

L.S. Vygotsky as the Founder of the Discursiveness of the Psychology of Art¹

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Abstract

In an article based on the book by L.S. Vygotsky's "Psychology of Art" examines the principles that the author attributes to discursivity, which determined the formation and development of the scientific discipline of the same name "psychology of art". The author identifies and analyzes four such principles: the complementarity of the analysis of specific works of art and the characteristics of the essence of art, the reliance of psychological comprehension and analysis on art historical knowledge, the principle of historicity and the similarity of the creative process of a psychologist with a number of thinking strategies known in philosophy. In conclusion, Vygotsky's approach to understanding art is compared with the approach of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Keywords: Art; Psychology; Principles; Thinking; Work; Essence; Interpretation; Explanation; Ideas

Introduction

It is a commonplace that many psychologists refer to the works and ideas of Vygotsky, even those who essentially disagree with him. The question is why, because not only because of the formula that he is the founder of Soviet psychology. True, this was not always the case. I myself wrote that "there was a period of development of Soviet psychology and humanitarian thought when the work of L. S. Vygotsky was kept silent and was actually banned. Today we are dealing with the opposite trend: L. S. Vygotsky is almost canonized and criticism of him seems, if not indecent, then at least strange. Currently, the thinking and creativity of the creator of Soviet psychology are considered exemplary, certainly not devoid of search and problems, but still fundamentally correct, having stood the test of time. But is this really so? [6, p. 111].

The author who polemicizes with Vygotsky and at the same time refers to him a lot is no exception. A better understanding of this situation, which is actually completely normal, can be taken into account that Lev Semenovich Vygotsky was the founder of debate, including in the field of psychology of art. He wrote not only the seminal book "Psychology of Art", but also many theater reviews and articles [9]. The fact is that the founder of discursivity in a certain field of science formulates ideas and principles regarding which this scientific discipline further becomes and develops, both through the continuation and development of these ideas, and polemics with them. What, one might ask, are the ideas and principles that Vygotsky asked, referring to the psychology of art? In this case, we will mainly rely on the understanding of Vygotsky's work "Psychology of Art".

¹The article was written based on the author's report "Psychology of Art: from L.S. Vygotsky to modern discourses and concepts," read on November 9 this year at the plenary session of the All-Russian scientific and practical conference "Problems of the psychology of art".

An analysis of “The Psychology of Art” allows us to highlight the following approach to understanding art (we will consider it the first principle formulated by Vygotsky as the founder of discursivity): the complementarity of the analysis of specific works of art and the characteristics of the essence of art itself. Indeed, on the one hand, Vygotsky in his book provides excellent analyzes and interpretations of specific works of art (fables, short stories, dramas, theatrical scripts). On the other hand, he outlines and tries to substantiate hypotheses about what art is. Let’s start with the last one.

“We seem to come to the conclusion”, writes Vygotsky, “that a work of art always contains some contradiction, some internal discrepancy between material and form, that the author selects, as if on purpose, difficult, resistant material, one that resists all efforts with its properties”. The author to say what he wants to say <...> All art is based on this unity of feeling and fantasy. Its closest feature is that, by evoking in us oppositely directed affects, it delays the motor expression of emotions only due to the beginning of the antithesis and, by colliding opposite impulses, destroys the affects of content, the affects of form, leading to an explosion, to a discharge of nervous energy. In this transformation of affects, in their spontaneous combustion, in an explosive reaction leading to a discharge of those emotions that were immediately evoked, lies the catharsis of the aesthetic reaction <...> “Together with Hennequin, we look at a work of art as “a set of aesthetic signs aimed at arousing emotions in people”, and we try, based on the analysis of these signs, to recreate the emotions corresponding to them” [3, p. 18, 205, 271].

If we consider these ideas from the point of view of scientific methodology, then this is, of course, a natural science approach - Vygotsky describes the structure of a psychological mechanism, the action of which explains catharsis. By the way, which exactly corresponds to his methodological program of 1927. “Not Shakespeare in terms, as for Dilthey”, writes Vygotsky, “but psychotechnics - in one word, i.e. a scientific theory that would lead to the subjugation and mastery of the psyche, to the artificial control of behavior”. “Psychotechnics therefore cannot hesitate in choosing the psychology that it needs (even if it is developed by consistent idealists), it deals exclusively with causal, with objective psychology; non-causal psychology does not play any role for psychotechnics...We proceeded from the fact that the only psychology that psychotechnics needs should be a descriptive-explanatory science. We can now add that this psychology, in addition, is an empirical, comparative science, a science that uses physiological data, and, finally, an experimental science” [4, p. 389, 387, 390].

