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Notes on Lev Vygotsky’s “The Psychology of Art”: the Metamorphoses of Its Evaluation by Russian Psychologists

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Abstract

Background. The relevance of the current work is connected to the significance of L.S. Vygotsky’s early studies on the formation of the foundations of the cultural-historical approach in psychology and theoretical and methodological principles of modern research on the psychology of art.

Objectives. The aim is to determine the peculiarities of the approach to the study of aesthetic response in Vygotsky’s work *The Psychology of Art*. Identification of substantive aspects concerning Vygotsky’s research “method” is important for studying the psychological uniqueness of artistic experience. The theoretical and ideological contexts that determine the ambiguity of assessments of *The Psychology of Art* by Russian psychologists will be established.

Methods. Critical historical theoretical analysis, comparative textual analysis of the original text of Vygotsky’s dissertation *The Psychology of Art. Analysis of Aesthetic Response* (archive of the Vygotsky family), subsequent editions of *The Psychology of Art*, critical articles by leading Russian psychologists regarding *The Psychology of Art*.

Results. It is shown in *The Psychology of Art* that, when studying the peculiarities of aesthetic reaction and cathartic experience, Vygotsky uses not only the principles of structural, functional and genetic analysis of the artwork, but also a wide range of psychotechnical techniques aimed at interpreting the meaning of the artwork. At the same time, the peculiarity of his use of methodological principles of reactological and psychoanalytical approaches, models of mental experiment in analysing psychological features of the artwork impact are revealed. It is shown that subsequent critical evaluations of *The Psychology of Art* were influenced not only by the theoretical attitudes of various authors, but also by ideological connotations (“ideological filters”, “mechanisms of social protection of the text”, etc.).

A shift in the substantive critical assessments of the work was recorded: from the dynamic analysis of artistic experience ("waste of energy", "explosive reaction") to the tasks of personal meaning to resolve affective contradictions arising in the perception of different levels of the organisation of the artwork. It is the attitude to the socio-biological type of human development that determines the pathos of the study of *The Psychology of Art* as a "social technique of feeling".

Conclusions. In *The Psychology of Art* the main questions regarding the mechanisms of sign mediation of emotional mental processes and meaning making are thoroughly developed.

Keywords: The Psychology of Art, aesthetic reaction, catharsis, structural-functional analysis of text, artistic form, mental experiment, text comprehension, cultural-historical theory of psyche

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*"...and my utterly desperate vocals
were transformed to a pleasant falsetto
by the technical marvels of science."*

Vladimir Vysotsky, "Monument"¹

*"One is telling as he's willing,
One is willing what he's feeling,
As he's feeling so he's telling"*

Bulat Okudzhava, "I am writing a historical novel"²

Preliminary remarks

These "notes" were written in connection with the preparation of a new edition of *The Psychology of Art* by L.S. Vygotsky. The initial motivation was a proposal made to me by Vygotsky's daughter and granddaughter more than ten years ago to prepare the first volume of the 16-volume complete works of Lev Semenovich, which they had conceived. Unlike the *Collected Works in Six Volumes* (1982), this edition, according to their plan, was also to include Vygotsky's works that had already been published separately. These include the monograph *The Psychology of Art*, published in 1965 (the second edition — corrected and supplemented — was published in 1968).

¹ Translated by Kirill Tolmachev

² Translated by Evgenia Sarkisyants

After that, the book was published several times with different "prefaces" and "afterwords", but the text remained practically invariant.

The Psychology of Art was supposed to become the main work of the first volume, its content center, which would also include other texts by Vygotsky on art. Lev Semenovich's daughter, Gita Lvovna Vygotskaya, and his granddaughter, Elena Evgenyevna Kravtsova, wanted the text of "The Psychology of Art" to be published in its original form, without the cuts made in the first editions; the removal of very significant fragments from the original author's text. For this purpose, they provided me with the materials available in the family archive (the digitised original typewritten version of "The Psychology of Art", numerous articles by Vygotsky on art, notes, letters, etc.). I accepted their offer with gratitude. However, upon my first superficial acquaintance with the materials provided, I realised that Vygotsky's works on art and their commentary would not fit into one volume. Therefore, I suggested making two. The offer was accepted and, in 2015, under my editorship, with an introductory article and commentary, the first volume of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky's *Drama and Theater* was published (Vygotsky, 2015). In addition, my *Comments on Lev Vygotsky's Theater Reviews* (Sobkin, 2015b) and a small monograph *The Tragicomedy of Searches* by Lev Vygotsky (Sobkin, 2022) were published as separate editions.

Unfortunately, after the deaths of Gita Lvovna and Elena Evgenyevna, work on the publication ceased. Apart from the first, none of the other 16 planned volumes were ever published.

Recently, in connection with a proposal from the Publishing House of Moscow State University, I have resumed the work on preparing Lev Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art* for publication. In addition to the necessary editorial and proofreading work, which was carried out jointly with E.I. Tashkeyeva (restoring fragments removed from previous editions, checking quotes used in the text, clarifying the information on the authors often not indicated in the text, supplementing the list of references, proofreading, etc.), there was also a need for an editorial preface to the new edition. The notes below are, in a sense, its substantive framework.

Problem, goals and objectives

Though 100 years have passed since it was written, *The Psychology of Art* is still interesting to read today. Are there many such PhD theses in psychology? I would think only very few. Moreover, the text is of interest not only to psychologists, but also to art historians, philologists, sociologists, cultural scientists, and physiologists. In short, to specialists in a variety of

professions. Perhaps this is because the work is an experience of implementing a comprehensive study, as we would call it today. In this regard, evaluating *The Psychology of Art*, we can conclude that it is an example of a scientific work where its main subject — “aesthetic reaction” — is considered from different angles; described in the languages of different scientific disciplines. Such a “polyphony of voices” provides for the internal dialogue organised by its author in the text itself regarding the main declared subject of the study; dialogue as an “obstetric method for generating truth”. In this regard, the book itself, in its general composition, structural organisation of chapters, and style, is internally dialogic. When reading the book, an attempt to hear these different voices, in dialogue with which its author finds himself, sets perhaps the main intrigue regarding its meaning — its understanding today.

The text invites us to a dialogue, and it is designed to do so. What does it mean to take part in a dialogue? Let me remind you that thinking by its nature, as Vygotsky himself noted, is internally dialogic (Vygotsky, 1982); therefore, an invitation to dialogue is also an invitation to the reader to co-thinking, a special responsive understanding.

Hence, another task arises. I will outline it briefly. Indeed, 60 years have passed since the first publication of *The Psychology of Art*. During this time, several generations of psychologists have read it. They have placed substantive emphases in the interpretation of Vygotsky's work differently, depending on their ideas and preferences in the field of art and their own scientific views. At the same time, of special interest — and, accordingly, the subject of my analysis — is the consideration of the attitude to *The Psychology of Art* of those who considered themselves to be Vygotsky's closest colleagues or disciples. I will note that among them this work was also assessed ambiguously. Therefore, I will try, at least as a first approximation, to present an outline of their opinions regarding *The Psychology of Art*. Perhaps the discovery of differences in their assessment and interpretation of this early work of Vygotsky will be useful for understanding not only the contradictions, but also the “zone of proximal development” of the cultural-historical approach in psychology today.

