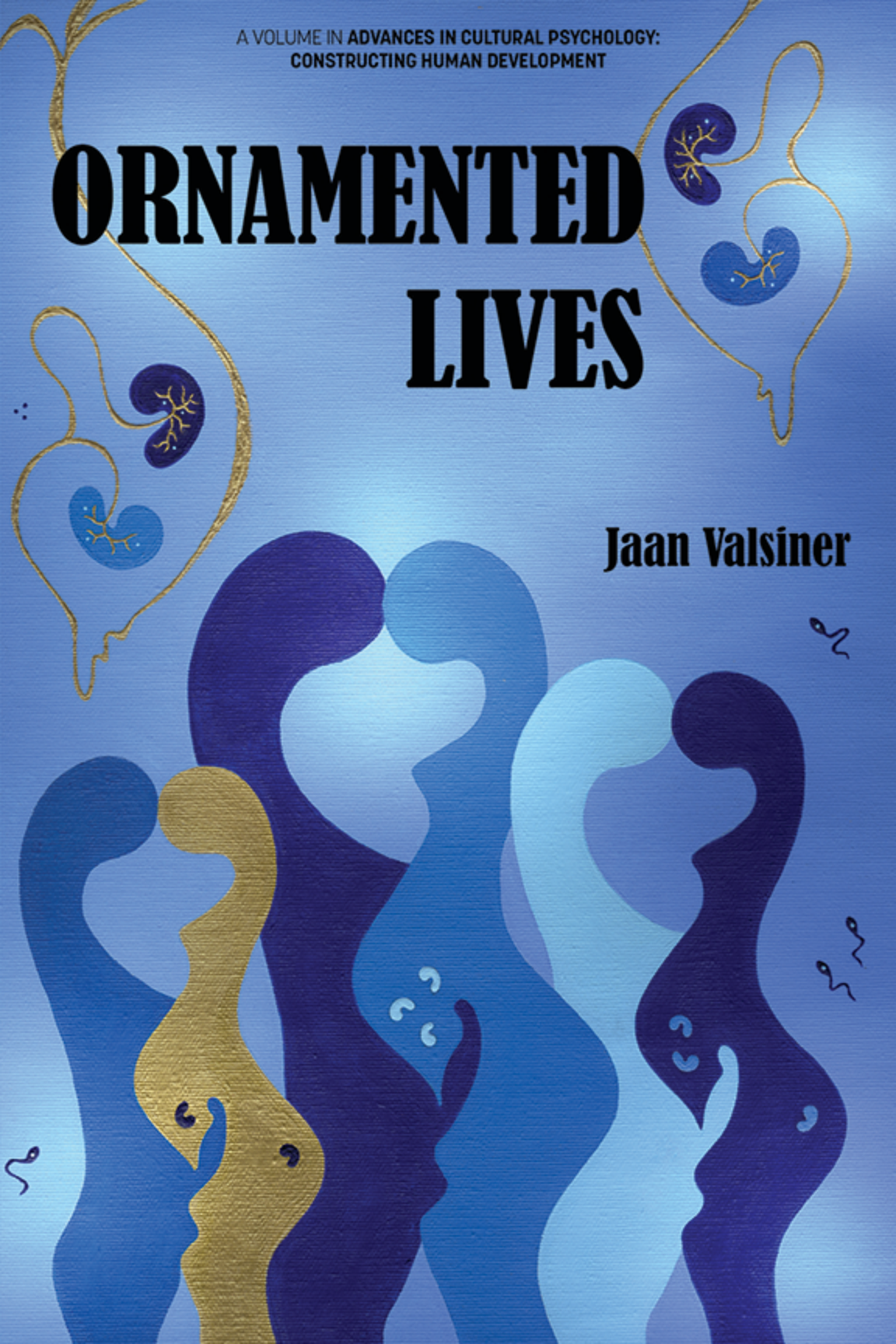


A VOLUME IN ADVANCES IN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY:  
CONSTRUCTING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

# ORNAMENTED LIVES

Jaan Valsiner



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# Ornamented Lives

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A volume in  
*Advances in Cultural Psychology*  
Jaan Valsiner, *Series Editor*

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Cover design by Soraya Salomão



INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.  
Charlotte, NC • [www.infoagepub.com](http://www.infoagepub.com)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress  
<http://www.loc.gov>

