parenthood is viewed as superior to adoptive in Western society. According to the author, the first is perceived as real, while the latter is understood as fictitious. Valério and Lyra (2014) also found discourses based on biological factors to legitimize adoptive filiation. The ambivalence identified both by the authors and by us in this study signals the elimination of that which is "unfavorable" – adoptive parenthood – which is then replaced by factors linked to biological affiliation, exclusively (Valério & Lyra, 2014, p. 721).

In Ryan's case, having a child who does not have his genetic traits means also dealing with the fear of the unknown, because he does not know where the child comes from. It seems to be distressing or threatening that the child may have the traits of the biological father and mother, which initially motivated him to think that he would love an adoptive child with "reservations" (Excerpt 7). The changing of these thoughts was prompted, according to Ryan, by the impossibility of having a biological child.

Sarah, in her speech, also brought up that her thoughts about adoption also emerged from the possibility of failure in their last attempt to conceive – a biological dysfunction – as suggested, for example, by the expression "if it goes wrong"

(Excerpt 6). According to Schettini (2008, p.12), "for most people, the idea of adoption is based on the existence of a frustration of biological expectations. [...] Adoption therefore appears as a solution to biological or psychological failure." Other studies (Levinzon, 2006; Schettini Filho, 1998) also point to infertility as the main motivation for adoptive parenting, representing a rupture in the life trajectory of people who wish to have children. Valério (2013), on the other hand, emphasizes that this rupture is not only of a biological nature but also, and mainly, of a cultural nature, since it symbolizes a break in society's expectation toward procreation, as opposed to the historically agreed-upon and valued norm for families to have children.

Andrade, Costa, and Rossetti-Ferreira (2006) found that many men faced with infertility mean adoption as a barrier to be faced, which is comes into place only after the possibilities for the initially desired biological parenthood have been exhausted. Sato et al. (2007b) point out that "being made aware of infertility and considering adoption are not merely personal experiences and/or life choices, but are historically structured experiences" (p. 98). The interviewed couple posed that adoption came to be considered by them only as things started going "wrong," when they did not go as planned:

Excerpt 8:

Sarah: If it had all gone well, maybe I'd never... have thought of adoption... but it, the pos-sibility has been getting stronger as things aren't going the way we dreamed and envi-sioned... and it becomes more established once you turn your mind's eye... to... to this option to love.

Excerpt 9:

Ryan: I think I had to go through those insemination steps (three failed attempts) to come to that conclusion. I had to go through these losses, because it is a loss.

It is important to note that the choice for adoption was also brought forth by the dialogical relationships, as aforementioned, between what each individual had already built personally on gender conceptions and the desire to be biological par-ents – throughout their development – and what each individual was actually going through (not being able to get pregnant). It seems as if, in a dynamic movement of negotiation between personal culture, collective culture, and biological reality signs, as well as between the past and the future, the couple, in the period of interviews I.2 and I.3, is being invited to re-signify their present roles and desires, generating new syntheses that culminated in the decision to adopt. However, to withstand these changes, the symbolic constructions of motherhood and fatherhood are being trans-formed over time. The individuals have been striving for the valorization of the "biological child" to give way to the "adoptive child," although we see, at the end of I.3, that this process was still very unstable, even after Ryan's change in point of view when thinking about adoption (Excerpt 7).

The individuals themselves realize that their perspectives on adoption have changed. However, we note that preserved traces of destroyed signs are present in the couple's now pro-adoption discourse. Such traces, perceived in the construction of the new meanings about becoming parents through adoption, seem to us to be a

defining feature of the transition process that begins exactly in the period of interviews (I.2 and I.3) with the couple. The construction of the data, therefore, occurred in real time in the process of rupture and transition for Ryan and Sarah.

Preservation as Part of the Hierarchical Destruction of Signs: Some Considerations

We seek to discuss and illustrate, based on a case study, the semiosis of the construction and destruction of the hierarchy of signs occurring in the experience of an unattainable pregnancy for a couple, as well as the emergence of the construction of a new sign. They experience a strong rupture during the data-building process (they cannot get pregnant through artificial inseminations), and they then begin to consider adoption as the path that will lead them to parenthood. With this event, we were able to access the rupture process while it occurred, allowing us to emphasize the tensions and ambivalence experienced by the couple. In addition, it was possible to identify the beginning of the transition process demanded by the rupture experienced. In this dynamic, we also identify a semiotic process of maintenance of what we call *preserved traces* of destroyed signs ("the value of pregnancy," "adoption as a consolation prize," and "biological parenthood seen as superior to adoptive parenthood"). Figure 9.2, an enlargement of Figure 9.1 – which was proposed by Jaan
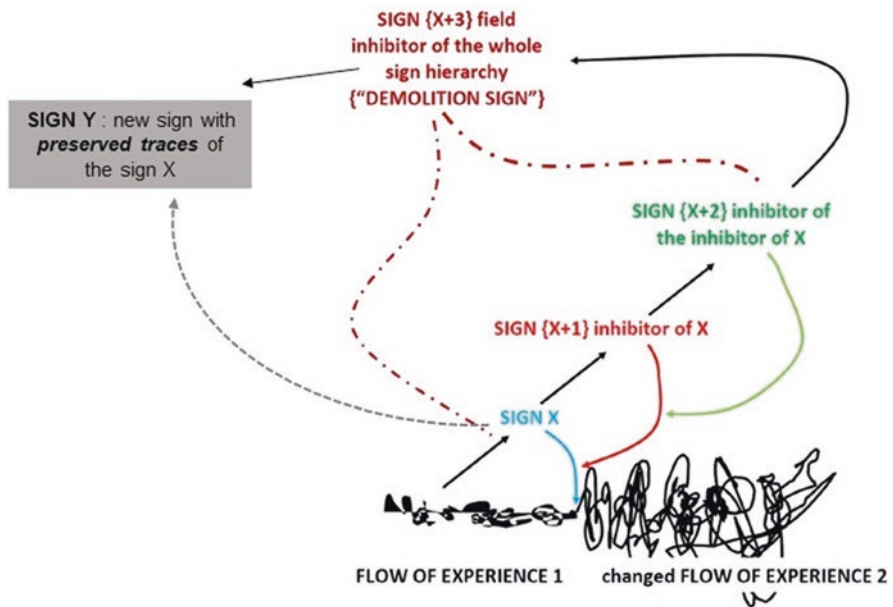
Fig. 9.2 Preserved traces of SIGN X in the emergence of SIGN Y

Valsiner, Chap. 8 in this volume – illustrates this maintenance in the emergence of a new sign, the SIGN Y.