Main results

1. The first professional assessment — K.N. Kornilov

A letter from Kornilov addressed to Vygotsky has been preserved in the family archive. The letter was written in October 1925, on the eve of Vygotsky's defense of his dissertation, the material for which was the text

of *The Psychology of Art*. At that time, Kornilov was the director of the Psychological Institute, where Vygotsky worked and where the defense was to take place. *The Psychology of Art* was presented to Kornilov for expert evaluation of its compliance with the scientific requirements to a dissertation in psychology. Before the defense, Vygotsky ended up in the hospital due to an exacerbation of his pulmonary disease. This explains the appearance of the letter. The fact that the letter has been kept in the family archive for 100 years indicates its great personal significance for both Lev Semenovich and his family. Here is its full text.

Envelope:

Here. B. Serpukhovskaya, 17, apt. 1.

To Lev Semenovich Vygotsky

On the postmark — sent and received 13.10.25.

Dear Lev Semenovich!

If I had not read your dissertation (and I have just finished it), I would have called you by the usual word "respected", but now I want to say as my whole being asks — "dear". And here is why.

I will not conceal from you that I began reading your work in the spring, but only finished reading up to the 5th chapter. Contrary to my expectations, I read it with great effort. Your first chapters are interesting for a specialist, for a philologist, a historian of literature. Fable, story, drama, Krylov, Bunin, Shakespeare — all this is interesting in its own way, and the most important thing is that it is not so easy to grasp where you are leading your reader. And this is almost up to the 9th chapter. And only here do you reveal your cards, only here does that which constitutes the whole essence of your work begin and where you see the face of the author with your own eyes. In accordance with your theory of two opposing tendencies tearing apart every work of art, you have constructed your work in this way, putting everything less interesting and less fundamental at the beginning and concentrating everything most important and fundamental at the end. This construction makes the work lose out for those who do not have enough patience to read it to the end, but it leaves an exceptional impression on those who manage to read it to the last line.

What struck me in your work is the exceptional ideological closeness of the positions we have taken. After all, you were the last to come to our Institute and, as it seemed to me, you came with great mistrust and, perhaps, prejudice, inspired in you (so it seemed to me) by Ivanovsky [most likely referring to the monograph by V.I. Ivanovsky "Methodological Introduction to Science and Philosophy" (1923) — V.S.]. And now this enormous work lying in front of me, the work which is your firstborn, as the first major work, in which therefore one cannot be insincere, this work speaks of the exceptional closeness of our

positions in the field of psychology. In fact, your application of the principle of unipolar expenditure of energy to the field of emotions is exceptionally good, I had not thought of such an interpretation of the application of this principle. But what particularly struck me was the simultaneity of the question raised by both you and me about explosive reactions. While you arrived at these explosive reactions purely from theoretical considerations about art, I, as you know, arrived at this question purely experimentally, as a direct continuation of the study of reactions of the most complicated order. And if in my last year's report on the result I had obtained, I could not yet give an exact answer to the question of whether there is an explosive nature of reactions, then on the basis of last year's work, where I introduced an extremely complicated type of reactions (mental arithmetic), the results were, as I wrote about this to Alexander Romanovich in Berlin, completely clear. In all subjects without exception, during complex mental operations, covering up to 3–5 minutes, the explosiveness is completely clear, which can be seen from their curves. And now, when I am processing this question about the experimental study of explosive reactions for publication, I did not have any visual illustrations to confirm this from life facts, like those borrowed from literature and art, which I selected to substantiate the principle of unipolarity. And now I do not even need to select: I can only refer in full to your work, which, following its own path, comes to the same conclusions. It was this coincidence of results with completely different methods that struck me: it is the best proof of the ideological affinity between us. And for the first time it somehow clearly emerged in my consciousness that if we had managed to work together for a few more years, we would undoubtedly have represented an exceptionally close-knit ideological team. And for some reason it occurred to me that no one else but you, with your creative nature, could have organically grown into this team, while at the same time preserving all the richness of your individuality. That is why it is extremely painful for me to feel your temporary withdrawal from our ranks, due to your illness. Let us hope that it is temporary and that you will soon recover. I regret very much that we will not be able to arrange a public defense of your dissertation, in order to have the opportunity to tell everyone about its exceptional value. But I think that only now, when your illness has worsened, we will conduct all the formalities through the board and other authorities. When you get stronger, we, regardless of any formalities, will arrange a public discussion of your work. We will take our own, but for now we will give you the opportunity to use all your rights related to your work, to which you have an unconditional right.

I spent a week over your work, learning from you how to interpret an aesthetic reaction, as it should be given from the point of view of our position.

You did it superbly, and I am infinitely glad that I have such a strong comrade in our joint work, and this joy gave me the right to call you "dear", which, I hope, you will not complain about.

With deep and sincere respect for you, K. Kornilov

12/X- 25. P.S. No answer is needed, since any tension for you should be eliminated now. We will talk later.

The style and respectful tone of the letter itself attracts attention; this is communication that presupposes equal interlocutors. And yet we must not forget that Kornilov was the director of the Psychological Institute, and was twenty years older. In fact, his recognition of the work as a completed dissertation study opened the way for young Vygotsky to professional psychological science.

I emphasise that the above letter is the first professional assessment of *The Psychology of Art*. At the same time, noting the erudition and subtlety of the art history analysis carried out in the first chapters of the work, Kornilov pays most attention to the ninth chapter, which is devoted to the study of the experience of catharsis in the perception of art. Moreover, for the author of the letter it is important to emphasize that *The Psychology of Art* is carried out in line with the reactological approach in psychology developed by Kornilov himself. He certainly had a basis for this. For example, Vygotsky's very designation of the subject of his research — "aesthetic reaction" — testifies to the significance of Kornilov's ideas about the connection between mental processes and experiences in a single reaction of the organism to environmental stimuli. In this regard, the aesthetic reaction, according to Kornilov, can be considered as an "atom of mental life" in the perception of art, since the reaction, from his point of view, contains the subjective side along with the physical one. At the same time, Kornilov notes that the tendencies identified in the dissertation on the material of art confirm his law on the "unipolar expenditure of energy": the more nervous energy is spent on thought processes, the less of it remains for external manifestation, i.e. mental and physiological manifestations are inversely proportional to each other. The activation of thought processes, the role of imagination, in particular, explains the uniqueness of the aesthetic reaction, as a reaction with an "inhibited end", which is specifically discussed by Vygotsky (intellect — inhibited will; fantasy — inhibited feeling). But perhaps the most important thing, according to Kornilov, is Vygotsky's explanation of the explosive mechanism of cathartic experience, the basis of which is the contradiction of artistic form and the material — the process of "closing" different substantive plans of the organisation of a work of art at one point. And this is a manifestation of the same tendency that, according to

Kornilov, he discovered in his experimental studies, where it was shown that the complexity of stimuli brought to the limit leads to an explosive reaction of the subject — an affective resolution of contradictions.

I will note that it is precisely this subject, concerning the reactological theoretical foundations of Vygotsky's interpretation of the aesthetic reaction, that M.G. Yaroshevsky also notes in his afterword to *The Psychology of Art*, republished in 1989 (Yaroshevsky, 1989). At the basis of the cathartic action of the aesthetic reaction lies that counter-feeling, the affective resolution of which is conditioned by the objective structure of the work of art — the contradiction between the material and form.