ISBN: 978-1-64113-468-2 (Paperback)  
978-1-64113-469-9 (Hardcover)  
978-1-64113-470-5 (ebook)

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Printed in the United States of America

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## *Preface*

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**T**his book is a new beginning in a number of ways. First, it is dedicated to the investigation of an aspect of our everyday lives—ornaments—that have been overlooked by psychology. Psychology has been studying people—sometimes using other species like dogs, mice, rats, pigeons, and chimpanzees as experimental models standing in for human beings. Of course, such substitution fails when we become interested in higher psychological functions that involve meanings-based intentional goals-oriented actions in culturally coded environments. No animal has so far been observed to be involved in decorating themselves or their environment—while human beings do that every day.

Ornaments—rich patterns of partially repetitive forms of graphic, acoustic, or olfactory kinds—are results of such completely human and seemingly nonfunctional pastimes. Despite being pervasive in human lives—one can find ornaments everywhere and over the past 75,000 years—their peripheral role in ordinary lives has carried over to the realm of psychological research. Ornaments have been too obvious, taken for granted—and have not been turned into a legitimate object for study in psychology. Furthermore—they are cultural inventions—and traditionally psychology has left such objects to be studied by ethnologists, art historians and fashion designers. However, in our recent times comes a change—together with the development of cultural psychologies in the recent decades various creations of the human

imagination that become materialized as crafts become included into the realm of targets for study. Ornaments are one class of such objects. They surround us—but also our subjective worlds are similar in kind. In this book I claim that our internal subjective worlds are ornamented as well—by affective sign complexes that provide framing for our feeling and acting.

Intellectually in this book I make what is peripheral into what is central for our research interests. I extend the usual interest areas of psychology—where we usually study people next to us—to the realm of investigation of psychological issues exemplified by people long gone into the infinity of history. They have left their traces onto the environment and we can try to make sense of these now. Ornaments in their multitude of forms—being everywhere—remain always in a peripheral status relative to what they are providing their background. They are frames for our human activities—similar to the picture frames we encounter but rarely notice when visiting art galleries. Frames are carefully selected to fit the picture they expose to the viewers—yet their role is to present, rather than dominate, over the object that they frame (Tarasov, 2011).

In the last decade I became interested in this paradox—something that is considered “just a decoration” is overwhelming, yet not primary, in the human lives. The ordinary presence of such decorations seemed to me extraordinary in itself—why is so much effort put into the patterns on bodies, clothes, public environment if these efforts are only to mark the periphery of human actions. Surely these decorations need to have psychological role as they have been omnipresent over millenia. But what kind of role? Finding an answer to this question motivated my exploration of where and what kinds of ornaments surround us. I posited that these surrounding forms must have functional counterparts within the psychological systems. I saw the possibility to make sense of ornaments through my theory of semiotic dynamics (Valsiner, 2007, 2014). My interest starts from the totality of the phenomena of ornaments—as fields that capture our feelings by giving them special framing—a feeling tone for living! This is a natural progression from my other work on the *Ganzheit* of cultural organization of human lives.

Secondly—while considering high variety of examples of ornaments, landscapes, and paintings—this book does not belong to the domain of “empirical science.” I elaborate a version of a field theory of semiotic dynamics here. Theoretical goals are primary. I have never been an empiricist who is proud of always being busy with “data collection.” My “data” are occasional glimpses from our human realities of living, guided by a general theoretical perspective that—for four decades—has been under construction, and continues to be so. My main goal is to arrive at some general knowledge about the universal laws of cultural construction of the psyche—after the

postmodernist claims for last half-century that such universal knowledge is not possible. I think it is both possible and needed. This has been my credo from my very first monographic treatment of psychological development (Valsiner, 1987). The priority is with theory—but empirical evidence plays a crucial role in the construction of theory in selected crucial moments. What empirical phenomena are important is set up by the theory and located in humanly relevant places of everyday life activities or—in the other extreme—in human imagination about far-away places or actions by fictional characters invented by novel writers. My approach is “Einsteinian” in its focus on theory and looking for only those empirical phenomena that could enrich theory—forcing it to be remodeled (Hentschel, 1992). At the same time it is “Darwinian”—in the sense of collection of specimens from all around the World. This double credo—parallel construction of theory and delving into the depth of human *psyche*—makes this book different from most other monographic treatises of our times. In it I do not want to persuade the reader about the “truth” of my approach. Contrary to the increasing practices of making public advertisements of upcoming scientific publications before the latter to, I do not believe persuasion solves any problems in creating new knowledge. The latter emerges slowly from the depths of an artist’s or scientist’s meetings with their phenomena of interest. Therefore, I bring to the interested reader a kind of personal travelogue through ideas—some of which might be new, but others deeply historically rooted.