This dynamic of destruction of hierarchy of signs to construct a new sign emerged from several ruptures experienced by the couple in their trajectories toward the realization of parenthood and involves emotions, feelings, fantasies, expectations, and mnemonic reconstructions among other things. Its organization tends to find relative stability over irreversible time, as well as temporal distance from the experiences of rupture through the successive symbolic elaborations on parenting and adoption, which contribute to support the decision to adopt and legitimize it in their experiences.

Such an organization could not be captured in this study because there was no temporal distance from the rupture phenomenon, nor can we affirm categorically that the participants were engaged in a transition (Zittoun, 2009). Thus our case study suggests that monitoring the real-time evolution of coping with rupture and transition expands the findings about the rupture experience but limits the investigation of the transition itself.

However, we emphasize that in confronting the rupture, values and meanings that previously distanced the couple from adoption and pushed them toward pregnancy as the only way to experience parenthood continue in the collective culture and in contact with the process of constructing a new sign ("we want to adopt"), which leads them to the desired and possible future ("becoming parents"). Thus, it seems to us that *preserved traces* of the destroyed signs become part of the process of the construction of new signs in the emergence of the transition process, as illustrated in this study. Further investigation monitoring the already consolidated transition, that is, considering temporal distance from the phenomenon, could confirm if such preserved traces of the destroyed signs present in the emergence of the construction of new meanings would remain or not.

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Chapter 10
Sublime Moments in the Light of Developmental Trajectory: An Exploration of the Unit of Analysis

Maria C. D. P. Lyra and Mariana Bentzen Aguiar

Introduction

This chapter analyzes sublime moments emerging in the life trajectory of an adolescent girl that does self-harming. The theoretical perspective based on cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics (Valsiner, 2007, 2014, target chapter) guides the construction of the unit of analysis that takes the reconstructed sublime moments on the moving from their mesogenetic context toward an ontogenetic developmental achievement. This means that around the sublime experience, the backward developmental changes and forward developmental movement are the length of this unit. The sign-meaning dynamics within this period relating the intrasubjective and intersubjective exchanges, immersed in sociocultural milieu, comprise the content of this unit. Moreover, we aim to methodologically contribute to a unit of analysis that can apprehend the sublime experience in a constant interaction of this girl's intersubjective and intrasubjective dynamics as they occur in irreversible time of living illustrated by the development of her life trajectory.

We intend to circumscribe the unit of analysis that presents the sublime experience in its developmental changing dynamics of a reconstructive sign-meaning process. Thus, we aim to grasp the process of destructing and constructing sign-meanings by analyzing the reconstructive power of past experiences and the projected imagined future, inferred in the trajectory "chosen" by the adolescent. In order to present this unit of analysis, we will first introduce a summary of the studies regarding self-harming followed by an introduction of the concept of Avenues of Directive Meaning as they delineate the mesogenetic conditions of emergence of the sublime moments. Finally, we will present the four developmental periods that compose our analysis. The first one comprises the previous conditions of the sublime moment

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found at the mesogenetic developmental level. The second one furnishes evidence of the emergence of the sublime moment in the adolescent's trajectory – who we will agree to call Alice from this moment on – and its connections with the arising of "who am I" questions. The third and fourth developmental periods correspond to the emergence of an integration of the transformation resulted from these sublime moments composing an ontogenetic life trajectory. In the third period, we emphasize the change in the concept of love as a construction-destruction process that comprises a new sublime moment that mobilizes the construction of new meanings for oneself, for the world, and, therefore, for the new ways to relate to them (particularly, the changes in cutting). In the fourth developmental period, we detail these mentioned changes (concepts of herself), highlighting the role of the meanings offered by collective culture through the interaction with the personal history of the subject and the construction of new Avenues of Directive Meaning (Lyra, Valério, & Wagoner, 2018).

Self-Harming as Sign-Meaning Destruction and Construction in Life Trajectories

According to Nock (2010), self-injury or self-harm is any act of deliberately imposing physical or psychological damage to oneself regardless of suicide intention. Therefore, these actions intend psychological equilibrium when facing very adverse situations – a condition of complete lack of any other possibilities to rely on other more psychosocially conceived possibilities as a way to adapt and to deal with these circumstances. In such context, self-harming becomes the only way for a person to adapt (Nock, 2010).

In human history, we find examples of self-harming behaviors due to the adaptation to social environments – or the collective culture that surrounds the person, pervading many cultures (e.g., rituals or cultural traditions such as neck deformation in African tribes, self-flagellation by religious groups, the practice of piercing and tattooing) (Almeida & Horta, 2010). These examples referred to above are not considered to be pathological. However, the desire for self-harm is commonly classified as being pathological nowadays in the so-called developed societies. Harming yourself is classified as maladjustment because it lacks shared communication with the sociocultural milieu – whether it be religious or sociocultural. Thus, Rosenbaum (2016) claims that self-harming is socially unacceptable as it is a practice that does not positively promote the construction of socially shared meanings, being limited to the scope of the private. In other words, we prefer to say that, in opposite direction, collective meaning considers self-harming as an unacceptable practice and, therefore, it is maintained as a private practice. This is what, for this author, differs self-injuring from other self-injurious practices (e.g., piercing and tattooing) and makes most self-harmers hide their scars, while some hurt themselves in a very visible part of the body to show their scars to the world as a denunciation of this sociocultural misfit. Self-harming, thus, carries the possibility of involving strong

affective tension both regarding the person's intrasubjective and intersubjective dynamics by injuring the body.

