



Lev Vygotsky: From Theater to Psychology

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Abstract

The article presents the analysis of L. S. Vygotsky's works dedicated to the theater arts and is organized according Vygotsky's different life and work stages. Meanwhile, special attention is paid to the Gomel period during which a large number of reviews were written by Vygotsky and published in "Nash ponedel'nik" and "Poleskaia pravda" newspapers. It is shown that even at the beginning of his work, he was interested not only in a range of problems in art, but also psychological problems related to art perception and creativeness. Vygotsky's usage of structural concept ideas about the peculiar properties of literary text composition are also explored. Vygotsky analyzes the socio- psychological mechanisms of theatrical art effect. Furthermore, those areas which are widely used by Vygotsky in determining the characteristics of cast reincarnation are examined. Special emphasis is placed on the different elements of the actor techniques (speech, movement, emotional expression, acting personality and etc.). Materials are widely used in this study and help identify the socio- cultural context that defined Vygotsky's values at different stages of his work, related to his drama criticism and his formation as a professional psychologist.

Keywords: L. S. Vygotsky; Theater arts; Drama criticism; Sociology of art; Theater as a social phenomenon; Levels of structural text analysis; Acting activity; Psychology of the actor reincarnation technology; Theatrical action logic; Psychotechnics; Sign-meaning-symbol.

1. Vygotsky about Hamlet

L. S. Vygotsky's interest in theater was shown already at his youth. The most known is his work about Hamlet (1915-16). In this work, special attention is paid to an originality of the psychological the reader-critic's attitude towards the text of the play. In this early work, Vygotsky uses the special psychotechniques of interpretation allowing to consider the tragedy as the special "sign system" causing emergence of esthetic experiences. The original of "Nonclassical Psychology" of Vygotsky can be found in this position.

In reading Vygotsky's Hamlet, attention should be directed to three points that, in his opinion, characterize the unique position of the reader-critic: (1) that the defining juncture that prompts a reader's critique is not merely a positive axiological attitude toward a work but the special emotional state of "delight" [vostorg] with which a critique begins; (2) that the reader-critic should be connected directly to the work itself, never breaking away from the text, which is the sheet music that inspires him to play the melody of his own experiencings; and (3) that, with due allowance for the possibility of varying interpretations, the reader-critic seeks to approach the work not from the outside but "from the inside," conveying his own impressions and interpretations, which he holds to be uniquely correct. This last point in many ways defines the personal life stance that characterized Vygotsky's later scholarly oeuvre, "the desire to drink from one's own glass."

Proceeding from those principles, Vygotsky implemented a structurally complex way of analyzing Shakespeare's tragedy, in which he juxtaposed three basic parameters: the play's storyline [fabula], its characters, and its overall emotional atmosphere.

Here, Vygotsky reveals the various levels on which the tragedy is organized, demonstrating how the play's end brings the convergence of two channels in the action's development that are defined as machinations both political (the fathers of Fortinbras and Hamlet) and familial (Gertrude, Claudius, Hamlet). That aside, however, there is also another, "otherworldly" causality, in that Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet function in the last scene as if they were already dead. It is a "long-drawn-out moment of dying," in which "the tragedy withdraws into death."

In this connection, I will comment on the areas of concern around which the semantic analysis of Hamlet unfolds:

1.1 The Distinguishing of External and Internal

This key topic is presented in two epigraphs selected from the tragedy for the etiuud: "Words, words, words. . ." and "The rest is silence." "Words" are what happens onstage, the actions that the characters perform there. And "silence" is that which is associated with the appearance of the ghost, that which the witnesses to Hamlet's encounter with it (Bernardo, Francisco, and Horatio [sic: correctly, Horatio and Marcellus—Trans.]) swear to him they will never tell, that of which Horatio is not to speak when recounting the tragedy

that transpired at Elsinore. As Vygotsky put it, “the tragedy completes the circle” here, as it transitions into Horatio’s tale, while still concealing its “secondary meaning.”

1.2 The Second Birth

Hamlet’s meeting with his father’s ghost permits him to glance “beyond,” confirming his vague forebodings and drastically transforming his conduct. This encounter is the act that brings about his “second birth.” And this explains his strange behavior, which Vygotsky defines as mental automatism [psikhicheskii avtomatizm]—that is, a state wherein one’s own thoughts, feelings, and movements are sensed as having been implanted by suggestion, arising under compulsion, and subordinate to an outside influence. Vygotsky expressly emphasizes that Hamlet’s “insanity” differs fundamentally from Ophelia’s.