Thirdly—this book is an example of trans-disciplinary work in practice. My psychological interests are transported to the fields of ornaments (the original focus of this book), landscapes and landscape paintings, body decorations on skin and clothing, and—last but not least—architecture and art history. Most of the materials I use come from a few centuries’ distance from today—the landscape painting in Europe in the 16th century or the architectural forms of Gothic churches are of psychological relevance precisely because they were constructed long before psychology as science started to make its feeble sounds about the functioning of the human mind. A psychological theory of today needs to be testable on phenomena far away—into geographical or time distance—from us. It needs to break through the clouds of social demands of our times—those of immediate “applicability.” All what I write about has no value for application in our current social realities. In this sense—this book is completely useless.

Nevertheless I expect it to be useful for the human sciences. The theoretical extensions suggested in this book can lead to innovation in making sense of complex phenomena. I suggest that human psychological processes are catalytically (Valsiner, 2014) rather than causally organized.

By revealing the potential catalytic function of ornaments in our ordinary lives makes it possible to see how our lives are actually extraordinary. They are *concretely abstract*—in each mundane act is a potential move to the non-mundane, and to meaningful generalizations that go beyond the current situated activity context. Our minds are in constant movement—and it is that dynamic process sciences need to unravel. Finding the dynamics of movement between the ordinary and the sublime may lead us to better understanding of the human psyche than any ontologically fixed general systems in psychology—the various “-ism”s<sup>1</sup>—have proceeded so far. This has substantial repercussions for methodology—what is needed is full appreciation of the open systems nature of the human psyche (Valsiner, 2017).

I must confess that the way the work on this book proceeded—over the past 8 years—has been surprising to me. Never did I expect that after my first and by now very simplistic publication on ornaments (Valsiner, 2008) my thinking would lead me to cross the Alps imaginarily together Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and ponder upon the unavoidability of landscapes in human lives. Or I would never have expected that I get interested in landscape paintings—first as these emerge in the 16th century Europe, liberating the scenes from religious figures on the foreground thus making the previous periphery of imaginary forests into the figure. And then again—in the 18th and 19th centuries—by encoding religious values into depictions of geomorphic images into imagined landscapes. Meaning-making moves in its own, sometimes mysterious, ways.

Many people have helped me in overcoming my naïveté about art, history and beauty over the time it took over the past decade. Pina Marsico, Tania Zittoun, Nandita Chaudhary, Luca Tateo, and Brady Wagoner corrected my simplifications and offered valuable extensions to go beyond the work here. There are definitely a number of new interesting projects growing out from this little book. Mikael Vetner is especially thanked for his support and personal contribution to the book. My publisher—George Johnson whose Information Age Publishers has for over a decade been a willing partner in the multi-sided publication projects (including this one) in cultural psychology has made our locally grown ideas accessible worldwide. His support for innovative ideas needs to be especially noted. The possibility to be involved in an experiment to create an internationally vibrant Center of Cultural Psychology in the small city of Aalborg—generously supported by *Danmarks Grundforskningsfond* and Aalborg University—provided a fruitful social context for my work. Myself coming from my original periphery—that of Estonia, which has been the border of Europe and Russia—I find the Danish border phenomena—between the Continent and Scandinavia—very congenial. Being on the border has made it possible for Danish

thinkers to remain relatively autonomous from paradigmatic imperatives that have captured the human sciences in the rest of the world. Like the phenomena of ornaments—it is the periphery that is actually central.

Finally—I hope this book extends the horizons of human scientists to move into interesting new research domains that would be true to their desired understanding of what science could be like. I have felt remarkably free in writing this book—and that feeling of freedom will hopefully be taken over by the readers.

—**Jaan Valsiner**

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**Note**

1. Such as “mentalism,” “vitalism,” “behaviorism,” “cognitivism” etc. Even the currently very popular cultural psychologies are not immune to that fate.