In agreement with Valsiner (2014), we can say that the human body is the arena for the process of semiotic mediation of actively decomposing messages of the signs (internalization) and recomposing them into new intrapsychic patterns (externalization). Through this dual process, people create their personal uniqueness, the *psyche*, and leave their marks on their bodies (e.g., paintings or self-injuries). In this "arena," the skin is the ultimate border of the human body from the outside world. Thus, it is the "social membrane of the mind" (Valsiner, 2014, p. 71). Permanent or temporary marks on the skin have "(…) their internal counterpart in the psyche" (Valsiner, 2014, p.71) and, at the same time, send messages to others and to themselves. Thus, they carry a double function: an intrapsychological and an interpsychological function.

In the same line of reasoning, Rosenbaum (2016) claims that self-harmers use their bodies as an "interpretive canvass" (p. 1). He argues that injuries on a self-harmer's body emerge as a form of iconic representation of feelings and emotional states because they are not conventionally established, so they can be conceived as an absence of formulation and symbolic elaboration. Thus, these individuals take physical action to facilitate communication with themselves and with others.

Thus, self-harming encompasses a process of sign destruction-construction in their own body which aim is to feel adapted or accepted in their uniqueness by themselves, by others, and by the social milieu. This comprises intrapsychological and interpsychological claim for acceptance and adaptation to others and to the sociocultural milieu. Moreover, this process occurs in extreme emotional moments, carrying strong feelings and tension between these people and their sociocultural environment as self-injuries such as cutting are not well accepted in society and considered to be of a pathological behavior (Nock, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2016).

So, in the context of our study, self-harming is a sign which has three interesting points:

(a) It is done on the body; I mean, it is concretely externalized on the person's own body.
(b) It is a physical harming of the person's own body in order to construct a new meaning. Thus, it can be thought as including destruction-for-construction of a new meaning at the same time or in the same gesture regarding the own body.
(c) This new meaning emerges facing adaptation – to be accepted – to very demanding and extreme moments of high psychological tension in which extreme or intense feelings are involved.

These proposals are essential contributions because most of the researches seek to understand self-harm by its biological manifestation or by using tests or questionnaires as methods. Regarding biological etiology, Richardson and Zaleski (1983) associate the repetition of self-aggressive acts with the dependence on β-endorphin. Concerning the use of tests and questionnaires, there are plenty of them: Self-Harm Information Form (Croyle & Waltz, 2007), Self-Harm Behavior Survey (Favazza,

Derosear & Coneiro, 1989), and Self-Injury Survey (Zlotnick et al., 1996), among others. All these studies use nomothetic approaches to investigate the responses of individual samples. In an idiographic perspective, only two studies — which rely on people as related to a sociocultural environment — are found: a Foucauldian reading of the process of self-harm (Arcoverde, Amazonas & Lima, 2016) and the study by Rosenbaum (2016) already referred to, that focus on the body of self-harmed people as an interpretive canvas, vehicle of semiotic communication.

This small number of studies indicates that there is much to be contributed to the subject in terms of an analytical perspective. Considering cutting, in terms of adaptation, as a goal to be achieved – intrapsychologically and interpsychologically – we can see its construction in a life trajectory in which the projection to the future (Zittoun & Valsiner, 2016) is strongly constrained by the possibilities and limitations that are offered by the society (Lyra et al., 2018; Obeyesekere, 1990). Moreover, the meaning that it has can persist or change throughout life. That is why we propose cutting as a sign that emerges and develops, which comprises successive moments of the people's life trajectories developing toward a way of adapting to their feelings and desires and to others in the social group. To interpret the meaning of cutting for people requires to apprehend people's internal dynamics, their interactions with others and with the social milieu as part of their movement toward achieving or not the goal of feeling accepted and, therefore, adapted. Self-harming, analyzed through these lens, takes the role of what we call Avenues of Directive Meaning (ADM) (Lyra et al., 2018) to the center of our discussion in the next section of this chapter.

Avenues of Directive Meaning: Searching for Mesogenetic Conditions Toward Ontogenetic Development

The concept of ADM stresses the focus on interactions of a person with others in constant exchanges with the collective culture available in the sociocultural milieu. Meaning emerges through a movement that relies on the own person's history and on the possibilities available in the sociocultural environment in which the person lives (Lyra et al., 2018). This seems quite obvious; nevertheless, in many ways, there is a tendency to rely on the person's dynamics as the major locus of meaning construction dismissing the deep interactional and contextual – specific time and space – condition of people.

This inclination to focus on the person's dynamics is particularly clear in most self-injury studies. That's why we propose a new approach to this phenomenon: focusing on the negotiated exchanges of the self-harmer and the sociocultural environment. The focus on interactions of people with others as immersed in a sociocultural milieu, constructing meaning and acting guided by these interactions, is exactly the core of ADM's proposal. People that do self-harming require to be investigated by aiming to grasp the meaning of the process of construction of self-harming in specific time and place in which people develop their life trajectories.

ADM stresses that life trajectories are guided by the meaning one creates in order to pursue a goal to be achieved. Moreover, this goal is guided by societal organization disposed in collective culture. Thus, some possibilities of meaning construction are accepted during certain times and in specific contexts but not in others. For instance, during wartime to kill is accepted as an act of bravery and is honored as homeland defense. In times of peace, to take the life of another human being is not only reproved by the laws of the society but by religion and by society as a whole. This diversity of meaning is only possible due to the societal group guidance which creates these divergent possibilities to interpret the same action.