1.3 The Prototypical Myth

Vygotsky’s use of the term “Oresteia” in his text (which refers us to the myth of Orestes “whose guilt lies in his birth”) is not a random choice. I will note that in structural terms, the myth of Orestes—who avenged the death of his father, Agamemnon, by killing Aegisthus, the latter’s cousin who had entered into a criminal liaison with Agamemnon’s wife and Orestes’s mother, Clytemnestra—is an evident prototype (with allowances made for a whole series of inversions) for Shakespeare’s tragedy. So, for instance, matricide is the primordial sin, and one that can never be forgiven. For this reason, the father’s ghost (unlike in the plot of the Orestes myth) prohibits Hamlet from murdering his mother, thus emphasizing Hamlet’s subjection to the ghost and his seminal (Vygotsky’s expression [semennaia]) connection with his father.

1.4 The Triggering Mechanism of the Action: The Pantomime

Hamlet has to dispel his own doubts as to whether or not Claudius murdered his father. And in order for this to happen, a unique psychological situation must be created wherein the culprit is discovered—a situation that involves “catching the conscience of the king.” So, on Hamlet’s suggestion, a troupe of itinerant players stage a play called *The Mousetrap*. Traditionally, this is a central scene, which reenergizes the entire action’s developmental momentum. The play-within-a-play is performed in pantomime.

When King Claudius fails this “test,” Hamlet has no more reason to question the need for vengeance. Here it should be observed that in Vygotsky’s analysis, the pantomime plays an important structural role, being a special mechanism of the anticipation of events that is built into “the machine of the tragedy” and triggers a predetermined outcome, the “automatism” of events, of the unfolding storyline. The tragedy is as inexorable as is the transfer of the throne to the young Fortinbras.

1.5 The Alignment of the Characters

While Hamlet is a tragic hero, Vygotsky observes, the rest of the *dramatis personae* are, by the nature of their experiences, dramatic characters. And particular analytical interest attaches both to their singular apprehensions of Hamlet (Vygotsky describing them each as one-of-a-kind mirrors—some convex, some concave, and each with its own focal distance) and to the characters' mutual correlations. Hamlet, Fortinbras, and Laertes are, for example, all their fathers' children. But Laertes avenges himself for the murder of his father quite differently from Hamlet. Fortinbras too has a connection with his father that differs from Hamlet's with his. A juxtaposition of Gertrude with Ophelia characterizes not only two differing female images but also specifies two differing types of attitude toward Hamlet. Claudius's position relative to the general development of the storyline is like no other: he is in essence a principal character who makes plans and thereby is all the while preparing his own demise, inasmuch as the play, as Vygotsky observes, has "a plan of its own." And Hamlet's wisdom lies precisely in grasping the play's plan, not in concocting his own plan for revenge. Finally, Horatio models the position of a spectator, an external observer of events as they transpire.

1.6 The Combination of Various Planes in the Storyline's Development

Here, Vygotsky reveals the various levels on which the tragedy is organized, demonstrating how the play's end brings the convergence of two channels in the action's development that are defined as machinations both political (the fathers of Fortinbras and Hamlet) and familial (Gertrude, Claudius, Hamlet). That aside, however, there is also another, "otherworldly" causality, in that Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet function in the last scene as if they were already dead. It is a "long-drawn-out moment of dying," in which "the tragedy withdraws into death."

And finally, stepping outside the framework of the Hamlet tragedy, I will add that this analysis was an important semantogenetic [smysloobrazuiushchii] center for the development of Vygotsky's own personality.

2. "Theater and Revolution"

Vygotsky published his article "Theater and Revolution" [Teatr i revoliutsiia] in a collection titled *Poems and Prose of the Russian Revolution* [Stikhi i proza russkoi revoliutsii], which was issued in Kiev in 1919 and included works by prominent writers and poets from a variety of literary schools—Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Belyi, Natan Vengrov, Zinaida Gippius, Maksim Gorky, Nikolai Kliuev, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Lev Nikulin, Aleksei Remizov, V. Ropshin (the pen name of Boris Savinkov), Il'ia Erenburg, and others. The very selection of authors suggests that the compilers had something unique in mind, that being to demon-

strate an ambiguous understanding, and a sometimes diametrically opposed experiencing and artistic representation, of the Russian Revolution.

The article is divided into five sections. The first of which, in a search for historical analogues to the contemporary situation in the country, compares the singular features of the relationship between theater and society during the French Revolution with the prerevolutionary period in Russia. Vygotsky's recourse to history is important, as it attests to an already mature inclination toward viewing societal phenomena in a historicocultural context. That said, he was not only seeking direct analogues but also striving, in this brief analysis, to show the cardinal distinctions between the two situations. Whereas during the French Revolution the theater was a conduit for revolutionary ideas and "a rostrum for society... that ignited the fires of revolution," in Russia, he held, the theater's basic issues were being discussed not in the context of social transformations but in logical terms involving artistic and aesthetic experimentation.