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PART I

*Roots of Beauty*

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Beauty is important. We look for it, recognize it when we find it, try to exploit it in many forms, and—face the life-long fight to preserve it. Proliferation of various forms of lotions that are supposed to keep our skin free of wrinkles and age-related spots indicates the severity of the fight—which, in the end, human beings as mortals will inevitably lose.

In that fight for beauty, ornaments occupy a special place. They are everywhere—yet we seem not to pay much attention to them. We appreciate them at some moments, and dismiss at others. Yet they have a strange role in our lives—once we appreciate them we—more often than not—refuse to take them seriously. They are “mere decorations”—a perspective that has permeated European thought since the separation of aesthetic objects as “beautiful for the sake of beauty” in late 18th century.

Focus on ornaments has been hostage to ideological currents flowing through the Western societies and their representations of various forms of art. Thus,

in the 19th century, theorists of architecture and the applied arts systematically investigated ornamental syntax and meaning. But their successors in the 20th century excluded ornament as an unwelcome supplement to the direct expression of structure and materials. What theorists of architecture rejected, however, theorists of the fine arts embraced. Hungry for a non-representational, formal model of art, early modernists looked at ornament as a privileged place of entry into fundamental problem of art conceived



as pure form. Beginning in the 1970s with the demise of modernism in architecture and formalism in the fine arts, however, the positions reversed themselves once more. Architects embraced ornament as an important semiotic element, while the fine arts interest in ornament languished. (Olin, 1993, pp. 728–729)

Historically speaking, ornamenting almost every possible aspect of human lives—from body to home, garden, town, and even landscapes—antedates the very late reflection upon that process in the last two centuries. By existing archeological evidence practices of body painting may have been in place at least 250,000 years ago, and first documented seashell beads date back to 75,000 years. The idea that such practices in the early millennia of development of *Homo sapiens* were suddenly invented for the sake of their beauty alone is quite unlikely. The practice of decoration of the self and the *Umwelt* must have had psychological functions as our species advanced in its technological sophistication. But what kinds of psychological functions did these practices serve? Why was it necessary for such functions to be externalized—from the depth of the Neanderthal minds to the material sphere of human living? And how would such externalization function to further guide the development of their makers' minds—culminating in our contemporary tradition of considering them “merely” important for beauty.

My goal in this book is to look at the processes of ornamentation through the lens of cultural psychology of semiotic dynamics (Valsiner, 2007, 2014). This perspective involves looking at sign construction in the service of coordinating the movement from past to future in the human life course, at all levels—*Aktualgenese* (microgenesis), mesogenesis, and macrogenesis (ontogenesis). All these levels are serviced by the historical proliferation of sign complexes—social representations (Sammur et al., 2015) in the societal realm. Yet it is the persons—with their exploration of their environments (“outer infinities” in terms of William Stern) as well as the corresponding “soul searching” (exploration of the “inner infinity” of looking for love, happiness, and meaningful ways of living)—who create, use, transfer, and abandon signs.

---

## The Meaning of *Ornament*

What is meant by *ornament*? In the conventionally established sense, ornament is a decorative pattern, which becomes classified into various types. The most general dichotomy that we find since 19th century includes distinction between symbolic and aesthetic ornaments:

We may term those styles symbolic in which the ordinary elements have been chosen for the sake of their significations, as symbols of something

not necessarily implied, and irrespective of their effect as works of art, or arrangements of forms and colors. Those that are composed of elements devised solely from principals of symmetry of form and harmony of color, and exclusively for their effect on our *perception of the beautiful*, without any further extraneous or ulterior aim, may be termed aesthetic. (Wornum, 1884, p. 1)

This distinction of cognitive and affective classes of ornaments is certainly inadequate (see Chapter 1) but it has proliferated in the various efforts to organize the myriad of examples of ornaments. The difficulty of making sense of the ornamented practices through classifications of outcomes is similar to Linnaean classification of the various natural species before Darwin-Wallace theory of evolution arrived on the scene of natural history. Ornaments are generated through some generic mechanism of psychological kind—and understanding that generic mechanism would allow us to view all existing as well as possible (but not yet produced) ornaments.