The idea that people construct meaning by navigating these avenues of possibilities of meaning construction offered by collective culture available in the society, directing toward constructing meaning for their acts in some ways and not in others, can be applied to self-harming. Self-harming as a sign emerges and develops as a person strives toward adaptation under societal guidance. These are moments of great tension in feelings from which cutting can emerge and develop as a way to adapt to results from the construction and destruction of signs and hierarchy of signs during people's navigation through these avenues of societal meanings.

The point to be highlighted is that in order to apprehend personal meaning of self-harming, comprising sublime moments, we need to approach how society is constructing possibilities of interpreting the dilemmas faced by the ones that choose to cut themselves as a way toward feeling adjustment. Moreover, it is necessary to identify how others with whom people interact present these societal meanings in their exchanges and communication with these people that do self-harming. Thus, the sublime as comprehending a tension between two opposite categories of values – e.g., bad versus good and honorable versus shameful) – and the subsequent transposition of this dichotomy by creating a new one, a synthesis (that negates the previous opposed categories), and bypassing them is always constructed and felt by the subject in relation to the meaning the society offers in specific time and space or context. Thus, the experience is always context-dependent and, therefore, related to the ADMs the society offers.

In this study we analyzed the case of an adolescent called Alice who does cutting and, consequently, suffers high emotional tension and dilemma, whose major aim is being accepted as she is. All the data was collected through a semi-structured interview made in only one meeting between the participant and the researcher. Nevertheless, this interview was interpreted as the participant's life trajectory reconstruction and, therefore, as the process of transformation of sign-meaning in constructing and destructing signs along time. It is just this approach that allows the research to apprehend and interpret past moments reconstructed by the participants in the present moment and, at the same time, imagined future, both re-evaluated and self-analyzed by the participant in a dialogue with the researcher, in order to approach intrapsychological and interpsychological dynamics of the participant. Moreover, psychological dynamics are grasped and interpreted by the research in a context of time and space.

The Case of Alice

> I cut myself in anger (…) and because I want to take it out of me

Alice is a 15-year-old girl who had done self-harming around 1 year before the interview by cutting her arms. Initially, she did not care about exhibiting the marks, but nowadays – once she has stopped cutting herself – she hides them and intends to cover them with tattoos. She is a medium-class girl who studies in a public school and had already changed schools many times – which has always been difficult for her because she loses friends each time. Besides that, her parents are separated, and, according to her, they split up due to the physically aggressive behavior of her father toward her mother ever since she was born. So, she describes herself as someone who has two homes: the one where her mother and stepfather live and the other one where her paternal grandparents live together with Alice's father.

At first, Alice stayed at her grandparents' home till she was 8 years old, and her mother took her to her home. She describes this period as being very stressful and says that she cried every day, mainly because she missed her grandmother. In her words, "Terrible (laughs nervously). I cried every day because I could not get used to being away from my grandmother."

The First Sublime Moment: Who Am I?

The second moment of stressful feelings described by Alice comprises the moment when she started doing cutting – about 1.5 years before the interview, when she was almost 14 years old. She relates this moment to when she was forced to "come out" with her homosexuality in the midst of her family. When questioned about when she started hurting herself, she says:

> See, I think ... It was right at ... that I actually remember ... it was right at the ... time I came out. Not that I came out, that I had to talk! (laughs nervously) (...) And then I cut myself in anger. Rage! Just in anger ... and because I wanted to take it out of me. I've already wanted to die once. I've already wanted a lot of things. But nowadays I think like this 'No, I don't want to die. , I want to stay here. , I want to live a lot. I have goals. I have plans. I want to live everything' (...) At those times I wanted to die because I thought I had no reason to live... if I had to continue living the way it was back then, being judged from all sides [of her family] … I thought that this would never end. So I wanted to die ... I would rather die than live like that.

This is a very rich description of sign and meaning creation out of a sublime moment. The marks on her own body – cutting – show the creation of sign-meaning. They show that within the tension between pain (psychologically and physically felt) and pleasure (inferred by the pleasure of releasing her anger), people create a "solution" to exhibit their inner feeling of pain to society. Alice also encapsulates the pleasure of her pain in the mark, the cutting on her skin, on her own body, because it displays an overcoming of the present tension – I am homosexual, but the others do not accept who I am – toward an action that shows a negation of both through a sign (cutting) that exhibits her new synthesis showing her suffering to others and cutting

what she dislikes in herself due to the others and, thus, demanding a "place" for her in a societal group. Therefore, this sign is the exhibition of her desire for acceptance of her uniqueness as homosexual. Her inimitability is shown as a sign on her own body, "claiming" that she is a homosexual being. This sign emerges, thus, to exhibit her uniqueness as homosexual and the judgments and evaluations against this of others and the society. All tension is, thus, a deep affective tension between her struggle for acceptance and adaptation to others and the society and her intrasubjective and intersubjective dynamics, therefore between herself and others. Cutting is, thus, a new sign created as an outcome from the opposed feelings: who I am (homosexual) versus the not acceptance and rejection of that by others.

We argue that this sublime moment only emerges because "liking girls" is presented as a not possible path for her sociocultural milieu – presented, in this case, by her family. Due to the family's nonacceptance of her homosexuality, Alice tells that, for quite a long time, she even started believing that being a homosexual was wrong and unacceptable, therefore an impossible path for her life. She tells:

> Yeah, I did not want to like girls. That's why I tried to avoid it. As my grandparents were religious, I tried to see God (laughs). See in God that this was wrong and that was it. (...) That is what I was thinking ... It was wrong, you know? Not that it's filthy or something like that. I thought it was wrong to live like this ... To be free ... I thought it was wrong to be free. I was raised very straight-laced. (...) I ... I think that, back then, in my mind, there were only thoughts of one day being someone. I thought of being someone. I just did not know who. I did not plan. And I only planned that the religion I wanted for my life was that one [Evangelic/Protestant]. I did not think I would change my mind totally as it is now.