The next substantive aspect of Vygotsky's analysis involves a discussion of the influence exerted by revolutionary social transformations on societal processes in the theater. Here he debates several important points relating to the sociology of art.

One relates to the lifting of prohibitions on an array of topics and works that had earlier fallen foul of heavy censorship — more specifically, the freedom to present erotica on the stage, the removal of prior religiously motivated bans, the opening of opportunities to criticize the tsarist regime, and so on. Meanwhile, though, Vygotsky astutely remarks that the lifting of prohibitions on previously taboo topics also plays into the introduction of a new type of censorship. Here he engages with the issue of the special filters and normative mechanisms that perform an important role in the processes involved in the sociocultural dynamic of art.

Another point relates to the role played by revolutionary transformations in the development of the theater of the national minorities. Since this article was written for a collection to be published in Kiev, the emphasis here is placed expressly on the development of the Ukrainian theater and the emergence of national theater schools and studios. The article gives special attention to a societal analysis of the theatergoing public, which is perhaps a central topic, since, from the sociocultural point of view, the inclusion of new societal groups into the life of the theater had set it on a special developmental vector. A new spectator, with his specific class-based, ideological frames of reference and expectations, influences not only repertoire policy but also the entire structuring of life in the theater (the theatrical idiom, the actor's and the spectator's experiential instrumentalities, the actor-character-spectator relationship, the criteria used to evaluate a work of theatrical art, etc.). This is the context wherein Vygotsky discusses postrevolutionary tendencies such as the new "workers' theaters" and the change in the class composition of the theatergoing public. And it is this that, in his opinion, "defines the kernel of the future theatrical revolution." (Vygotsky, 2015).

The article's third section contains a targeted discussion of the theater's new postrevolutionary repertoire policy. On the one hand, in Vygotsky's opinion, the foreground was

being increasingly occupied by didactically incriminatory critiques of the prior political order (plays about the House of Romanov, on Grigori Rasputin, etc.) and political satire on matters of current concern. And on the other hand, there were plays from the old repertoire that were primarily societal in their orientation (The Lower Depths [Na dne], The Wreck of the Nadezhda [Gibel' Nadezhdy], The Death of Danton [Smert' Dantona], The Fall of the Bastille [Vziate Bastilii], etc.). Here too he shows himself to be a subtle theater critic, one who studies not only a performance's artistic idiosyncrasies ("what is happening on the stage") but also the unique emotions being experienced in the auditorium.

The article's fourth section is devoted to a substantive analysis of Mayakovsky's play *Mystery-Bouffe* [Misteriia-buff], which, in Vygotsky's opinion, is a genuinely new phenomenon that reflects a striving toward revolutionary transformations in the theatrical art. He accentuates a unique ("revolutionary") genre approach that combines the previously incompatible genres of mystery play and slapstick [buffonada]. While the mystery play assumes enclosure [zakrytost'] (by way of its genetic association with a "mystery" [tainstvo], in which only initiates are permitted to participate), slapstick, by contrast, is the open art of the streets, where the acting is exaggeratedly humorous and the spectator is directly addressed. While parsing in some detail the play's plot and the stylistic peculiarities of its language, Vygotsky is highly critical of it, demonstrating the incompatibility attendant on combining traditional allegories with contemporary topicality, since that combination is manifestly subject to the tendentiousness of the societal requisition, the current ideological "market forces." And the result is that instead of being presented with the revolution's elevated spiritual ideal, we are regaled with nothing but "a bread roll hanging from a tree!"

And then, in the fifth and final section, Vygotsky transfers his analysis of the correlation between theater and revolution into the realm of forecast, asking, "What could happen in the art of the theater in connection with the Revolution?" In his opinion, changes were to be expected both in dramatic literature and in the reconstruction of theatrical forms ("new wine is to be poured into new wineskins"). From his point of view, "a heroic theater" would be expected to respond to the spirit of the grand societal transformations then transpiring. Here, however, he sees a fundamental sociocultural contradiction, in that, instead of new forms of theatrical tragedy making an appearance, it was the old forms — those that run counter to the transformations occurring in society — that were being actualized, developed, and disseminated: "That art is going not forward but backward, is crystallizing into its primitives, disintegrating into its elements, regressing from complex to simple. It is an indoor [komnatnyi] art in the full sense of the word" (Vygotsky, 2015). Despite that contradiction, however, the theater's future lies, from Vygotsky's point of view, in the creation of a monumental, awe-inspiring art for the whole people.