The varieties of forms of ornamentation are immense—aside from visual forms and colors used for that purpose, we can think of auditory (musical framing of life events), gustatory (smells of food reaching our sensory system before it arrives on the table), haptic and tactile (the feeling of clothes on the body). Yet there are some universals across the sensory domains in making some patterns into ornaments:

1. In ornaments, there is high redundancy—*repetition of the form*, either precisely or approximately. This criterion unites all kinds of ornaments with music—ornaments can be seen as analogies to melody. Both music and ornament are characterized by rhythm—temporality (usual for music) becomes encoded in time-freed forms in the case of visual or tactile ornaments. Such encoding of course calls for time-bound decoding—the person who experiences an ornament is moving in relation to the positioning of that pattern. Sometimes the movement is in unison of the body and the ornament (e.g., body paintings are in full synchrony, ornaments on clothing almost full synchrony), at others—external (ornamented walls, facades of buildings, panoramas of cities).
2. Ornaments *involve direction of suggested movement*. It can be horizontal (right or left) or vertical (upwards<>downwards), often both. Furthermore—ornaments can center symmetrically, or guide the experiencing person towards one or another (left or right) direction). Figure I.1 illustrates that point on an excerpt from a well-documented ornament. Of course the specifics of the suggested movement directions depend on where the ornament is located—

upwardly suggestive temple or church facades, in contrast to laterally oriented decorations of the edges of vases.

3. Ornaments are *perceptually peripheral but semantically central*. Their redundancy makes it ever-influential and unavoidable. In terms of psychologists' vernacular—ornaments keep the experiencing person necessarily “within the field.” As such, in contrast to selected figures that can be attended or not attended by the person (selective attention), the peripheral perceptual nature of ornaments makes them unavoidable. They thus provide the affective framing to all human activities. It is hence not surprising that the practice of ornamentation emerged early in the cultural advancement of *Homo sapiens*.

The basic assumption that underlies the investigation in this book is the functional claim that the emergence and proliferation of the practices of ornamenting—results of changing the environment—feed into the changing of the intra-psychological worlds of the persons who undertake such purposive actions. And—these intra—psychological changes feed forward to further acts of ornamentation.

How can ornaments function? Hypothetically we could propose that their role is to create a holistic tension in the peripheral sensory fields of a person. Thus, Figure I.1b illustrates the abstraction of the visual tension between upwards-downwards-bilateral suggested movement, together with four pairs of spiral “end points” within the figure. The suggestion is simultaneous, and the tension triggered has no solution—as the suggested



(a) The original excerpt



(b) The *Ganzheit* of the abstract pattern

Figure I.1 An example from an ornament where the horizontal, vertical, and spiral forms are embedded into one another (from Jones, 1868, p. 28).

oppositions are maintaining one another. And each of the holistic simultaneous “triggering units” is embedded in a wider field that the person cannot escape—wherever s/he turns there is the tension encoded into the minimal Gestalt of the full field (the *Ganzfeld*—Metzger, 1929). Ornamenting any surface creates such total field through the proliferation of similar patterns (Figure I.2). I will analyze that tension both in the field—inherently in the ornaments—and in our subjective life-worlds. My basic thesis is that it is through the peripheral experiencing of external ornaments we develop their internal field-like counterparts in our minds—leading to further ornamentation of our environments.

Are ornaments beautiful? This question is a good example of the mislocation of the beauty—to the ornament, not to the ornament maker or experiencer. It is the latter who create the meaning of beauty, project these into the ornaments, and act as if the beauty was there. This attributional shift has been the core of European philosophical discussions of the beauty as such. We attribute our own mental constructions to the Other—another person, our pet animal, the nature, a deity, and—in the case of ornaments—an object. Figure I.2. “is beautiful” only as we, its viewers, project into the patterns observed the character of “being beautiful.” The flowers in a vase on our coffee table do not have any knowledge about their “being beautiful”—but we, the agents who have cut them and put them into the vase—are confident that they are.



**Figure I.2** An Arabian ornament (*Source*: Owen, 1856, plate 25).

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## *Philosophies of the Sublime, and of the Beautiful*

**W**e feel *into* the world. In 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. Life is an ill-structured problem—to use the distinction introduced by Herbert Simon (Simon & Newell, 1957/1982)—in contrast to finite cognitive problems where all conditions are known, do not change, and discrete solutions exist in principle.

We do not know our futures—but are curious and apprehensive about them. In the case of ill-structured problems all the conditions may change in

time, the whole set of conditions might not be known to the problem solver, and the problem could have no tangible solution options. The latter kind of problems is representative of our ordinary living—we constantly face new conditions while proceeding in our life courses. This uncertainty makes our affective relating with the environment primary—the tension on the border of the present and the future is open to deep feelings. The rational effort to cope with it—through “simulation heuristics” of life scenarios that might happen (but need not). Lives can proceed along many different trajectories—of which just one ends up being that of a given person (Sato, Mori, & Valsiner, 2016).