Once Alice cannot be herself in the potentiality of her uniqueness (liking girls) because being homosexual wasn't accepted and, therefore, not a possible path for her, she sees herself in a strong tension: "If I cannot be myself, so who am I?" Seeking for who she is according to the avenues of meanings presented by her cultural group (e.g., "try to see God") makes her feel pretty much as a "straight-laced" girl, therefore not being herself. Therefore, as she doesn't feel as her true self, the cutting that she inflicts on her skin is not only on her body – to hurt and punish herself for "liking girls" – but also for the others who restrain her possibilities of being by telling what avenues of meanings are available for her development/trajectory. So, we can see a flow that goes forward and backward, feeding itself, as illustrated in Fig. 10.1.
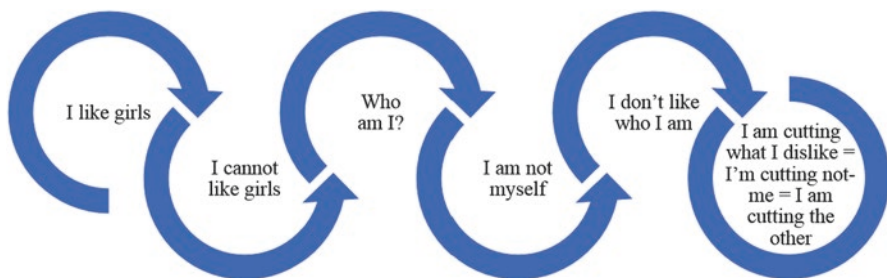
Fig. 10.1 Alice's inferred self-dialogues

During this very painful experience of not feeling as being herself, Alice faces a sublime moment, which synthesis seems to present a solution for her problem/question ("I show the others my suffering due to my societal group, that's why I am not me"): I'll hurt myself and, by doing so, I'll hurt the others too. This dialogical and dynamic movement points out to a very important relationship between the self-harmer and the world. In Alice's case, she wanted to publicly assume her homosexuality only when she would turn 18 years old – age of majority and autonomy in Brazil. She supposed she would have her "own life" by then. But she "had to talk," in her words, about her sexual preference when she was 14: she openly told her stepmother about her sexual preferences, as a secret, but her stepmother told everyone in her family. This event points out to a social promise that was broken and increased her anger and the feeling of taking the anger out of herself as a way of hurting both her and the others (since she couldn't hurt the others directly) – and, as we said before, as a cry for help by showing her pain because of nonacceptance and nonrecognition (of herself as she is or a "place" for her to be socially accepted).

So, we present this sublime moment and its meanings through Fig. 10.2. On it we can see that, at first, the pain and pleasure of hurting herself were separated and had dichotomic meanings. She felt not only the biological pain but also the sentimental ache of not being accepted. On the other hand, she felt pleasure for taking the anger out on somebody (herself) and also the satisfaction in inflicting physical punishment and exposing to society the marks of the socially expected "solution" for doing something "wrong." But then a transformation occurs, when, by getting over the dichotomy, she faces a new curvilinear meaning: the pleasure of showing others her suffering and the painful pleasure of creating a sign through which she claims for uniqueness and sends a message for help.

This sublime experience transforms the meaning construction into an ontogenetic level: changing her relation with her life course. We will explore how Alice transforms her concept of herself through the process of destruction<>construction of signs related to her concept of love. This meaning-making also changes her use

A. The first (linear) opposition

PAIN ←——————→ PLEASURE

| Physical pain in cutting + Society's rejection of her homosexuality | Taking the angry on somebody (herself) + The pleasure of punishing herself and of showing the marks to otherness/society as a "solution" for what the social millieu claims as wrong (liking girls) |

transforms

Through the creation of her individuality to otherness/society

B. The emergence of sublime

PLEA SURE of PAIN

Pleasure of showing others/society her pain + Pleasure of claiming the acceptance of her uniqueness to the others/society

Fig. 10.2 Alice's making of the sublime by uniting the opposites (pleasure/pain). (Adapted from Valsiner (2018, p. 24))

of cutting (that stops) and her relationship with the scars on her skin. All those processes encompass the new ADMs that are guiding the meaning-making process.

Opening New Paths/Meanings for "Who I am": The Changing on Alice's Concept of Love as Another Sublime Moment

During this period of sexual unacceptance, Alice qualifies herself as "close-minded." Furthermore, she claims that she only changed because of some experiences: (1) when she was infatuated with some girl of her church and (2) when she hooks up with a girl for the first time. Those experiences, according to her narrative, only happened after her grandmother accepted her sexuality. Moreover, they also happened after she started doubting some credos of her religion at that time (Evangelic/Protestant).

About the first aspect – namely, the role of her grandmother – Alice claims that she stopped hurting herself after she moved to her grandmother's house. There, she did not only find acceptance but also a place for herself ("that did not care" [about her homosexuality]). She says:

> In the time of anger I was very blind ... It didn't know how to deal with my problems. (…) I had no friends and no people I could trust or talk to. Even because... when I came out, after a while, I went to my grandmother's house. My grandmother accepts me (emphasis), so she agreed with me moving to live there for a while because I couldn't deal with my mother putting pressure on me anymore. My mother, my father, everyone… And then I went to live there .. And it was there where I stopped with that [cutting herself] (…) Because I stopped listening to[complaints about their decisions]. I moved from a place where they rejected me so much to one where they did not care. So it was good. Then ... I stopped wanting [to die]... I do not know ... I stopped thinking about dying.. stopped everything [the thoughts about dying].

In Alice's discourse, we clearly see that her grandmother's acceptance opens up a new path. Thus, the acceptance of her grandmother functions as a catalyzer condition (Cabell & Valsiner, 2013) for the development of Alice's new meaning construction. Therefore, this new path demands the emergence of a new meaning possible in the sociocultural group – though vivified by only one person (the grandmother) – different from that one that has been destroyed (e.g., I cannot love a girl; I have to avoid "liking girls"). Moreover, the grandmother functioning as a catalytic condition has the function of making emerge another possibility of meaning-making that enables the emergence of a new meaning for her cutting – they ceased to be signs that claim for acceptance of her homosexual uniqueness and become something else. This new meaning of the cutting on the skin is clear once she tells the interviewer that back in the past, she didn't care about showing the scars and that nowadays she hides and even says she wants to cover them with tattoos. In her words: "I keep hiding them [scars of the cutting] and I want to get a tattoo on top. I think it marks a time that was... difficult. As to my tattoo, however, I'm not with that person anymore [it was a couple's tattoo], I do not regret doing it because it marks

something in my life. It was a good time. The cutting is like this, but it was a bad time. It marks me."