2. Change of the sociocultural context and theoretical guidelines — A.N. Leontiev

For forty years, the typewritten text of *The Psychology of Art* lay in the family archive, and only in 1965 its first edition appeared, "with minor" (as the editor of the publication Vyach.Vs. Ivanov notes) abbreviations. It is clear that before that only a few people were familiar with the text; those who were part of the "inner circle". I will note that there were other typewritten copies. One of them, a typewritten manuscript with Vygotsky's author's corrections, was found in the archive of S.M. Eisenstein. Based on it, the second — "corrected and supplemented" — edition of *The Psychology of Art* was published in 1968, which until recently was canonical.

The introductory article to the first editions was written by A.N. Leontiev. Today it is of particular interest, both in connection with the experience of interpreting this early work of Vygotsky in the logic of the activity approach (according to Leontiev, in this work, Vygotsky "often says his own thing in words that are not yet his own"), and in relation to the ideological subtexts contained in the article, conditioned by the desire to protect the text from possible official criticism in the 1960s. It is important to hear and "read" these subtexts today; in this regard, Leontiev's article is of unconditional cultural interest. I will note four points.

2.1. Transformation of the original text — the influence of ideological filters

One of the motives of the introductory article, as it seems to me, was the desire of Alexei Nikolaevich to publish the text of the monograph, which was clearly "questionable" for censorship reasons, protecting it from possible bans. In this regard, he uses the technique of reducing the significance of the text for Vygotsky himself: "As is known, *The Psychology of Art* was not published during the author's lifetime. Can this be seen as

just an accident, just the result of an unfavorable combination of circumstances? This is unlikely. After all, in the few years after *The Psychology of Art* was written, Vygotsky published about a hundred works... Rather, this can be explained by internal motives, due to which Vygotsky almost never returned to the topic of art" (Leontiev, 1968, pp. 10–11).

What are these "internal motives", why did he not publish this work? In many ways, they become clearer if we turn to those "minor cuts" made by the editor. Mostly, they concern references in Vygotsky's text to Trotsky and Bukharin in the first and last chapters of the book. In relation to the total volume of these chapters, the volume of editorial deletions is about 16%. It is up to the reader, who will now be able to read the full text, to judge their "insignificance".

I will cite only, as an example, a fragment from the original text with which Vygotsky practically finished his book (I have italicised Trotsky's text, which was omitted from the publication. — V.S.): "Since the plan for the future undoubtedly includes not only the reorganisation of all mankind on new principles, not only the mastery of social and economic processes, but also the "remelting" of man, the role of art will undoubtedly change. "Man," says Trotsky, "will want to master the semi-conscious, and then the unconscious processes in his own organism: breathing, blood circulation, digestion, fertilization — and, within the necessary limits, subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Life, even purely physiological, will become collectively experimental; the human race, frozen homo sapiens, will again enter into a radical reworking and will become — under its own fingers — the object of the most complex methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training. This lies entirely along the line of development... Man will set himself the goal of mastering his own feelings, raising instincts to the pinnacle of consciousness, making them transparent, extending the wires of will into the latent and underground, and thereby raising himself to a new level — to create a higher socio-biological type, if you like — a superman" (Trotsky, 1924). It is impossible to imagine what role art will be called upon to play in this re-molding of man ..." (Vygotsky, 1925, pp. 263–264).

Thus, for Vygotsky, the refusal to publish his book is most likely connected with self-censorship, since in ideological terms, *The Psychology of Art* turned out to be "not at the right time" just a year and a half after he defended his dissertation (in 1927, Trotsky was removed from all his posts and sent into exile). For the initiators of the publication of the text in 1965 (Leontiev and Ivanov), "minor deletions" are a forced compromise so that the book would be published; at least in the 1960s.

At the same time, in my opinion, the quote from Trotsky was extremely important for Vygotsky in terms of meaning, namely as an explanation of the last line, which concludes the entire text of *The Psychology of Art*: "...as Spinoza said: "What the body is capable of, no one has yet determined" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 331). I will add that this phrase of Spinoza is also taken out as an epigraph to the entire book. The work begins with it, it determines the ideological and emotional tone of the research. But the point is not only that Vygotsky uses here the stylistic device that is characteristic of the poetics of his texts (especially critical articles on art), when the beginning and end of the text are compared (literally repeated); as if cathartically resolving in a semantic explosion the author's (and, I will add, the interested reader's) reflection on the problem posed at the beginning (Sobkin, 1981; 2015b). Quoting Trotsky, at the very end of the book (putting the "final point"), Vygotsky seeks to emphasise the *social pathos* of his work, that orientation toward the future development of the characteristics of the human psyche ("social technique of feeling") that inspired him as the author of the study. I will say otherwise: such an ending reveals the semantic "closure" (emotional explosion) of the movement of the author's thought, his experience of intellectual catharsis.

I do not know how "insignificant" this deletion is, it is not for me to judge...

I will only emphasise that the importance of a special socio-cultural line of evolution in the development of the human psyche is clearly indicated by Vygotsky here, in his work on the psychology of art. And this, as we know, is the originality and "*social pathos*" of cultural-historical psychology: the biological line of human development has practically ended (cf.: "*frozen homo sapiens*") and socio-cultural factors in the creation of a new "*social-biological type*" come to the fore. These factors are becoming the most important subject of psychological research, both by Vygotsky himself and his followers.

Incidentally, today we are witnessing this clearly expressed tendency of the influence of techno-evolutionary processes in modern culture on changes in mental processes. Thus, numerous studies show how computer technologies change the features of mental development as early as in early childhood.

2.2. From Reactology to the Activity Approach

In addition to overcoming the ideological barriers that made it difficult to publish *The Psychology of Art* in the 1960s, Leontiev undoubtedly

faced another problem: the problem of clarifying precisely those theoretical psychological foundations on which Vygotsky's early work was built.

For reasons understandable to a historian of Russian psychology, Leontiev had to address the inevitable question of the connection between *The Psychology of Art* and the theoretical ideas of reactology. As I noted above, this is exactly how Kornilov himself read Vygotsky's work, supporting it as an original *psychological dissertation study* (Kornilov, 1925). Meanwhile, it is worth recalling that in 1931, a "reactological discussion" was held at the Psychological Institute, in which Kornilov and representatives of the direction he headed were subjected to sharp criticism. The essence of the accusations concerned ignoring the qualitative specificity of higher mental processes, misunderstanding the "essence of the social conditioning of human consciousness". It is clear that Leontiev remembered this discussion well, especially since both Luria and Vygotsky spoke out against the reactological approach in it. Considering this criticism and its negative administrative consequences for the supporters of reactology, it was important for Leontiev (even 35 years later) to emphasise the lack of connections between *The Psychology of Art* and the theoretical and methodological foundations of reactology. I will quote his statement on this matter: "In his book, L.S. Vygotsky does not always find precise psychological concepts to express his thoughts. At the time it was written, these concepts had not yet been developed; the doctrine of the socio-historical nature of the human psyche had not yet been created, *the elements of the "reactological" approach propagated by K.N. Kornilov had not yet been overcome* (the emphasis is mine — V.S.); a concrete psychological theory of consciousness was outlined only in the most general terms. Therefore, in this book Vygotsky often says what he has to say in words that are not his own" (Leontiev, 1968, p. 10). And yet, it should be borne in mind that for Vygotsky himself, the question of studying the aesthetic reaction was of key importance. Moreover, emphasising the significance of this topic, he specifically included it in the title of the book. The text, which is kept in the family archive, is entitled: *The Psychology of Art. Analysis of the Aesthetic Reaction* (Vygotsky, 1925). In the 1965 edition (and all subsequent ones), the second part of the title — "*Analysis of the Aesthetic Reaction*" — is missing. However, I will note that the title, as a special category of poetics, is considered as a *certain key* to understanding and interpreting the work, *given by the author*. Thus, in the "slightly" changed title, we are given a "key", though adapted, as it were, "for a different lock"; for understanding Vygotsky's text in a different socio-cultural and scientific context, that is,

within the framework of the activity paradigm. Most of his subsequent interpretations will be developed in this direction.