Feeling is central—apprehending the next moment inevitable, and on rational grounds—never fully possible. Human beings invent signs to cope with such uncertainty—and often saturate their environments with large sign complexes that provide psychological support in this fight for “control and prediction” of one’s own life. Imagination guides our sensory processes. We imagine—act—and make some of the imagined scenarios true. In that process we have established a curious practice—that of redundantly decorating ourselves, and our environments.

---

## The Feeling Tone of Sensation

The affective primacy in our relating with the world is given from the beginning of our sensory experience. Each of our sensations is not merely a signal of some property of the object that triggers it—a needle penetrates my skin and I register the fact that the needle is sharp—it immediately leads to the emergence of a local feeling in response to the sensation. This *sense-feeling* (*sinnliche Gefühl*—Wundt, 1874, p. 126; 1897, p. 75) or *affective tone of a sensation* (*Gefühlston der Empfindung*) is an immediate part of any sensation. The *Gefühlston* is an immediate complement to the sensation itself—it cannot exist separately (e.g., there is no affective tone of a sensation without the particular sensation). Yet it can become generalized across their original triggering sensations, and transformed into processes of imagination:

... the sensation of green arouses almost unavoidably the idea of green vegetation, and since there are connected with this ideal composite feelings whose character may be entirely independent of the affective tone of the color itself, it is impossible to determine directly whether the feeling observed when a green impression is presented, is a pure affective tone, a feeling aroused by the attending idea, or a combination of both. (Wundt, 1897, pp. 76–77)

Figure 1.1 specifies the functioning of the sense-feeling. It is on the one hand a constructive reaction to the sensation trigger (immediate subjective

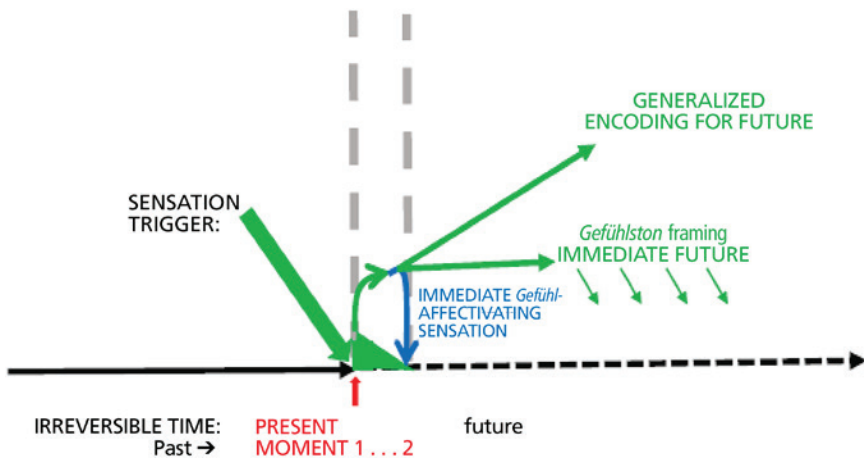


Figure 1.1 The *Gefühlston* in the context of experiencing.

reply) and material for the generalization (and, eventually, hyper-generalization—Chapter 7) processes. The sense-feeling occurs necessarily in irreversible time, and may cover time periods of varied extensions—always extending from PRESENT MOMENT 1 (as the sensation is triggered) to PRESENT MOMENT 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.

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. Secondly, 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* (Ehrenfels, 1890/1988)—can be explained through the formation of a local sign (in terms of Hermann Lotze) that can anticipate the next notes of the melody to come. Finally, 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.

Wundt’s focus on universality of the *Gefühlston* for all sensations has fallen into oblivion—together with the dis-focusing on the sensations, in favor of perceptual and cognitive processes. The latter have been the bastions for the



rational perspective in looking at the psychological processes in their unfolding, leaving the affective side out of attention (see Chapter 6). Where affective and cognitive processes are inevitably united is in the process of apperception.

---

### **Apperception—Feeling Forward From Perception**

It was Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) who introduced the notion of apperception into philosophy—with a meaning that is parallel to the notion of attention in the psychology of today. It was Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) who—after Immanuel Kant’s philosophical explorations into “transcendental deduction”<sup>1</sup> in the first half of the 19th century—gave that notion a theoretical form that has had impact on psychology.