This corroborates inference/interpretation that the cutting occurred when there were no paths available to Alice. As soon as the grandmother presents acceptance, new avenues of meaning in the sociocultural milieu that allows Alice to reconstruct the meaning of cutting (new ADM) are created; the cutting ceases, as well as its old meaning – a sign of her desire to be accepted as homosexual – is destroyed, and then she transforms it into an index of a bad time. This change – in the meaning of the cutting and scars – was only possible because Alice opens herself – through the support of her grandmother as a catalytic condition – to new ways of conceiving love.

We see, also in Alice's discourse, a transformation of this sign-meaning (love) in a religious context. This destruction and construction of love meanings is very important because homosexuality was not accepted by her religion at that time (Evangelic/Protestant). Nevertheless, she uses a circumvention strategy to find a place for it in the religious credo. She describes that love is a lovable feeling and approved attitude. Why to love another girl would not be approved if it is a good thing?

> Alice: First, I, even in church, got interested in a girl. So I kept thinking ... Like ... The first thought I had for a long time was ... If this is so wrong, why can we love another person? Not that ... I loved someone (laughs). But I mean it's a beautiful thing because they say it is a bad thing, a bad thing, how it would make us to do something like this... But I wonder why. Why would a thing that is only evil, only brings evil, would make us love another person?

This way, Alice is trying to create a sign that encompasses her homosexuality as possible to be accepted by a religious credo and, through this, recognized by others and the society. By doing so, she creates paths to answer the "Who am I" question and also creates a socially accepted place to her. At the same time, with this movement, she tries to destruct the sign "it is wrong to love another person of the same sex," once she realizes that to love is lovable and approved in as much as it is applied to another human being independent of sex orientation. So, she realizes that there is love where it wasn't possible before and, by doing so, creates a curvilinear synthesis merging both previous meanings (Fig. 10.3). All these dynamics can also be understood as a sublime experience as it surpasses the first opposition that is categorically linear. Alice creates a new synthesis, in which love signifies love for all human beings regardless of sex differences.

The construction of this new sign conduces her toward a new religion: spiritism. Although she likes spiritism, she does not consider herself a spiritist because she is not a practitioner; she says: "It's because I feel too detached to be part of a religion and to be dependent on it. I understand that the spirits… they... they can do things. They rely heavily on us for things that I cannot commit myself to." This "no commitment" credo – even with a religion that she likes – is strongly related to her wish to be a "free soul." This is another movement that the destruction of the old sign (e.g., I'm not me/I don't like girls/loving girls is forbidden/not acceptable) and construction of a new one (e.g., I'm myself/I like girls/love is acceptable regardless of sex orientation) happens. Due to the importance of this choice, we'll approach it in a specific subtopic.
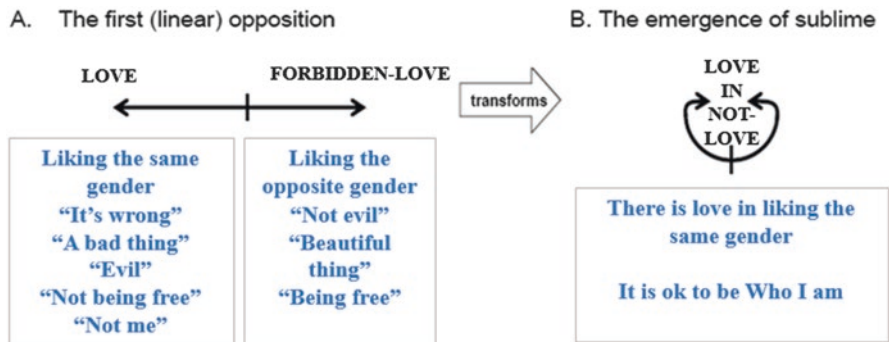
Fig. 10.3 Alice's meaning-making of the opposites (love-forbidden love). (Adapted from Valsiner (2018, p. 24))

The Emergence of an Ontogenetic Developmental Achievement: A New Concept of "Who am I"

As we argued earlier in this chapter, the new and expanded meaning of love moves Alice toward new avenues of possible meanings and, therefore, demands the creation of new meanings: (1) one relates with her scars/cuts differently (as an index of a bad time) and (2) another sees herself not as "close-minded" person but as a free soul.

This developmental change, as well as her desire for hiding her scars, reiterates that once cutting was a sign of claiming for acceptance of her homosexuality (by herself and the others), comprising the first sublime moment in her developmental trajectory; next, this sign-meaning changed since she was accepted; and, after that, she accepted herself. When questioned about her perspective of herself through time, Alice comments:

> How I see myself?(…) I think ... I do not know ... I feel so, I do not know, free. So ... free (laughs). Once I was so close-minded. I was totally against myself. Nowadays I accept myself much more. I accept who I am ... I ... I'm not like my niece [which is also homosexual]. We have this difference... She does not accept herself and she wants to be different... and I see myself like this and I want to be like this. (…). I'm a free soul (laughs). I'm like this, I do not know, free. (…) I did not accept myself. The others I accepted. I did not accept myself. (…) I liked girls. That's what I tried to avoid. As my grandparents were religious, I tried to see God (laughs). See in God that this was wrong and that was it. (…) But, I think it changed because of myself, because I wanted to change. I've grown more love for myself. I have started to see myself differently.