It is also extremely interesting in methodological terms, showcasing as it does Vygotsky's unique approach to research. His analysis begins with a search for historical analogues of the sociocultural phenomenon that interests him here, then moves on to study how that phenomenon functions in the contemporary reality, and to a related search for the societal sources of development and for new, "germinal" [zarodyshevye] forms of theatricality to match those developmental tendencies (*Mystery-Bouffe*), and concludes by suggesting a

transition to the “forecasting” of a form (theatrical tragedy) that may potentially prove responsive to those basic tendencies of development. Thus, even in this early work on the theater, Vygotsky quite distinctly displays an overall logic that defines the methodological uniqueness of his culturohistorical approach, which would later be implemented in his groundbreaking psychological studies.

3. Theatrical reviews

Vygotsky has written about 70 theatrical reviews which have been published in various newspapers, magazines and collections to the period. These works were unknown until recently and were not included in a scientific context. Meanwhile, reviews are of huge interest to understanding of sources and features of his cultural historical concept.

This material is unique. Over almost a year and a half (from September 1922 through December 1923), Vygotsky published sixty-eight theater reviews and notices in Gomel newspapers. Since several of them covered not one production but two (and sometimes three or more), simple arithmetic shows that in those sixteen months he reviewed more than eighty performances in Gomel, and that does not even include the reviews of individual touring companies and individual artistes. Those reviews offered subtle psychological descriptions of performances given by Ekaterina Gel'tser, Leonid Utseov, Nikolai Foregger, and Vladimir Maksimov (all landmark artistes of the day), by the Second MAT Studio, the Aleksandrinskii Theater company, the Krivoie zerkalo Theater and others, which in and of itself constituted an important contribution to the history of this country's culture.

On average, therefore, Vygotsky not only attended six performances every month (virtually on a weekly basis) but also wrote critiques of them. It is important to bear this fact in mind, since it attests not only to the young Vygotsky's general erudition, which the reader will learn from the reviews themselves, but also to the enormous amount of theatergoing experience he accrued while in Gomel.

It is important to consider that, as a theater critic, Vygotsky was expressly analyzing not only his own subjective experiencings but also the affective-semantic reaction of the audience. And this, incidentally, is a unique position, distinct from that of the ordinary spectator who as a rule registers only what is happening onstage.

Another extremely important circumstance is that during his numerous visits to the theater, Vygotsky came to grips with an abundant psychological phenomenology of interpersonal, social-role, and societal relationships, while also observing the manifestation of characterological and personal idiosyncrasies in various conflictive situations. From this also follows his understanding of the importance of the actor's psychotechnique, which is linked to an analysis of how logical and appropriate the actions taken in the proposed circumstances are (Konstantin Stanislavsky), which is, in turn, determined by the production's gender. But if gender is understood as a special axiological space (a chronotope, per Mikhail Bakhtin), it may be supposed that while attending those theatrical performances,

Vygotsky (already functioning as a psychologist) was not only registering the complex phenomenology of psychological manifestations that corresponded to mundane reality but also observing the possibility of engendering unique affective-semantic phenomena under the specific “experimental” conditions stipulated by the theatrical production’s gender (its own special spatiotemporal organization). I will note that the reference to theatrical gender is of fundamental significance to Vygotsky, inasmuch as gender also supplies the elementary unit of his critical analysis. It may be concluded that in his practical theatrical criticism he is ascending from abstract to concrete. The key contradictions between the various organizational levels of an artistic work (“between material and form”) also presents as a basic device that enables the implementation of dialectical thinking in the analysis of a work of art.

4. Levels of Theatrical Analysis

An analysis of Vygotsky’s theater reviews brings up the fact that his critical evaluations are constructed around the theatrical spectacle’s various organizational levels: the dramaturgy, the acting (utterance, movement, transfiguration [perevoplosh-chenie], etc.), the directing, the audience reaction. I will now pause to examine some of these points, concerning acting, in greater detail.

4.1 The Actor’s Transfiguration

Since evaluations of acting occupy a central place in Vygotsky’s review, they warrant a section of their own. The content of those evaluations is extremely diverse, touching on aspects as varied as an actor’s individual idiosyncrasies, the actor’s unique technique, how well he or she conforms to the character, the actor’s role specializations [amplua] and their societal stereotypes, the character’s active line of conduct, and so on. Since Vygotsky functions in his reviews primarily as a theater critic, the analysis of his opinions on acting are of interest especially in terms of the normative notions around which his evaluations are structured.