But if you think about the expression “all art is based on this unity of feeling and fantasy”, then it is not a natural science approach, but a humanitarian one. The same duality is visible in the interpretation of specific works of art. On the one hand, subtle hermeneutics, on the other, natural scientific explanation. Just one example, Vygotsky’s analysis of Bunin’s short story “Easy Breathing”.

The essence of the lifestyle of the heroine, high school student Olya Meshcherskaya, according to Vygotsky, is expressed by the formula of “everyday dregs”, but Bunin “not only does not try to hide this everyday dregs - it is naked everywhere in him, he depicts it with tactile clarity, as if giving it to our feelings touch it, touch it, feel it, see it with our own eyes, put our fingers into the sores of this life. The emptiness, meaninglessness, insignificance of this life are emphasized by the author, as is easy to show, with tactile force... We repeat once again: its essence, taken from this side, can be defined as the dregs of everyday life, like the muddy water of life. However, this is not the impression of the story as a whole. It’s not for nothing that the story is called “Easy Breathing”, and you don’t have to look at it very carefully for a long time to discover that as a result of reading we get an impression that cannot be described in any other way than to say that it is the complete opposite of the impression that give the events that are narrated, taken by themselves. The author achieves exactly the opposite effect, and the true theme of his story, of course, is light breathing, and not the story of the confused life of a provincial schoolgirl. This is a story not about Olya Meshcherskaya, but about light breathing; its main feature is that feeling of liberation, lightness, detachment and complete transparency of life, which cannot in any way be derived from the very events that lie at its basis” [3, p. 198-199].

There is, of course, a humanitarian approach here. But then a natural scientific discourse unfolds, allowing one to draw a conclusion in the spirit of the operation of the psychological mechanism: “It is possible, by following the structure of the form indicated in our

diagram, to show step by step that all the skillful leaps of the story ultimately have one goal - to extinguish, to destroy that immediate the impression that comes to us from these events, and transform, transform it into something else, completely opposite and opposite to the first. This law of destruction by the form of content can be very easily illustrated even by the construction of individual scenes, individual episodes, individual situations" [3, p. 198].

In other words, Vygotsky's approach and methods are "hybrid". But if we close our eyes to the reduction of the interpretation and explanation of works to a singled out psychological mechanism (at present, such an explanation does not look very convincing), then the complementarity that we talked about above is obvious. There is this complementarity in our works, as evidenced by the very title of the penultimate book of the author, dedicated to the understanding of art - "From the analysis of artistic works of art to understanding the essence of art" [7]. But there is also a difference. I proceeded from the conviction that I cannot postulate a psychological mechanism in advance, that the humanitarian analysis of unique works of art ("individuals", not subjects, but unique objects) provides only material for generalizations, that it is possible to obtain assumptions about the essence of art only with an eye to these generalizations, and most importantly - resolving problems related to art, understanding other concepts, and implementing the methodological guidelines shared by the author.

The principle of complementarity discussed here had a great influence on Vygotsky's followers. First of all, they take Vygotsky's idea of the mental mechanism of perception of art, but the interpretation and analysis of works of art, as a rule, is different from that of the meter. Here is one example, an article by Vladimir Sobkin, a famous Vygotsky researcher, "Ah, "Poor Liza", ah!" - Experience of psychological analysis of the story by N.M. Karamzin".

"What does it mean", he asks, "Liza's reduction of her love story to a simple plot of seduction: "I loved - he cheated"? Psychologically, this indicates the destruction for her of the meaning of her romantic experiences in her relationship with Erast. At this point in the narrative, a cardinal event occurs when two storylines converge: romantic love and the line of seduction. In L. S. Vygotsky's terminology, their "closure" occurs, and as a result, the romantic line is destroyed. Now this is really the end of the story... The feeling of tragedy arises due to Lisa's overcoming of romantic illusions, the reduction of love relationships to a trivial betrayal - Erast's preference for another woman, whom he gave his word ("engaged") to marry" [10, p. 140].

As K. Stanislavsky would say: "I don't believe it": just because someone cheated on someone, the romantic feeling does not disappear anywhere. Moreover, it turns out that Sobkin, analyzing "Poor Liza", solves completely different problems than Vygotsky.