These comments suggest that Alice starts to deal with the constraints that society establishes regarding the acceptance of homosexuality in a different way. She seems to continue seeking the reconstruction of her intrasubjective dynamics through transforming the society's signs and its hierarchy offered to her. The cutting was a sign of her desire to be accepted as homosexual, an acting toward her adaptation within what was offered by the sociocultural milieu in that specific time and place.

With new avenues offered by society discovered by her some time later and cata-lyzed by her grandmother's acceptance of her as she is, Alice starts constructing new meanings, not only reconstructing her intrasubjective dynamic – an internal movement that goes together with an external facing of collective groups in society, which are not going to be explored in this paper.

Focusing Alice's intrasubjective dynamics, we already mentioned that the mean-ing of her scars changed from a sign of her struggle to be accepted as homosexual to something that belongs to the past, recognized as a "bad time." Due to this emerg-ing new meaning, she talks about covering the scars with tattoos, since the latter represent something that can be openly chosen and openly exhibit to others, such as piercing – that she already has. This desire emerges from a kind of a new "agree-ment" between herself and others in the society, once she doesn't need to use cutting on her body as a message for acceptance.

However, this self-acceptance by others is gained by using one of the possibili-ties that Alice finds in her surroundings – to use marks on the body that are socially accepted. This occurs due to the destruction of cutting as a "mark of not acceptance 'in society'" towards change to "marks that have a degree of acceptance in society like tattoos and piercing."

Thus, the movement from an unacceptable sign on the body toward the ones that are acceptable is guided by the avenues of meaning society offers. Moreover, Alice's intrasubjective meanings change along with the dynamics of destructing and con-structing signs regarded as possible sign-meaning in the society. This happens through her navigation in the Avenues of Directive Meaning found in society, which are dynamically worked by Alice in order to achieve the goal of feeling adapted and accepted by herself and others – her grandmother's acceptance of her homosexual-ity and love with another person regardless of sexual choices as guided/accepted by religion. We summarize Alice's intrasubjective meaning changes, as well as her sign construction-destruction navigating through offered ADMs by available collective culture in her social milieu as exemplified in Fig. 10.4.
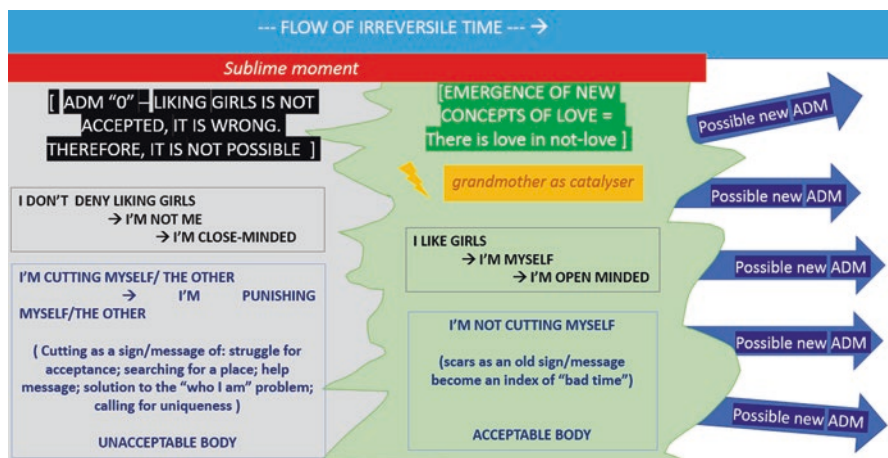
Fig. 10.4 ADM influence in Alice's meaning-making

Sublime Moments in the Light of Developmental Trajectory: Searching for a Unit of Analysis

In this chapter, we intended to approach the unit of analysis that circumscribes the sublime moments of transformation under the dynamics that comprise the developmental trajectory of an adolescent girl who used to do self-harming, by cutting her own body, and afterward changed her conception of love regarding a homosexual love, including homosexual love as acceptable, therefore an equal kind of love.

We highlighted the role of interaction between people and their societal organization – the collective culture – through the ADM concept as comprising the process of a person's meaning- making guiding both the sublime moment and its developmental life trajectory. We proposed that the sublime as *locus* of transformation of sign-meaning – its destruction and construction of signs – seems to be only approached by a person's reconstruction that takes the form of a person's dynamics in irreversible time, thus constructing life trajectories. Therefore, the researcher's possibility to apprehend these moments is only comprehensible by following the unfolding life course; the successive moments in the present that comprise the sublime experience is always reconstructed by the subjects through sign-meaning construction and destruction. It is within this intrasubjective and intersubjective interactions that the researcher-observer can apprehend and circumscribe the sublime moments always in their movement toward the future.

The researcher's interpreting of what is observed requires grasping the interaction between the person and collective culture as they are disposed through the Avenues of Directive Meaning placed in societal milieu in order to infer the intrasubjective dynamics as they are developing in the subject. This means that the follow-up of developmental changes through a person's life trajectory seems to be a necessary condition for the researcher to apprehend the sign-meaning changes that result from the transforming characteristics of sublime moments. This means that it is the coordination of externalized intersubjective exchanges with the inferred process of the intrasubjective dynamics that is required in order to compose a unit of analysis as it constructs a life trajectory in which occurs the sublime experience. We understand that this point highlights the search for a unit of analysis that fulfills the requirement of a holistic unit and that integrating the irreversibility of time and the complex-holistic requirement of the subject's psyche always corresponds to the complex nature of the psyche in their moving toward the unknown future (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008).

Last but not least, in order to still complement this unit of analysis, we finally suggest that we need to include the researcher's perspective on the phenomenon as a following step to be explored to complement this unit of analysis. This dimension has not been covered in this text. Nevertheless, it is a task to be explored in a near future.