2.3. *On Vygotsky's objective analytical method and psychoanalysis*

Despite the fact that a special chapter in the book is devoted to Vygotsky's criticism of the psychoanalytic approach of researching art, Leontiev considered it necessary to strengthen Vygotsky's negative attitude to psychoanalytic research. This can be explained quite simply and is connected with the philosophical and theoretical contradictions between Marxist and Western psychology; and, what is most important for Leontiev, the opposition of the activity approach, as a continuation of Vygotsky's research line, to psychoanalysis. However, in my opinion, Alexei Nikolaevich fails to correctly complete this task in his short introductory article. I will give a typical example that concerns the key issue of the research method used by Vygotsky.

Leontiev writes: "... in his book he (Vygotsky — V.S.) opposes traditional *psychologism* in the interpretation of art. The method he chose is objective, analytical" (Leontiev, 1968, p. 7). In the quoted phrase, I specifically highlighted the comma in bold. It would seem like a trifle... But we all remember from childhood the popular expression "Refrain not to kill King Edward is right", where the meaning of the statement changes dramatically with the place of the comma. Here, too, by placing a comma, Aleksey Nikolayevich tries to destroy the association of Vygotsky's work with Freud's objectively analytical method, which is familiar to a professional reader-psychologist. However, such a technique is unconvincing, since Vygotsky himself already wrote in the preface to the book: "We consider the central idea of the psychology of art to be the recognition of the material being overcome by artistic form or, what is the same, the recognition of art as a *social technique of feeling*. We consider the objective analytical method (note that the comma is missing. — V.S.) proceeding from the analysis of art in order to arrive at a psychological synthesis, as the method of studying this problem, it is the method of analysing artistic systems of stimuli" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 17). And here follows an explanatory footnote from Vygotsky himself: "S. Freud uses a similar method to recreate the psychology of wit in his book "Wit and its relation to the unconscious" (ibid., p. 504). It can be noted that at this point the publishers of the book resort to a "small trick" by placing this clarification by Vygotsky at the very end of the book, in the "Comments" section (that is, the reader must flip through 500 pages to understand the methodological connection between

Vygotsky's study of the "aesthetic reaction" and Freud's approach to the analysis of the "laughter reaction").

Digression 1. Comments on "Vygotsky's method". The comma placed by Leontiev between the words objective and analytical does not clarify the essence of the method, but rather, on the contrary, obscures it. In this regard, it is important to turn to Vygotsky's essay on Hamlet, written in 1915, where his "experience of reader criticism" is presented in detail, as well as to his theater reviews of 1917–1923 (Vygotsky, 1968; 2015). It is here, as it seems to me, that the essential features of those psychotechnical methods and techniques that he uses in interpreting works of art are manifested. It is clear that, in *The Psychology of Art*, the very "psychotechnics" of discovering meaning, revealing subtext, is subordinated to other, specifically research tasks. At the same time, Vygotsky's ability to "run into meaning", to pose and solve "problems with meaning" when reading a text is of great importance for his objectively analytical method; without this, his "living research" would remain "foul-smelling, dead words" (N. Gumilyov, *The Word*) about art.

Discussing the uniqueness of the "Vygotsky method", I will note only four points.

The first point is that in Vygotsky's etude about Hamlet, it is assumed (and this is one of the key initial psychotechnical conditions of his analysis) that the reader-critic himself experienced an acute emotional experience (*catharsis*) when perceiving this work of art. Moreover, it is important to discard other known interpretations and remain "face to face" with the text, since this is precisely his own reading. At the same time, the reader-critic in the process of reading is in a *dual position*: simultaneously correlating the change in his semantic experiences with the artistic features and content of the text. Thus, the text is considered as a kind of "musical notation" of the score of the reader's semantic experiences. These "*notes*" must not only *be read* (which implies knowing the features of the artistic language, its means of expression, etc.), but also *be played*, evoking the corresponding feelings and experiences. And here the ability to detect in the structure and content of the text those internal affective contradictions that determine the further development of artistic experience; the development of a semantic understanding of the text is of fundamental importance. I emphasise that it is not only *detection* that is important, but also *response*.

In this regard, I will return to Vygotsky's definition of his method: "...an objectively analytical method, proceeding from the analysis of art, in order to arrive at a psychological synthesis — a method of analysing artistic systems of stimuli" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 17). Note that here the *analysis*

concerns the work of art, and the *synthesis* concerns those experiences and meanings that arose in the reader. It is this *analytical-synthetic unity* that determines the uniqueness of the method.

Moreover, Vygotsky specifically illustrates in detail the essence of such analytical-synthetic activity using the example of two chapters devoted to the study of the fable: one of which concerns the methods of *analysing the elements* of the construction of the fable (Chapter 5), and the other (Chapter 6) — *synthesis* — those techniques for detecting the affective contradiction and “subtle poison” of experiences during its (the fable’s) perception. In general, the study of the fable demonstrates a method for identifying the conflict between the declared idea of the fable (moral maxim) and the logic of the development of the process of the reader’s experience during its perception; detection of the course of the process of that “counter-feeling” that *refutes* the moral of the fable formulated at the level of *meanings*.

The second point characterising “Vygotsky’s method” is associated with the experience he acquired as a professional art critic when writing numerous (about 70) theater reviews (Sobkin, 2015a). If the experience of “reader criticism” is oriented toward introspection of one’s own experiences in connection with the structural features of the text, then the main subject of professional criticism is *artistic generalisation* aimed at identifying, on the one hand, the author’s idea (its “super-task”), and, on the other, the range of those basic social problems that determine the ideology of the work. Here, the critic turns out to be a special cultural mediator between the author, the text and the audience. And this, in turn, requires “expanding the social context”, giving the text general cultural significance, its special “understanding”. In this regard, the artistic text is fundamentally open not only to individual “empathy”, but also to art history and cultural interpretations.

Accordingly, the method of psychological analysis of a work of art changes, since it is necessary to find not only substantive connections between various structural levels of the text and semantic experiences, but it is also important to *translate these senses into meanings*, turning to social, cultural, and political contexts for this. Such a transition from “*intra to inter*” is necessary for Vygotsky’s research method, since it is precisely this that allows for a psychological analysis of art as a “social technique of feeling”.