4.2 The Correspondence of the Character’s Onstage Image to the Societal Stereotype, and the Actor’s Role Specializations

In evaluating the image that the actor embodies, Vygotsky quite often correlates it to one of two types of societal presentation. The first, which lies on the earthbound plane, assumes a comparison between the character being played and a given stereotype of the everyday consciousness—age (old person, child, youth, etc.), employment (telegraph operator, chambermaid, officer, etc.), societal stratum (queen, servant, working man, etc.), and so on. Here, are some characteristic examples: “Actors cannot wait to act their title, and only then do they act their role as best they can”; (Vygotsky, 1923p) “And playing an old per-

son mostly comes down to just one thing—that old people slur their words.” (Vygotsky, 1923n). And so, the critical evaluation, on the one hand, focuses on uncovering any lack of correspondence between the image being played and the societal stereotype embedded in the dramaturgical material. And on the other hand, it is important to emphasize that Vygotsky’s evaluations quite often remark on another side of the actor’s performance, where his talent enables him to overcome the weakness of the dramaturgical material: “She underplays the role’s onstage image, it is true, but [. . .] with an inner grace and restraint, she avoided the crass and perilous parts.” (Vygotsky, 1923k)

A unique type of societal presentation that Vygotsky relies on in his critical evaluations of acting lies directly on the theatrical plane and is associated with theatrical role specializations: comic, romantic lead, vaudevillian duffer, heroine, ingenue, tragedian, servant girl, and so on. In these cases, the evaluation is built on any discrepancy between the role specialization and the role he is playing: “Comedian he may be, but he is forever doing someone else’s job in the wrong roles.” (Vygotsky, 1922f).

I will note that Vygotsky’s critiques juxtapose both the societal stereotype and the role specialization with the actor’s individual personality:

All along the spectator could see that the weak-willed queen who cannot lose her temper and has no character should have been played not by Igoreva (who wants nothing more than to lose her temper) but by Erina, who cannot and should not play a play’s energetic, most active heroine role. There would have been a good comedic reason for them to have traded places (Vygotsky, 1923p).

Important here is that the means of juxtaposition — of societal stereotype, role specialization, genre, and actor’s individual personality — is in a certain sense comparable to the approach to analysis of role specialization in the theater taken in 1922 by Meyerhold in his “Table of Role Specializations” (Meierhol’d, Bebutov, & Aksenov, 1922). This was a table of seventeen pairs each of male and female role specializations that lists the actor’s necessary physical qualities, provides examples of appropriate roles, and characterizes the onstage functions, which ultimately made it possible to systematize dramatic works from various epochs (Grachev, Nistratov, & Sobkin, 1990; Sobkin, Nistratov, & Grachev, 1989).

4.3 The Evaluation of the Actor’s Emotional Manifestations

I will note that the important thing to Vygotsky is not how well a feeling is outwardly portrayed but how internally justifiable that feeling is: “He has an authentic internal agitation onstage, an unfeigned, elicited energy. The point of departure for his acting not its outward form and expression but comes from within. . . You clearly sense that feeling being mustered up before your eyes, so much pressure and effort there is in it” (Vygotsky, 1922e). And he also remarks on the important need to create not a unidimensional but a complex gamut of feelings and experiencings: “But can an entire role really be maintained on just a tear? The upshot is tearfulness instead of suffering” (Vygotsky, 1922d).

In giving his attention to the sincerity of the actor's experiencings, Vygotsky as a theater critic is effectively employing the criterion coined by Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky and expressed in his renowned "I do not believe you!" I will emphasize that the actual emotional response to what the actor is experiencing is paramount to Vygotsky the critic in his evaluation of the acting.

That said, there is another line to be taken in evaluating the actor's onstage emotional manifestations, which is to juxtapose them with the nature of what the characters are experiencing in the logic of the relationships stipulated by the dramaturgical material. The following are some characteristic examples: "This was a businesslike piece of reasoning, not Andreev's outburst" Vygotsky (1923h); "To play Dostoevsky at a normal temperature, say 36.6 or 36.8, is to undo him. But Sosin (Raskol'nikov) is before all else an actor whose temperature is normal. Dostoevsky's heroes are cut from a completely different spiritual cloth" Vygotsky (1922c). I will emphasize that here the sincerity, the "truth of feelings" is correlated with the extent to which they correspond to the work's style and genre (tragedy, comedy, melodrama, slapstick, etc.).

Vygotsky not only documents the influence exerted by that particular aesthetic principle ("to live on the stage, not to represent"), but also shows a special aesthetic sensitivity to the processes of the sociocultural dynamic of the actor's activity, in which technologization of the creative act tends to geld its psychological content and causes a cliché form. The aesthetic principle that focuses on the creation of a particular psychotechnique to show what the actor is experiencing forfeits its substantive momentum and leads to the technologization of the actor's activity, which then becomes encrusted with cliché and spins a cocoon around itself.

