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


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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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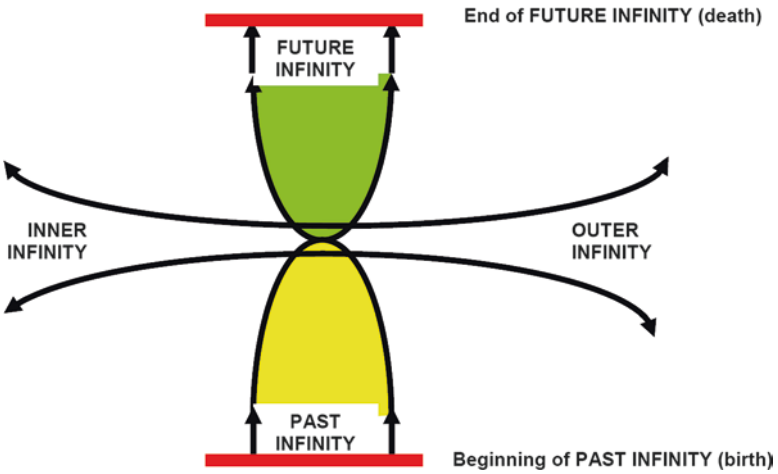


**Fig. 8.1** The unity of two dual infinities

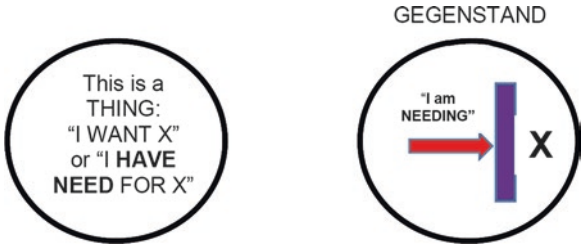


**Fig. 8.2** The basic notion of *Gegenstand* (**b**) in contrast to thing (**a**). (**a**) Projection of THING. (**b**) Presentation of *Gegenstand* into the *psyche*

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]

[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

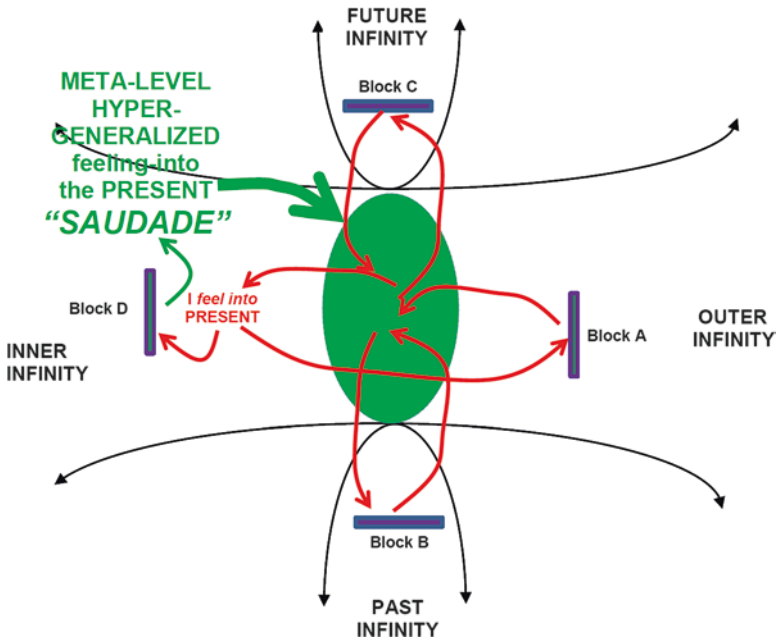


**Fig. 8.5** Emergence of the sign-based third dimension of the dual infinities: the case of *SAUDADE*

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.

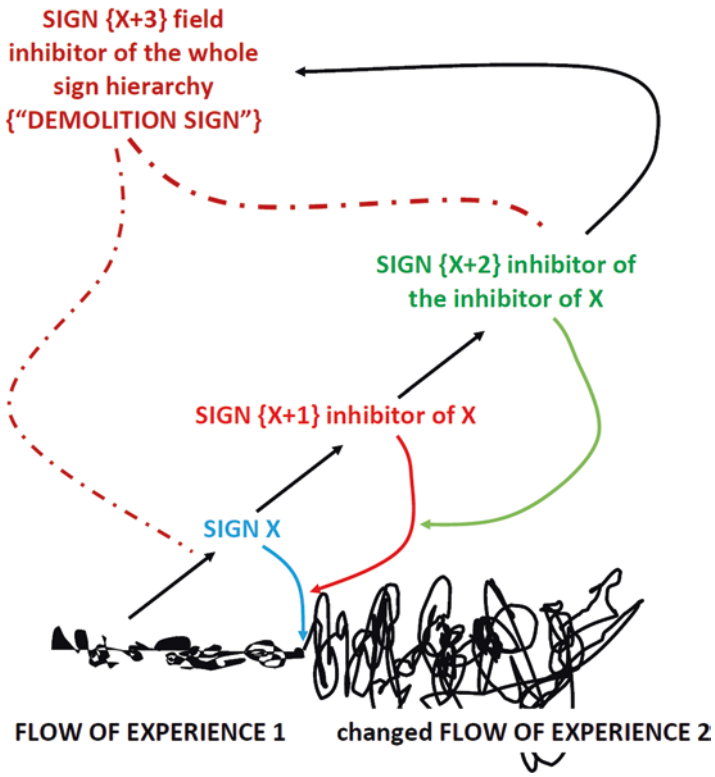


**Fig. 8.6** The construction and destruction of dynamic sign hierarchies

## 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.