Moreover, here the peculiar “shuttle” nature of the process of interpreting a work of art is clearly evident: the initial emotional experience associated with a particular fragment (episode, character’s action, plot, artistic device, etc.) is comprehended in the context of the general structure of the work of art when searching for its ideological concept. Then again, on the basis of awareness, the same fragment of the text is experienced anew, in

new interconnections, in a new semantic context. Such a "shuttle" process (sometimes multiple) of emotional experience and its comprehension characterises the complex "fermentation of meaning", *when the tear of the initial emotion turns into the wine of the feeling experienced by the reader*. This, ultimately, is aimed at determining the logic of the socio-psychological mechanism that underlies art as a "social technique of feeling".

The third feature of the "Vygotsky method" is the use of a *thought experiment*. Its uniqueness requires special explanation. In this regard, I will give a slightly different formulation of Vygotsky's definition of his objectively analytical method: "... every work of art is naturally considered by a psychologist as a system of stimuli, *consciously and intentionally* (emphasised by me. — V.S.) organised in such a way as to evoke an aesthetic reaction. At the same time, by analysing the structure of stimuli, we recreate the structure of the reaction" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 40). In this definition, it is important to pay attention to the "conscious and intentional organisation" of the artistic structure.

In this regard, I will note that a *thought experiment* presupposes researcher's special ability to put himself in the *author's position*: mastery of the psychotechnics of methods for organising a special artistic communication "writer — text — reader". In the course of such a thought experiment, a research psychologist "probes" how certain changes in the relationships of certain elements of form and content of a work of art influence its (the work's) emotional-semantic perception ("aesthetic reaction"); he tries to "return the shame of sighted fingers, and the bulging joy of recognition" (O. Mandelstam, *The Swallow*). Moreover, the fundamental difference from the "live" real process of artistic communication here consists precisely in the reflexive analysis of the content of the mental "experiments" conducted by the psychologist, where the variables are the changes and deformations introduced into the text, and the results are assessments of the features of possible emotional-semantic shifts in one's own experience, as a *response* to such changes.

In essence, we are talking about identifying the meaning of the artistic form, when the mental deformations carried out by the researcher lead to the disappearance of artistic experience ("aesthetic reaction"). In support of this, I will cite here another remark made by Vygotsky regarding his method: "The objective analytical method takes as the basis of the study, as its starting point, the difference that is revealed between an aesthetic and a non-aesthetic object. The elements of a work of art exist before it, and their effect has been more or less studied. A new fact for art is the method of constructing these elements. Consequently, it is precisely in distinguishing

the artistic structure of the elements and their non-aesthetic unification that the key to unraveling the specific features of art lies. The main method of research is comparison with the non-artistic construction of the same elements. That is why form serves as the subject of analysis; it is what distinguishes art from non-art: the entire content of art is also possible as a completely non-aesthetic fact" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 506).

A similar method of research is clearly presented by Vygotsky in the 7th chapter of the book, devoted to the analysis of the story by I. Bunin "Easy Breathing". In it, he examines the relationship between the plot and the storyline, revealing the internal contradiction that arises between the sequence of events in the heroine's real life and how they are presented in the novella. I will note that he, not at all accidentally, defines the logic of such an analysis through the opposition "anatomy — physiology" of the story. This is of fundamental importance. The fact is that here "physiology" presupposes the definition of the function that this or that element of a work of art plays (specifically, in the analysis of the story, its "event" side) for the generation of artistic experience — catharsis. Thus, it is precisely in relation to the functional goal (providing a certain "aesthetic" effect) that the structure of the text (its "anatomy") is considered. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that the opposition itself ("anatomy — physiology") already contains a methodological position that is fundamental for Vygotsky's subsequent psychological research: "function generates organ"; a position that, as we know, is important not only for the line of biological evolution, but also for the line of socio-cultural development of man; his higher sign-mediated mental functions.

I would like to add that the principle of text deformation outlined here by Vygotsky is possible not only in the form of a "thought experiment", but also on real material. For example, Lev Semenovich himself, on the pages of his book, repeatedly turns to a comparative analysis of different translations of the same text into Russian, while recording various semantic shifts in its understanding and experience. In general, such an approach opens up broad prospects for the development of research in experimental aesthetics (Lotman, Petrov, 1972; Gracheva et al., 1988); I will also refer to some of my own studies (Sobkin, 2006; Sobkin, Adamchuk, 2012; Sobkin, Markina, 2010; Sobkin, Shmelev, 1986).

Moreover, I will note that another line of experimental psychological research in the field of art psychology is also possible, aimed not at *deformation*, but, on the contrary, at *generating* artistic texts (Sobkin, 1985). A similar *generative principle* in real artistic practice manifests itself when, for example, a master needs to "*slightly*" correct a student's work so that it

"sounds aesthetically pleasing". The principle is well known in art pedagogy; Vygotsky also draws attention to such co-creation between teacher and student.

In fact, here it is necessary to take only one small step to discover the connection between the principle of *generative experiment* in art and Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The step is "small", but behind it lies an important, in my opinion, clarification. The fact is that, when discussing the issue of the ZPD as a space for joint activity of an adult and a child, it is often overlooked that the "zone" defines a single (common) *semantic space* of the activity of a teacher and a student (more broadly — an adult and a child). This presupposes the ability of an adult to take the child's position, to look at a problem through his eyes, to feel his meanings when solving a problem situation. In fact, in the "zone", motivational and goal-oriented aspects of activity are worked out and experienced; this is a special space, a field of semantic development.

Finally, the fourth point associated with the peculiarity of the "Vygotsky method" is clearly manifested when considering the general methodological concept of the empirical part of the study in *The Psychology of Art*: "it was most convenient to arrange the study from simple to more complex, and we intend to consider a fable, a short story and a tragedy as three literary forms that gradually become more complex and rise above one another" (Vygotsky, 1968, p. 117).

What does Vygotsky mean when he speaks of "complexity"? I will note that such *complexity* and *elevation of forms* is conditioned, in turn, by accepting Hegel's classification of poetry into epic, lyric and drama, which are considered as three types of *historical development* of literature. Thus, for Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art*, it is important to study the differences in the "aesthetic response" to different types and genres of literature, as well as the *historical evolution of the aesthetic response*: how from the initial "seed" of contradictions in the fable (opposite direction of action, contradictions of the plot and story, contradictions of character) different specific, more "complex" types of aesthetic response grow and develop. Hence, the conclusion is quite legitimate that in this early work Vygotsky proceeds from the idea that the analysis of the *historical evolution of the structural features of literary forms* allows us to trace, in turn, *the phylogenesis of the development of the psychological features of the aesthetic response*; to discover precisely *the historical development of the psychological mechanisms of the artistic experience of art*. And this, I note, is one of the key theoretical postulates underlying his cultural-historical psychology; the postulate of the need to compare the development of mental processes in phylo- and ontogenesis.

The approbation of the possibilities of studying the phylogenesis of the development of aesthetic reaction is carried out in *The Psychology of Art*. Here, the evolutionary line of complication of artistic experience is manifested in the movement from the discovery of an affective contradiction between the actions of characters and morality (fable), to the feeling of destruction of material by form (short story) and to the experience of a catastrophe based on the mechanism of identification with the protagonist (tragedy). Moreover, the evolution of aesthetic reaction is considered precisely as the "absorption" of previous forms and the superstructure of psychological mechanisms that determine artistic experience.