Apperception is based on the notion of reflexivity—in order to perceive of what is expected to be perceived, one needs to perceive and reflect upon what is being perceived.<sup>2</sup> It involves self-observation—here the observer and the observed are confined to the same actor. This feature of apperception may have led to the decline of the use of the concept in the introspection-denying methodological credos of psychology in the 20th century. Furthermore, what was recognized by Herbart was the plurality of the apperceptive processes—it operates in terms of mass of presentations (*Vorstellungsmass*). That presentation-complex—inner psychological system of meanings—feeds into the perception-based presentation complexes (of external objects). The self emerges and maintains itself at the constant intersection of the inner and outer presentation complexes. The notion of apperception in the 19th century would be a forerunner of Jean Piaget’s theoretical scheme of assimilation and accommodation. It played a central role in Theodor Lipps’ psychological aesthetics (Lipps, 1903, Chapter 3). In contrast, by our time in the 21st century it is a concept fallen into disuse.

Why is apperception central for aesthetic reflection? It entails apprehensive nature of what is likely to be perceivable—hence uniting processes of imagination with that of perception-to-become. The main feature of aesthetic relation—that of disinterested interest in the object—is possible only through such forward-oriented view. Yet in that view is also the reason for its disappearance from psychology in the 20th century—it entails self-observation (*selbstbeobachtung*) in contrast to self-perception (*innere wahrnehmung*)—and with proliferation of Wundt’s experimental psychology as the epitome for psychological science that the former disappeared from science.

---

### **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.

The notion of *disinterestedness* was brought into European philosophy by Anthony Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, in the beginning of the 18th century (Cupchik, 2002, p. 157). Its introduction made it possible for the philosophers in the 18th century to develop the separate domain of aesthetic philosophy.

Frances Hutcheson (1694–1746) was the first of these philosophers to dwell upon the idea of beauty. From his point of view,

the figures which excite in us the Ideas of Beauty, seem to be those to which there is *Uniformity amidst Variety*. There are many Conceptions of Objects which are agreeable upon other accounts, such as *Grandeur, Novelty, Sanctity*, and some others . . . But what we call Beautiful in Objects, to speak in the Mathematical Style, seems to be in a compound Ratio of Uniformity and Variety: so that where the Uniformity of Bodies is equal, the Beauty is in the Variety, and where the Variety is equal, the Beauty is as the Uniformity. (Hutcheson, 1726, p. 17, emphasis in original)

The notion—*beauty is in variety*—fits the practices of ornamentation very well. The ideal beauty of objects for Hutcheson started with were mathematical forms:

. . . the Variety increases the Beauty of equal Uniformity. The Beauty of an equilateral Triangle is less than that of the Square; which is less than that of a Pentagon, and that again is surpassed by Hexagon. (p. 17)

It is interesting to see the comparison (more . . . less) as applied to objects of beauty at the time.<sup>3</sup> Seeing the variety proliferating towards “more” beauty a simple geometrical object is turned into a “more” beautiful complex object—culminating in becoming a hyper-complex field such as is the case with ornaments. The special way of perceiving such complexity— affective sensible per caption—became the target of scholarly disputes in the 18th century. The special philosophy of aesthetics—developed by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and canonized by Immanuel Kant—gives us a scholarly effort to make sense of the human *psyche* creating the meaning of beautiful worlds. On the side of artistic creativity—in parallel with the philosophical debates—the 18th century gave birth to the stylistic exaggeration of rococo that proliferated the ornamentation of everyday lives (Adamson, 2011). Among other artistic forms, ornaments with their omnipresence and proliferation of detailed wholes were the arenas for elaboration of the aesthetic world views.