4.4 The Evaluation of a Role's Active Line

Vygotsky accords particular significance in his evaluation of acting to the active analysis of the idiosyncrasies of a character's conduct, which explains why the formulation "individuals in conversation instead of individuals in action" has a place in his reviews (Vygotsky, 1923f). He also discusses a wide range of issues associated with the active analysis of a character's behavioral idiosyncrasies: the motivation for their deeds ("the sublime psychological springs of that murder were never pressed" (Vygotsky, 1922a)); the motivational conflict in the role itself, which defines the unique nature of the character's experiencings (for example, a conflict between the need to behave as befits a queen's societal status and actions that are grounded in a woman's natural leanings); the correspondence of the behavioral logic to the psychological idiosyncrasies of the character's nature ("the comical look of a vulgar little old man who wants to make the woman he loves his kept mistress and his sudden chivalrous nobility toward her are ill-matched" (Vygotsky, 1923a)).

Issues pertaining to the analysis of a character's general line of conduct (which Stanislavsky called "the through-line of action") are examined separately. For example: "Just as there are poets who can write a couplet, a stanza, even a scrap of doggerel, who can create

only a tiny unit, one single passage but not a whole poem or a poetic narrative, so there are actors who can do one act, one scene, even one rejoinder" (Vygotsky, 1923b); "The acting fragments into episodic snippets portraying how people eat, drink, love, marry, wear their jackets" (Vygotsky, 1923m); "But to combine scene with scene into an act, and the acts into a role—that is beyond her" (Vygotsky, 1923b).

In the discussion of a character's conduct, special attention goes to the conflicts and contrasts that supply the role's developmental dynamic: "A role cannot be kept to a single note; two neighboring pieces of a role cannot be painted the same color. There have to be internal contrasts" (Vygotsky, 1922d).

I will emphasize that Vygotsky often uses the understanding of internal conflict less in describing the relationships between characters (which is important in mobilizing the spectator's apprehension of the performance, as opposed to the times when we come to the theater and all we see there is, to borrow Vygotsky's own expression, "a love so simple, open-mouthed" (Vygotsky, 1922e)) than in registering the development of the onstage image. And he understands development to be the dialectical removal of contradictions, an array of transmutations, a metamorphosis (reminiscent of the famous "caterpillar-cocoon-butterfly" example): "His path from apprentice to minister evokes one thing only, and that is a staunch objection: there is no metamorphosis, no transmutation, no piece of business, no counterfeiting, no splitting" (Vygotsky, 1922b). Attention should be directed to the fact that here we are up against Vygotsky's profound understanding of the actual process of development as a fundamental, qualitative change. And his ability to trace the subtle boundaries of the phenomenology of development is associated in content with the ideas on "the kernel of the image" that are encountered in the works of theatrical notables such as Stanislavsky, M. Chekhov, Evgenii Vakhtangov, Solomon Mikhoels, and others. It is important to bear in mind the understanding of the unique features of developmental phenomenology that we encounter in Vygotsky's theater reviews when exploring his later works on psychology proper that touch directly on the problems of development, which are central to culturohistorical psychology.

And finally, it is important to draw attention to the range of issues associated with the role's tempo-rhythmic layout, its emotional score, the "blueprint of passion." This topic is intimately tied to issues pertaining to the actor's emotional manifestations, which were examined above (to "the living experience," to Vygotsky's interest in the living person rather than in a marionette). Moreover, it should be emphasized that the tempo and rhythm of a role (or, more broadly, of a performance) are important to Vygotsky's theater reviews, since his evaluations juxtapose them with the unique features of the action's organization in performances of varying genres: "The actors have only to convey the intrigue, unravel a tangled ball of amusing situations that take each other's place with lightning speed. This play [. . .] stands or falls on a sparkling gesture, a brilliant exit or entry, the rapid patter of the action" (Vygotsky, 1923p). And I will add in passing that here, Vygotsky the critic is also singularly preoccupied with his own "concurrent directing" of the performance he is watching.

4.5 The Actor as an Agent of Creativity

I mentioned above that the problems of emotionality — the sincerity of the feelings shown onstage, the psychotechnique applied to what is being experienced emotionally, the correspondence between what the character is experiencing and that character's nature, the genre, and so on — receive special attention in Vygotsky's theater reviews. That said, it is important to single out yet another aspect — that is, when the emotions are contextualized by the actor's creative commitment, which permits the acting to be viewed as an artistic deed, as an artistic fact: "There is something that makes it possible to distinguish the very worst picture from the very best copy, and that is creativity" (Vygotsky, 1923i). It was Vygotsky's opinion that an actor lacking the ability to be carried away, unwilling to make the "emotional outlay" comes to resemble an adult who "to divert the children imitates a dog—ungiftedly, conscientiously, assiduously, and badly" (Vygotsky, 1923l). I will note that Vygotsky viewed an actor who holds back, who acts "with reticence, as if in rehearsal," (Vygotsky, 1923e) as a mere journeyman. To him, therefore, the "energetic" aspect (the energy outlay) characterizing an actor's onstage conduct is an important criterion for the manifestation of creative commitment

Another important characteristic that defines the actor's creative manifestations is his capacity to go in search of the miscellaneous personal idiosyncrasies that correspond to a given role, "the combining of notes" into an integral melody:

The actor's inventiveness, the role's dynamic, the melodic combination of notes, the scenic chord — there is little enough of that on our stages. It is all on one note. If we have a romantic lead, then he is nothing but saccharine, if we have a neurasthenic, he is only weepy. Hence the featureless monotony that has wrecked more than one good rendition (Vygotsky, 1922d).