Summarising the above regarding the "Vygotsky method", we can conclude that *The Psychology of Art* contains in implicit form the key triad — *structural, functional and genetic analysis*, which characterises the methodological uniqueness of the organisation of research into the study of the characteristics of mental processes and mechanisms within the framework of the cultural-historical approach. Of course, this statement is important, but in order to understand the uniqueness of the *method* used by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art*, the triad itself cannot be considered in isolation from those *psychotechniques* of analytical-synthetic activity to detect subjective affective experiences and methods of interpreting a work of art. It is clear that the psychotechnical uniqueness of this analytical-synthetic activity — *the ascent from abstract meanings to senses* — is presented here by Vygotsky only on specific examples of research of certain works of art and is not disclosed in its entirety. However, the main requirement is obvious: the sensitivity of the research psychologist in the analysis of art to affective contradictions and the ability to be surprised, to respond to them. This gives me reason to call Vygotsky a *meaning-maker* in psychology; to define him with the word that Osip Mandelstam used regarding his close circle, saying: "we are meaning-makers". As S.S. Averintsev notes, a meaning-maker is characterised by "exceptional tenacity with which the poet's mind follows, without retreating, the same thought, sometimes going into the depths, sometimes coming to the surface" (Averintsev, 1996). And I will add: "the mind of a psychologist-meaning-maker".

2.4. *Catharsis as a meaningful center of aesthetic reaction*

At the very beginning of the article, I noted that Kornilov drew attention to the *explosive* nature of the aesthetic reaction as the most important result of Vygotsky's research in *The Psychology of Art*. I will add that the completion of the "explosion" is a state of *harmony*, when all parts come together into a single whole, into a single gestalt. Here, counter-feeling finds

its resolution and this causes a kind of *pleasure*, harmonising the emotional sphere of the individual during the experience of catharsis. Thus, if we discuss the dynamic aspect of the cathartic experience, then at its core lies a simultaneous explosion of affective contradictions and, at the same time, a feeling of completion of the gestalt in the work of art.

At the same time, I will emphasise that the issues of catharsis are touched upon by Vygotsky when discussing various aspects related to the psychological uniqueness of the aesthetic reaction: thinking, imagination, emotional-volitional processes, problems of understanding, personality traits, etc. Moreover, in the course of analysing the psychological phenomenology of the aesthetic reaction, various existing theoretical concepts and explanatory schemes are often used (or rather, tested). This gave Leontiev the right to say: "he often says *his own* things, *not in his own* words". For me, it is important to draw attention to something else here: for Vygotsky, analysis is not simply "reduction to the known," but a willingness to enter into *dialogue* with other authors, a desire to show that in order to explain the phenomenology of aesthetic reaction, new approaches are needed. In these dialogues he really does "say his own thing".

For example, discussing the uniqueness of artistic cognition, the importance of imagery and allegory in art, Vygotsky introduces a special concept of *emotional intelligence*, which he considers as a special type of thinking with the help of synthetic judgments based on affective states during the creation and perception of works of art. Analysing the issue of understanding, he compares such different ways of interpreting works of art as "reading out" from the text and "reading into" the text, the latter being done by the reader who imposes his own ideas on the text. An important role in the "reading into" is played by emotional mental processes: pleasure, hedonism. Discussing the importance of ideological aspects in art, Vygotsky in parallel specifically analyses the phenomenology of unconscious mental phenomena and the role played here by the mechanisms of substitution, "deception" of censorship, masking, repression, rationalisation, de-automatisation of perception and the experiences associated with them: sublimation of desires; expenditure and saving of efforts; condensation, concentration, delay and inhibition of affective states; the substantive dynamics of repression and the transition from painful negative states to pleasure and enjoyment. In this regard, catharsis acts as the most important mechanism for transforming the unconscious into the conscious social; a mechanism for expanding the personal experience of the "I" in the general process of the impact of art and its social role as a "social technique of feeling".

Moreover, considering issues related to the experience of catharsis in art, Vygotsky emphasises the fundamental importance of imagination and fantasy, which, through the actualisation of a special psychological process of "empathy", allow the reader to bring into a work of art from within himself — to *empathise* with it — certain feelings of his own, which determines the uniqueness of the cathartic experience in the process of aesthetic reaction. Moreover, he emphasises the possibility of the existence of affects of two kinds. One is *compassionate empathy*, when we, together with Othello, experience his jealousy, his suffering, when we *sympathise* with him; the other is a *contributing affect*, when we worry about Desdemona, who does not know what threatens her. It is characteristic that in both cases (compassionate and contributing) we feel the *value of our participation in the other*. This is what determines the positive emotional experience as a result of catharsis: "we cry out our grief", and not the character.

I will emphasise that all the listed substantive moments in the various directions of analysis of the aesthetic reaction are oriented towards identifying the central moment — the uniqueness of the catharsis experience in art.

Let us return to Leontiev's introductory article to the 1968 edition of *The Psychology of Art*. In it, although briefly, he specifically dwells on the topic of catharsis. Moreover, just as with the research method used by Vygotsky, he again emphasises the obvious difference between Vygotsky's approach and psychoanalytic interpretations of catharsis. He writes: "The meaning of this term in Vygotsky's work, however, does not coincide with the meaning it has in Aristotle's treatises; even less does it resemble the flat meaning it received in Freudianism. Catharsis for Vygotsky is not simply the elimination of suppressed affective drives, liberation through art from their "filth". It is, rather, the solution of some personal task, the discovery of a higher, more humane truth of life phenomena, situations" (Leontiev, 1968, p. 10).

Of course, such an interpretation of Vygotsky's understanding of catharsis is legitimate. Moreover, here we see Leontiev's clear desire to fit *The Psychology of Art* into the theoretical concepts of the activity approach he himself developed; the desire "to pronounce Vygotsky's words in his own words"; in his own language, in his own terms and concepts that are close to Leontiev (and, I note, later also to Vygotsky). In this case, the distinction between *meaning* and *sense* is central; *setting the task for personal sense*.

Meanwhile, it is important to keep in mind that Vygotsky clearly takes into account both the Aristotelian *phenomenology* of the experience of catharsis when characterising the uniqueness of the aesthetic response,

and the role of *unconscious processes and mechanisms* when interpreting the *effect of pleasure* that arises during the perception of art. This, I note, is what I wanted to show above. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind the phenomenology, the "image" of the aesthetic response that Vygotsky was guided by.

Digression 2. On the uniqueness of cathartic experiences in art. I will try to define the "image" of the *cathartic experience* that Vygotsky could take into account in his research; the image of that unique *cultural norm of artistic experience*, which, as a value-target reference point, determines, in turn, the substantive nature of the study of various aspects of the aesthetic response. This norm, as they say, is "on everyone's lips". I will give characteristic quotes — stable "formulas" of the aesthetic experience that have become entrenched in the culture. Each of them captures certain of its facets.