"The above consideration", notes Sobkin, "allows us to formulate one of the main tasks that determine the main directions of our analysis of "Poor Lisa". On the one hand, we will try to record those explicitly or implicitly expressed artistic techniques that Karamzin uses (plot construction, speech and behavioral characteristics of characters, description of the landscape, etc.). This is a special author's game with the reader on the "field of art", which involves both following established literary norms and violating them, parodying them, etc. On the other hand, it will be important for us to record those moments that relate to the psychological characteristics of real behavior (motives of actions, affective reactions, behavioral norms, social expectations, moral assessments, ideological positions, etc.). They can also be either explicitly expressed or, on the contrary, implicitly present in the text. But this, we note, is the author's game with the reader on the "field of the real": psychology, social relations, ideology" [10, p. 111].

If Vygotsky wants to understand the essence of art and demonstrate effectiveness in terms of explaining the mental mechanism he formulated, then Sobkin is interested in "the artistic techniques that Karamzin uses", as well as "the psychological features of real behavior (motives of actions, affective reactions, behavioral norms, social expectations, moral -moral assessments, ideological positions, etc.)". As a result, it turns out that Vygotsky's beautiful mechanism remains aside for Sobkin; he does not use it in the interpretation of works of art.

Second principle - the basis of psychological understanding and analysis on art history knowledge and studies. "We have finally found", Vygotsky concludes, finishing the analysis of the fable and throwing a bridge to poetry, "that affective contradiction and its resolution in the short circuit of opposing feelings constitute the true nature of our psychological reaction to the fable. This is the first step of our research. However, we cannot help but look ahead and point out the amazing coincidence that the psychological law we have found has with those laws that many researchers have long pointed out for the highest forms of poetry" [3, p. 184].

"If we turn to the studies of verse as an aesthetic fact, which were carried out not by psychologists, but by art historians, we can immediately notice a striking similarity in the conclusions reached, on the one hand, by art historians, and on the other hand, by psychologists. Two series of facts - mental and aesthetic - reveal an amazing correspondence, and in this correspondence we see confirmation and definition of the formula we have established" [3, p. 279] (our italics - V.R.).

What is the meaning of such a correspondence, why is a psychologist forced to rely on the research of art historians (though not everyone does, but good, convincing psychological works related to the analysis of works of art really satisfy this formula). I think this is not simply a matter of familiarizing oneself with the knowledge gained by other scientists regarding the study of the same phenomenon. Art criticism is not in the pejorative sense of the word an eclectic scientific discipline, based on a variety of other philosophical and scientific disciplines (hermeneutics, semiotics, linguistics, the same psychology, history, cultural studies, anthropology). Due to this variety of means, an art critic can grasp and hold the whole (complexity) of a work of art, which a smart psychologist understands and does not hesitate to use.

Like a representative of any other science, a psychologist is forced to understand the psyche and behavior of a person (including in art) by constructing ideal objects. The latter, as I show, involve idealization (attributing fixed characteristics to the phenomenon being studied) in order to solve the problems facing the scientist, the ability to think about them consistently, as well as take a fresh look at the facts that interest the scientist [8, p. 59-60]. In turn, in the process of idealization, a scientist often loses sight of many important meanings characteristic of the phenomenon being studied, since the structure of ideal objects is simpler compared to the structure of the phenomenon itself. But these meanings, omitted during the construction of the initial ideal objects, may be needed at the next stages of the study, for the construction of new ideal objects - which, as a rule, is necessary for adequate study. So, the research of art historians helps the psychologist to retain and see the whole and complexity of the phenomenon being studied. It is this important point that Vygotsky captures when he speaks of the fundamental correspondence between two series of facts - mental and aesthetic.

The third principle, formulated by Vygotsky as the founder of discursivity, can be called the "principle of historicity". In accordance with it, the correct interpretation of works of art requires taking into account the historical time and ideas in which these works were created and functioned. "If before", writes Vygotsky in the article "On the Question of the Psychology of the Actor's Creativity", "the testimony of this or that actor", of this or that era, was always considered from the point of view of the eternal, unchangeable nature of the theater, now researchers approach this fact primarily as a historical fact that is taking place and which must be understood first of all in all the complexity of its historical conditionality...

Not the eternal and unchanging laws of the nature of acting experiences on stage, but the historical laws of various forms and systems of theatrical acting become in this case a guideline for the researcher. Therefore, in the refutation of Diderot's paradox, which we find in many psychologists, there is still an attempt to resolve the issue on an absolute plane, regardless of the historical specific form of the theater whose psychology we are considering. Meanwhile, the main premise of any historically oriented research in this area is the idea that the psychology of an actor expresses the social ideology of his era and that it changed in the process of human historical development, just as the external forms of the theater, its style and content changed. The psychology of an actor in the Stanislavsky Theater is much more different from the psychology of an actor in the era of Sophocles than a modern building is different from an ancient amphitheater...