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Chapter 11
Toward an Abstracting Conceptual Enterprise

Check for updates

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Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Dynamics (CPSD) offers a theoretical framework to support how to apprehend and understand human experience that constructs selves and cultural world as semiotic processes. As a basic science, as an epistemological-theoretical and methodological arena of transdisciplinary, seeking for reconstructing the hermeneutics of human singularity and its differences from natural sciences, it is inevitable the construction of "new" (or, more critically, old challenges) such as generalizable mechanisms/processes in a grammar that overcomes the mainstream vocabulary centered in a problematic individualistic and causal perspective. This task aims a twofold enterprise regarding the abstractive process required for generalization: firstly, to focus on how the unique subject emerges in his/her cultural contingency and his/her constant adaptation to the future of self's experiences – and, therefore, the maintenance and transformation of the sociocultural world – through semiotic processes, initially affective and subsequently cognitive (Valsiner, this book, 2007, 2014). This approach has the challenge of grasping the successive transformation that human being does from the very first sense experience and the subsequent affective-perceptive moment, developing toward language use and cognition, modeling it through semiotic dynamics.

For this reason, the scientific enterprise of CPSD must develop toward two fundamental assumptions: firstly, to apprehend the subjective and individual process of meaning-making that leads to abstraction – and therefore generalization – considering the subjective world of the uniqueness of personal culture (Valsiner, 2007, 2014) and secondly, on the basis of this phenomenon, to construct a scientific theoretical cultural psychology as a basic science of semiotic dynamics. In other words,

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it is the semiotic dynamic between the self and culture that gives rise to the scientific construction however at diverse levels. One refers to the methodology used to apprehend the phenomenon and the other at the conceptual construction that creates a theoretical basic science of human development that guides future advances in the area.

Abstraction and Meaning Construction: Methodological Challenges

This first aspect deals with the way on how to apprehend the subjective and individual process of meaning construction and its abstraction and generalization that take place in the particular universe of each single self. This point refers to the methodology used and will focus on the type of logical inference that is proposed by Peirce as implying the abductive logics exemplifying it in a concrete example. It is through abduction, many times highlighted by Valsiner (2007, 2014), that the logical reasoning required for new discovers regarding CPSD occurs.

> Abduction is, after all, nothing but guessing. We are therefore bound to hope that, although the possible explanations of our facts may be strictly innumerable yet our mind will be able, in some finite number of guesses, to guess the sole true explanation of them. *That* we are bound to assume, independently of any evidences that is true. Animated by that hope, we are to proceed to construction of hypothesis. (Peirce in Valsiner, 2017, p. 110)

According to Salvatore (2014), CPSD needs to be guided by abductive logics or abductive inference (abstractive generalization, as Salvatore calls it) that supports a methodological framework that will lead to infer from the phenomenon observed the possible comprehension. Moreover, it is important also to observe the limit of variability inherent to the phenomenon.

The first author of this text has an interesting example of abduction that has led to a paper recently appeared (Lyra, Valério, & Wagoner, 2018). We were studying life trajectories of couples that decided to adopt a child, using the Trajectory Equifinality Model – TEM (proposed by Sato and collaborators) (Sato & Valsiner, 2010; Sato, Hidaka, & Fukuda, 2009; Sato, Mori, & Valsiner, 2016). We were expecting to find one trajectory for each couple that contains bifurcation points. Nevertheless, we found two parallel trajectories for the two and three couples studied – one of them two parallel trajectories and for the other three parallel ones. At this moment we were really surprised because all the works using TEM claim that just one trajectory is actualized. Others are imagined by not in fact realized.

Because we were surprised, it came the idea that if meaning-making has a strong role for guiding person's life, it could be that it was the meaning the couple constructed regarding "to adopt a child" that could be the reason for the concomitant trajectories. Moreover, these diverse meanings concerning adoption – diverse for each of the two couples – seem to be available, at the same time as possibilities displayed at the collective level of the sociocultural environment. Thus, the adop-

tion process following the inscription of the Brazilian Register of Adoption requires to obey the actual law. This last one, the current law, exists simultaneously with the old style of adoption in Brazilian history, which means to find a child in any place available. This last way of adopting is also in the mind of the shelter attendants and the family and members of the community, mainly within the poor population.

We think that the example described above exhibits the work of an abductive reasoning. It creates new understanding regarding life trajectories due to the guidance of an abductive logic that was methodologically adopted.

Blocking Remembering-Imagination

The second point that we want to highlight refers to how the process of self's unique meaning construction leads to abstraction-generalization. Such dynamics takes place at the subjective world of selves, constructing a personal culture relying on memory as pre-presentation and imagination as preparation for the future.

Memory as reconstruction of past experience – pointed out by Bartlett (1932) and recently well developed by Wagoner and collaborators (2015, 2017) – and imagination are basic psychological processes for CPSD. The pre-presentation of the future relying in past experiences and the forward movement due to imagining possible (and impossible) futures are the source or the semiotic "material" worked by selves in order to construct a meaningful life trajectory. Nevertheless, sometimes both remembering and imagining are blocked. We think that the study of how and why the impossibility of remembering and the impossibility of imagining needs to be explored inside the framework of CPSD. In order to exhibit an example of these (im)possibilities, or a blocking phenomenon, we will approach a case of literature, provided by the psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in the book *Surviving the Holocaust* (1986). The author, himself, a Jewish survivor of a German concentration camp, wondered, what made so many face death, resisting to such inhuman extreme situations, whereas others died in short time under same conditions? In his understanding, one of the major hypotheses was that the survivors kept, even under such violent regime, an inner belief, an imagined set of uncertain future of reencountering their ruined lives, their devastated homes, and their own names. However, it was the impossibility of recovering any sense of self, the defensive blocked memory about who they were and who they would become, that made impossible to keep themselves alive, attending to the desire of Holocaust. We understand this description as an indication that subject constructs limits for the possibility of imagining themselves that is a result of an interaction between personal history and sociocultural environment that offers the limits for both remembering and imagining.

It is the limits of knowledge like in such questions and open hypotheses that make science move forward in its development. We hope that this book will inspire the reader in recovering the centrality of human experience in psychology, triggering new challenges, and amplifying the concept of us.

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Index