In that connection, mention should also be made of his thoughts on the breadth of interpretive range [shirota ispolnitel'skogo diapazona] as an important characteristic of an actor's creative potential, and one that permits him to create a variety of images, from comic to tragic. I will add that Vygotsky pairs the actor's range with the uniqueness of the actor's capabilities, which are linked to the stylistic devices used to create an artistic image: "There are actors who offer photographs of roles; there are those that offer only passport data; there are those who fashion sculptural masks; there are those who sing their roles — and there are many, many other rooms in the theater's house." (Vygotsky, 1923d).

An important place in Vygotsky's evaluation of the uniqueness of the actor's individuality goes to psychological characteristics proper, such as inventiveness, intellectuality ("in his acting there is far more acumen and frigid observations" (Vygotsky, 1922c)), emotional mobility ("onstage liveliness and unforced mobility" (Vygotsky, 1922d)), daring ("no dread of uncouth and vulgar movement and tone" (Vygotsky, 1923f)), and so on. It should be emphasized that Vygotsky does not limit himself to documenting the actor's psychological characteristics in the role but sometimes also draws succinct and integral personal portraits of actors appearing on the Gomel stage. For example:

Utesov is a true master of the art of variety—the ditty, the dance, the caricature. His whistling, snorting, grunting, and free-floating malice in *The Newspaper* [Gazeta], which convey in satire the tone and spirit of the émigré press, are done penetratingly and with a clockwork perfection. . . Everything that makes a contemporary man of business and speculator funny is conveyed in such grimaces and wry faces, and with such heartfelt piquancy and profound intonations as to be infectiously amusing. Current events, funny stories, virtuoso technique — they are all here to serve this maestro of Odessan spontaneity, in life and in the theater (Vygotsky, 1923g).

The actor's uniqueness as an agent of creativity is, needless to say, most distinctly expressed through the relationship between actor and role: "It could be seen that the artist has something to say about the role, and he said it well and convincingly" (Vygotsky, 1923c). And this brings out an altogether singular topic in which two distinct junctures may be singled out. On the one hand, the very expression "has something to say about the role" is a manifestation of the stance of the actor as author, not only performing but simultaneously creating and interpreting the role and thereby defining the personal meaning that the actor ascribes to the onstage image he or she has created. And on the other hand, statements about the actor's relationship to the role ("the satirist is the prosecuting attorney of his role: he sets the spectators at odds with the leading men" (Vygotsky, 1923a)) are also distinct manifestations of the correlation between the idiosyncrasies of the actor's performance and the specific theatrical aesthetic. While in the theater of experiencings, the actor's authorial stance is "hidden" (is directly expressed in the image created), in the theater of Berthold Brecht, for example, the actor is estranged from his role and "delivers" it, like a speaker delivering a lecture. Another possibility is a ludic relationship — "I and the role" — as in Vakhtangov's famous staging of *Turandot*. Characteristically, Vygotsky explicitly addresses the actor's unique inhabiting of such ludic relationships as "I and the role" in his article "In Reference to the Psychology of an Actor's Creativity" [K voprosu o psikhologii tvorchestva aktera] (Vygotsky, 1936).

It is important to emphasize that for Vygotsky the "actor/role" relationship was fundamental to an understanding of the unique nature of the onstage experiencings and to the ascertaining of the psychological idiosyncrasies of the actor's transfigurational psychotechnique.

4.6 The Actor's Role as a Generalized Semantic Image

A central juncture in the evaluation of acting in Vygotsky's reviews is the individual nature of the character created onstage. These are as rule highly concise characterizations that generalize the ultimate personal manifestations: "The nullity is raised to a colossal degree. This is a gleaming stupidity, a glittering nonsense, a brilliant, distended soap bubble, a heroic nonentity, and human folly of the first water" (Vygotsky, 1923o). And these evaluations are not infrequently structured on a contraposition of the desired ideal onstage image with the actor's real embodiment of it: "Sosnin emphasized only the baron's mundane traits, never conveying the eternal fog in head and heart, the magnificent nonsense, the

picturesque and touching defenselessness and helplessness of this chimerical figure. And what emerged was virtually all business, even evil" (Vygotsky, 1922c).