Here is a classic definition by Aristotle: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an important and complete action, having a certain volume, [imitation] by the means of speech, decorated differently in each of its parts; by means of action, and not of a story, accomplishing by means of compassion and fear the purification of similar affects" (Aristotle, 1957, p. 56). There are many interpretations of this definition and their consideration is not included in my task. At the same time, it can be assumed that the position closest to Vygotsky was that of I.V. Goethe, who understood catharsis as a pacifying completeness between compassion and fear. This echoes Vygotsky's idea of the closure of meaningfully different affective lines in a cathartic experience. Moreover, in Goethe, such reconciliation of various passions is accomplished with the help of *consciousness* — understanding and revealing the essence of the phenomena that gave rise to the tragic action. In this regard, I would like to note that Vygotsky not only takes into account the importance of the participation of consciousness, but places a special emphasis on the character itself, the uniqueness of "comprehension" in the purification of affects; this comprehension is carried out with the help of a special *emotional intelligence*.

Though there is another aspect to Aristotle's definition. It concerns the special role of *action* ("imitation of action") in the experience of catharsis in the perception of tragedy. Since Vygotsky was well acquainted with Stanislavsky's system (Vygotsky, 2015; Sobkin, 2015b), he felt and understood perfectly well the effective basis of catharsis, the uniqueness of the viewer's (reader's) *co-action* to the character. Hence the special significance he attached to the need to isolate *action and counteraction* in the structural analysis of different levels of organisation of a work of art.

Finally, of special interest is the consideration of the role of the mechanism of effective identification in the cathartic experience, associated with feelings of *compassion and fear*. Such duality, two-dimensionality is of fundamental importance for understanding the uniqueness of artistic experience: if *compassion*, in my opinion, refers to the hero, *fear* refers to oneself, acting in an imaginary tragic situation.

In addition to Aristotle, in Russian culture, the statements of A. Pushkin are undoubtedly of key importance in determining the uniqueness of the psychological influence of art on personality. I will cite three of his statements that touch upon important aspects of this problem; these are those of his statements that were undoubtedly known to Vygotsky, as a person who received a professional philological education.

In 1830, Pushkin wrote the poem "Elegy" (Pushkin, 1957, p. 178). It begins with a description of the depressed emotional state of the lyrical character ("Of madness years the faded joy and laughter / Weigh gravely like a hazy morning after... / My way lies dreary. Work and grief are written). But the poem ends with an enlightened feeling: "And, it could be, my sunset's melancholy / One final smile of love will lighten, jolly"³. In fact, here in poetic form a description of the state of catharsis is given. It is a description associated with the "cleansing" of the character from negative experiences.

I have not yet mentioned the most important thing. The structure of this poem includes three more lines: "Amidst the anguish, daily charge, and sadness: / I'll bare my soul for harmony to sweep; / Upon a fiction, heavy tears I'll weep". These three lines characterise that unique way when, with the help of art (experiencing the aesthetic feeling of beauty — "bare my soul for harmony"), the hero resolves his life contradictions. This is a necessary way out of a real-life situation into an imaginary one. I would like to emphasise that the *awareness* and *understanding* of the tragic nature of one's personal situation (cf. Goethe's "pacification") is included by Pushkin in the very structure of the artistic text. Such an artistic device of "modeling" the way of resolving a conflict by including the very way of understanding a conflict situation in the structure of a work of art allows us to draw a conclusion about the fundamental significance of a *reflexive exit* regarding one's negative states when experiencing catharsis in art; a reflexive exit, placing oneself *above* one's real-life situation, turns out to be a mechanism of personal development.

³ Translated by Evgenia Sarkisyants.

Meanwhile, I would like to note that in the artistic environment, as a rule, only one line is quoted from this entire poem: "Upon a fiction, heavy tears I'll weep." A capacious and fundamental thought for understanding the peculiarities of perception of art is expressed here in a clear, memorable "formula". Indeed, when perceiving art, we retain two planes: our real, life plane and the artistic, fictional plane. The difficulty lies in explaining the psychological mechanism of this fundamental phenomenon: our *real tears* over a *fictitious situation*. Hamlet's question: "What is he to Hecuba, what is Hecuba to him?" is still awaiting its psychological resolution.

In this regard, it is important to pay attention to the two preceding lines. In them, Pushkin gives us a kind of a hint. The perceiver of a work of art must have his own *personal experience* of filling his own "sorrows". Moreover, the perceiver himself must be in a certain psychological state of *readiness to respond* to the work of art, readiness to *recognise* his personal problem, his "sorrows, worries, anxieties" in the work of art. Without this, he cannot feel the harmony of art ("sweep in harmony"), in order, in turn, to harmonise himself.

In 1830, Pushkin also wrote the poem "Hero", which contains two lines that are often found today in evaluative judgments about art: "The dark of lower truths is dearer — / We're subterfuge aspirant... " (Pushkin, 1957, p. 200).⁴ Two points are important here. One concerns the opposition "banality — originality"; more broadly, — the opposition of an everyday life situation, and that unusual structure, those *forms* of organisation of *space and time, events and characters* that determine the originality of works of art. This was shown by Vygotsky in the analysis of the fable and Bunin's short story "Easy Breathing", and in the analysis of Hamlet.

Another point is connected with the meanings of the words "aspirant" and "subterfuge" used by Pushkin to understand the uniqueness of the feeling that arises when perceiving art.

Thus, "subterfuge" is not just an imaginary, conventional situation. This is a special distinction between the *truth of life* and the *truth of fiction*. Here a special, extremely important facet is noted: art is "not like in life", it is "subterfuge", it is "fable". Vygotsky pays special attention to this, drawing parallels and, at the same time, recording the differences between conventionality in art and in play; between an imaginary situation in children's play and an imaginary ("deceptive") situation in art. Speaking about the importance of "deception" in art, it should be emphasised that on the part of the perceiver this is *voluntary participation in deception*. Moreover, he

⁴ Translated by Thomas Beavitt.

wants to *be deceived*. Director A. Ya. Tairov put it wonderfully: "A theater ticket is a contract of deception. The theater undertakes to deceive, and the spectator undertakes to believe (that is, to be deceived, to succumb to deception). In order to comply with the contract, both parties must fulfill their obligations well and voluntarily, willingly" (Tairov, 1970, p. 475). But the game is also voluntary, and the child *wants* to play it and plays it without external coercion. But who is he *deceiving*, why does he *like it*, from whom and in "what currency does he buy the ticket"? What is the nature of this "Homo ludens"?

Finally, the idea of the "elevating" deception is clear: cathartic experiences associated with the perception of art make a person better, elevate him above himself. In this regard, art is a kind of amplifier of human cultural potential. And, at the same time, art presupposes the manifestation of *creative activity* on the part of the perceiver (reader, viewer, listener): in art, man creates himself in proportion to the human race. In this regard, the socio-cultural context becomes obvious, which allowed Vygotsky to formulate the main thesis of his work on the social function of art as a "social technique of feeling".

I will cite the last, third statement of Pushkin, which is important in connection with the definition of the uniqueness of the phenomenology of artistic experience. In the autumn of the same 1830, Pushkin wrote an article *On Folk Drama and the Drama "Marfa Posadnitsa"*. We encounter another judgment, brought to the point of a formula in it: "The truth of passions, the plausibility of feelings in the supposed circumstances — this is what our mind requires from a dramatic writer" (Pushkin, 1958, p. 213).