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## Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and *Aesthetica*

It is interesting that the focus on Aesthetics as a special brand of philosophy emerged in the German Pietist context—in Halle (the main bastion of Pietism)—and in parallel with the emergence of psychology as a free-standing discipline. The intellectual roots of that emergence go to the philosophy of Gottfried Leibniz. Christian Wolff—the founder of psychology as a distinct area of thought (in 1732–1734) was in Halle until he was expelled by the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm I in 1723—forced to exit his native town in 48 hours. The reasons were ideological—Wolff had dared to claim in his rector’s speech (in 1721) that the Chinese could reach a similar moral status as Christians, only by a different route. That reasonable early exposition of the principle of equifinality angered the Pietist establishment in Halle who persuaded the king to remove the then leading German philosopher from power position in the Prussian educational system. When given the command to leave, Wolff escaped to Marburg (Hessen) where he was welcome by the local ruler. Denunciation did not stop—in 1727 all his works were banned in Prussia. Yet—monarchs change, and new generations take different decisions—the son of the previous king, Friedrich II, invited Wolff to return to Halle in 1740 where he stayed until his death (1754).

The ideological opposition of the Pietist creed in Halle to Wolff’s (but not Leibniz’s) philosophical ideas created the context for both psychology and aesthetics. Emergence of the special philosophy of aesthetics was started by Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) who moved to Halle to complete his secondary education in Halle in the Pietist *Waisenhaus*<sup>4</sup> in 1727–1730, followed by university studies in the same town in 1730–1735. Wolff and Baumgarten did not overlap in Halle—the latter arrived as a young boy of 13 precisely when the former’s works were banned in all of Prussia. When Wolff returned in 1740, Baumgarten—now habilitated young scholar—was assigned to professorship in Frankfurt on Oder.

Baumgarten developed his ideas based on Wolff’s philosophy—despite the fact that these ideas were unpopular with the Halle Pietist creed. Despite the ideologically charged context, he investigated “Wolffian” philosophy and logic in his student years (also visiting Jena for brief freedom from anti-Wolff ideologies of Halle). As the anti-Wolff campaign was local political, the philosophy of Leibniz was not under similar denunciative pressures and could be investigated. And there was the personal charm—Baumgarten was a well-liked teacher and highly knowledgeable person who seemed to keep away from political controversies. After his university graduation in 1735 he entered in lecturing at the university level in Halle (1735–1740), during which years he finished his *Metaphysica* (first published in 1739)

where the first ideas of aesthetics as a separate field were elaborated. When moving to the professorship in Frankfurt on Oder for the rest of his life, the ideas found their place outside of the Pietist orthodoxy.

Building on the analysis of poetic discourse (Baumgarten, 1735/1900) he established the aesthetic philosophy as that of “sensible” thinking about the beautiful in his *Aesthetica* (Baumgarten, 1750).<sup>5</sup> Aesthetics followed his treatise on *Metaphysica* (Baumgarten, 1739/1779). Poetic expression had its “extensive clarity”—different from logical one (Makkreel, 1996, p. 66). Logic could not handle poetics—the beautiful could be dealt with in its own terms. By 1750 (i.e., the publication of Part I of *Aesthetica*), Baumgarten had moved to recognize beauty in the content of the phenomena—the process of knowing (Gregor, 1983). Poetic expression was the arena for this—the images evoked by poetry create a rich alternative for understanding to that of logical argument. As Guyer (2014, p. 15) pointed out—Baumgarten turned what was (and is) a vice in scientific knowledge—connoting too many ideas without clearly distinguishing among them—into a special virtue of poetry. That virtue required relative separation of the aesthetic mode of thinking from that of rational (logical) mode.

The clarity<>non-clarity opposition was an important arena in the birth of aesthetic philosophy in the 18th century. The dominant mode of thinking—in terms of logic—was obviously considered that of high clarity. Baumgarten found a way to demonstrate that poetic understanding can have similar clarity—only achieved through a different route. Comparing various representations a poetic thought—for example, hypothetical representations B, C, D, and so on, each of which can be confusing (non-clear), with the poetic expression (A) that is larger, but also unclear—the latter can be *extensively* clear.<sup>6</sup>

How can a “confused”—and larger—representation (A) be extensively clear? That poetic language use can accomplish such clarity is evident from the dominance of poetic expressions in human history. The answer may be in affective hyper-generalization (see Chapter 6). The larger field affords various synthetic efforts. Poets can capture in a word—ill-defined as such—an idea that goes beyond the word. The odes sung to the beauty of the brown eyes by poets may capture their feelings of love—which, as a concept, can never be schematically defined—more precisely than an analysis of the components of the affective construction of the meaning of “brown eyes.”

This focus on aesthetic synthesis may have been a rhetoric way to defend the separation of aesthetic understanding from logical one in the 18th century context, but in later times it has proven a central issue for all perspectives that recognize the need to avoid reduction of complexity to its