Thus, when discussing in his reviews the generalized portrait of a character presented onstage, Vygotsky, on the one hand, addressed the broader cultural context (criticism, advocacy journalism) and on the other, drew on his own understanding of the dramaturgical material and of any contemporary socio-political associations that may have been germane. I will note that reversion to contemporary realia not only "contemporizes" a production but also gives it a new and sometimes unexpected meaning. And that meaning is generated from neither more nor less than the rationale behind his critical evaluation of an actor's specific performance, in which he correlates the acting with the generalized ideal onstage image.

It is important to emphasize that focusing on the construction of a character's generalized image assumes penetration into the inner, deep-reaching meaning of what he does. Here Vygotsky distinguishes "the role's psychological layout" from the "simple, proximate meaning" of the character's conduct that the actor may be using as his guide: "Whereas she could not cope with the role's psychological layout, in which a calloused heart so long silent falls in love stormily, spitefully, painfully, she was in tune with its simple proximate meaning all along" (Vygotsky, 1923j). That said, the defining juncture in the analysis itself is the search for the character's contradictions—a principle that associates organically with Stanislavsky's approach, to which Vygotsky makes a direct and highly characteristic reference: "Stanislavsky has given his students a wonderful rule: 'A sweet ingénue playing a sweet role (Ophelia, for example) should play it manfully, for otherwise sentimentality and falsehood result'" (Vygotsky, 1922c).

An overall analysis of Vygotsky's reviews shows that his generalized semantic evaluations of the onstage image created by the actor's focus on documenting the contradictions between those two differing levels, the first of which is associated with designating the divergences between the character's ideal onstage image and its actual embodiment on the stage, and the second, with uncovering the contradictions in the character's nature. An overall analysis of Vygotsky's reviews shows that his generalized semantic valuations of the onstage image created by the actor's focus on documenting the contradictions between two differing levels. The first one is associated with designating the divergences between the character's ideal onstage image and its actual embodiment on the stage; and the second level deals with uncovering the contradictions in the character's nature. Those contradictions may vary depending on the actor's creative intent: there may, for example, be contradictions associated with correlating the incompatible (an outward dim-wittedness and a most marvelous heart) or with the more complex creative mindset in which the personal essence that hides behind the mask (the role's secondary dimension) must be revealed.

This may perhaps mark a suitable end to my introduction, which only generally outlines the problems that Vygotsky broached in his works on the art of the theater. I will furthermore note that I have left virtually untouched for now issues such as theater management, repertoire policy, the problems of the national theater, and so on, to which Vygotsky also

repeatedly alluded in his reviews. Nor have I dealt with the extremely important and interesting question of the stylistic idiosyncrasies of his texts on the theater, which allow us to trace, on the one hand, his unique way of thinking with its distinct signs of mastery of the principles of dialectical logic's ascent from abstract to concrete, and on the other, the singularity of his axiological orientations, personal evaluations, critical judgments, and sense of humor. Those are points that I sought to unfold in my commentaries on Vygotsky's theatrical articles and reviews. I will emphasize that during the preparation of my materials, it was of primary importance to me to mark the substantive lines, the "unheard dialogue" that Vygotsky pursued when contemplating development in the theater, in art, and, of course, in psychology. And I will note that he conducted that intense dialogue amid postrevolutionary Russia's enormously powerful sociocultural shifts and transformations. In that state of axiological and normative uncertainty, his addressing of matters pertaining to art played, in my view, an important role in both his personal and professional self-definition.

A reader seeking a familiarity with Vygotsky's early works will, needless to say, choose the subject areas that match his own cultural and professional interests. But for me, at the risk of repeating myself, it was primarily important to center attention on the semantic junctures that were of personal concern to Vygotsky and to designate thereby the points of departure, the axiological baselines that determined how he would eventually come to be a professional psychologist and, more broadly, one of the twentieth century's foremost thinkers.

Besides acting, analyzing art theater Vygotsky focused attention on the following aspects: dramatic text, direction, spectator reaction. In theatrical reviews of Vygotsky reveals a number of phenomenon of understanding of the text which are he used later in psychological works. Among them there are semantic generalization, semantic contradiction, emotional dominant.

In the analysis of histrionism special attention is paid to speech styles and speech behavior (the purposes, drives, speech actions). At the same time, the speech is regarded not in itself, but in comparison to other paralinguistic means of expressiveness (gestures, intonation, pauses, etc.) The psychological phenomena connected with the movement as means of emotional impact on the viewer are of special interest (emotionality of the movement, the detained gesture, etc.).

In general, the analysis of theatrical reviews shows that for Vygotsky distinction of ordinary and spiritual sense acted as the central opposition. Unfortunately, his followers this line didn't develop. The detailed analysis of this direction is presented in our book "Comments to Theatrical Reviews of Vygotsky" (Sobkin, 2016) and in first (and still only) volume of complete collection is composed (Sobkin, 2016).

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