The judgment is especially widespread in the theatrical environment. However, its meaning is usually significantly transformed, since the statement is often attributed to the actor, and not to the playwright, as in Pushkin. Therefore, following Stanislavsky, instead of "assumed circumstances" they often talk about *proposed* circumstances. Outwardly, the differences are insignificant, but in fact they are quite significant. Thus, *assumed* circumstances imply creative activity, the imagination of the writer for whom the situation is not yet complete, it must be invented, *assumed*. For the actor, the creative process unfolds along a different line — he works with an already "prepared" situation, namely, one proposed by the playwright. Here, there is another creative psychological mechanism, not so much fantasy but imagination; a mechanism when it is necessary, like the reader, to include oneself in the *proposed* circumstances. In this regard, I will note that Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art* subtly captures, despite

the external synonymy, these psychological differences between fantasy and imagination.

It is also worth paying attention to the peculiar combination of two experiences in this statement by Pushkin: "the truth of passions and the verisimilitude of feelings." Why did he combine them so strangely? And what does this opposition mean: "truth — verisimilitude"?

From the context of the article, it is clear that we are talking about a comparison of "truth in life" and "truth in art." On the one hand, art should reflect life, and true human manifestations are important here ("true passions"), but on the other hand, feelings should be expressed in artistic form, correspond to the norms of art, therefore they are conditional ("verisimilar"). Here, not only the uniqueness of artistic experience is emphasised (the dual nature of feeling in the aesthetic reaction itself), but also the uniqueness of the nature of artistic communication, that "*what our mind requires from a dramatic writer*".

To conclude the current digression, I will touch upon one more aspect. It is fundamental for understanding the nature of catharsis. Here, I must turn to the work of another poet — to the poems of Osip Mandelstam. Exactly one hundred years after Pushkin's tragic death at a duel, Mandelstam wrote in 1937 while in exile in Voronezh: "Perhaps this is the point of madness, / Perhaps this is your conscience — / The knot of life, in which we are recognised / And untied for existence" (Mandelstam, 1991, pp. 258–259). "The knot of life" ... This is an epitaph common on Jewish tombstones, signifying the connection of the soul with God. If "your conscience" is not pure, then the soul will be thrown away by him like a slingshot, rejected. In this regard, catharsis presupposes a person's *trial* in an extreme, tragic situation of moral and ethical choice in the conditional space of *existence*, the space of art. As Averintsev noted, this is a struggle "for full consciousness on the very edge of delirium, a struggle for catharsis on the very edge of absurdity" (Averintsev, 2011, p. 19). Perhaps this is what Leontiev had in mind when he wrote: "Catharsis for Vygotsky... is, rather, a solution to some personal problem, a discovery of a higher, more humane truth of life's phenomena and situations" (Leontiev, 1968, p. 5).

3. "The Psychology of Art" as the Beginning of Non-Classical Psychology — D.B. Elkonin

The 1968 edition of *The Psychology of Art*, in addition to Leontiev's introductory article, also contained detailed comments by Vyach. Vs. Ivanov. They allowed Vygotsky's work to be "fitted" into the contemporary context of Russian and foreign research on the psychology of art, and drew read-

ers' attention to details concerning the *multi-level structural organisation of artistic text*; to those diverse sign means whose unique psychological impact Vygotsky studied (Ivanov, 1968). Later, Ivanov also paid special attention to a detailed analysis of the significance of Vygotsky's works for understanding the deep structures of semiotic systems of art (Ivanov, 1976). Thus, the importance of this early work by Vygotsky on the psychology of art was emphasised as a special line, namely as a psychological direction for studying the role of complex sign systems.

However, for psychologists, Leontiev's introductory article, where this work was assessed as early and imperfect remained the main reference point when reading *The Psychology of Art*. However, in 1984, in connection with the 50th anniversary of Vygotsky's death, D. B. Elkonin made a special report, where, on the contrary, he emphasised the fundamental importance of *The Psychology of Art* as a key work defining the uniqueness of the cultural-historical direction of psychological research, the issue of the semiotic mediation of the psyche being precisely the center in it (Elkonin, 1989). This is how Elkonin writes about the uniqueness of this approach: "... from the form of a work of art through a functional analysis of its elements and structure, it is necessary to move on to the recreation of the affective-semantic formation that the author of the work wants to convey to readers. The formation already exists objectively in a literary work, and it is given to those who read it. Therefore, it is very important to find the elements of the structure of the work, to understand their functional meaning and what function they play in leading readers, forcing them to accept or, perhaps, reject this or that semantic formation" (Elkonin, 1989, p. 477). I have already noted this principle underlying Vygotsky's method more than once in the article. So, what is "non-classicality", then?

Answering this question, Elkonin emphasises that the essence of *non-classicality* is that "the primary forms of affective-semantic formations of human consciousness exist objectively outside of each individual person, exist in human society in the form of works of art or in other material creations of people, i.e., these forms exist earlier than individual or subjective affective-semantic formations" (ibid.). Hence, the understanding of psychological processes and mechanisms can be studied precisely through the "structure" of such systems, as generating affective-semantic formations. In other words, understanding how a corresponding affective state can be evoked with the help of a work of art, we also reconstruct the method — the pattern — of their emergence. The nature of psychological patterns lies not inside, but outside. Thus, it is in *The Psychology of Art*, that Vygotsky

already relies on the fundamental theoretical principle of his theory: the transition from *interpsychic* forms to *intra*.

In a work of art, psychological mechanisms are at "rest"; they exist in a filmed form. But in order to "revive" them, "recognise" them, translating them into the subjective experiences of the reader, special psychotechnics are required., such as the "reader's criticism" that Vygotsky used in his early work on Hamlet. Above, I specifically discussed this point, considering the range of issues related to the "Vygotsky method". Now it is necessary to make one final clarification.

In 1986, A. A. Puzyrei's book on the theoretical problems of cultural-historical theory appeared (Puzyrei, 1986). Discussing Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*, he notes that the work of art itself is considered a kind of "trap" for the psyche, oriented towards certain psychological patterns. Quoting Vygotsky: "Every lyric poem is such an experiment. The task of analysis is to reveal the law underlying the natural experiment" (*ibid.*, p. 47). Most importantly, the uniqueness of a work of art as a "trap" is that it generates a meaningfully new experience that we did not have before. Continuing his thought, I will say: a work of art is a special "feeling machine"; before reading the corresponding artistic text, this experience was not in us. Therefore, art is a special amplifier of our psychological capabilities.

Conclusion

It is clear that I gave only a general outline of those problems that seem important to me in Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*. At the same time, I wanted to show, at least as a first approximation, how views on this work changed among his followers and colleagues. Of course, the circle of authors chosen for consideration is far from complete, but I was limited by the framework of the article. Two topics — "Vygotsky's method" and the uniqueness of artistic experience ("catharsis") — seem especially important to me, so I have given them special attention.

Different generations have read the text of the monograph, placing different semantic accents. How will those who are entering psychology today read *The Psychology of Art*? I do not know... The cultural situation is changing, many works and names are fading into the background, forgotten, displaced.

But I hope that Lev Semenovich's book will acquire a new "light breath" and a new generation of psychologists will "read out" and "read in" new meanings to it. Perhaps, in some miraculous way, it will become the Zone of Proximal Development for those who are entering psychology today.

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