The laws of refraction and interweaving of the feelings of the role with the feelings of the actor must be resolved first of all in terms of historical, and not naturalistic (biological) psychology..

It is necessary to identify the function of stage acting in a given era for a given class, the main trends on which the actor's impact on the viewer depends, and, consequently, to determine the social nature of the theatrical form in which these stage experiences receive a specific explanation...

The actor's experience, according to a happy German expression, is not so much a feeling of "I" as a feeling of "we". The actor creates impersonal feelings, sentiments or emotions on stage, which become the emotions of the entire theater hall. Before they became the subject of an actor's embodiment, they received literary design, they were floating in the air, in the public consciousness" [5, p. 321, 323, 324].

Having formulated this principle, which in psychology was called the "cultural-historical" approach, Vygotsky did not always implement it consistently. This is probably due to the hybridity of his methodology, combining natural science and humanitarian approaches. The fact is that the principle of historicity involves identifying "singular" (occurring only once) steps in the development and characteristics of the phenomenon under study, and the natural science approach to the reconstruction of history (i.e., genesis) identifies steps determined by social and cultural patterns. Are singularity and patterns combined in the development of a scientific phenomenon of interest, in this case art? In real history, I think yes, but in methodology they look like they negate each other.

I would highlight one more principle when analyzing "The Psychology of Art": Vygotsky demonstrated through his work (creativity) that the analysis and main interpretation of a work of art resembles, in part, a dialectical process according to Plato, in part, the process of "disenchantment" according to M. Weber, and in part, the resolution of a previously formulated contradiction and the revelation of a secret. In all cases, within the framework of such "conceptualization", the artist poses and becomes familiar with problems, does not understand what is happening to one degree or another, resolves problems and overcomes misunderstandings, realizes himself and takes into account the other (reader, viewer). This is creativity, but not everything.

Vygotsky presents the listed processes as the artist's objective response to the objective challenges of the time. Without denying this, I would say that this is at the same time the artist's response to his own personal problems. As Olga Kondratievna Popova, one of the leaders of the "musical movement", a teacher of "free dance" (an art direction that developed under the influence of Duncan), very correctly notes.

"I was", she recalls, a "free dance" teacher, "a child of terrible mental responsiveness. <...> It was very easy to achieve anything, because my psyche was very sensitive, vulnerable, and life was such that... I thought for a very long time, and all these years and the previous ones (the girls <students> know), I often asked myself: what did the musical movement give me - support? or vice versa? And only now I can say with absolute certainty: if there had not been a musical movement, I could have reached any degree of mental illness. Absolutely. What it is? And this is the ability to pour out all of your unrealized experiences, and maybe this whole life.... I am given a real opportunity to speak out. Pour it out, keep it all out of yourself, don't put pressure on it and experience it in silence, and I am given the motor path to experience this activity... After all, I repeat again: we are not trying to make a fuss about the fact that I dance exactly like Bach - but this will not happen in life! I'm dancing my idea in Bach, right? Your experience. And at this moment, apparently, such states and such moods are realized that otherwise I would have had in my soul forever. And they would gradually kill me. That is, apparently, this activity is some kind of powerful breakthrough and flow that I release from myself. Now I am deeply convinced of this. This is an opportunity to live. And the ability to regulate your conditions" (quoted from [1, p. 227]).

Conclusion

I have highlighted only the main principles formulated by L.S. Vygotsky as the founder of the discursiveness of the psychology of art. I think the second most important pioneer of discursivity in this area was Mikhail Bakhtin. In the book "From the Analysis of Works of Art to Understanding the Essence of Art", I wrote that Vygotsky was convinced that "his interpretation of fables and other literary works of art is, firstly, the only correct, objective one, and secondly, it completely fits into the above-mentioned scheme of assignment contradictions and their resolution (catharsis). For me personally, it is quite obvious that there are others, no less interesting and shedding light on the nature of the art of interpretation (interpretation) of works of art, and also that interpretations can rarely be subsumed under the scheme of contradictions and their resolution.

Another point concerns the "psychological mechanism" itself, described by Vygotsky, who argued that from analyzing the form of a work of art we can come to knowledge of the psychological mechanism. The question is, how can the analysis of artistic form lead us to the reconstruction of aesthetic experiences? Is it possible, without asking the concept of artistic form and mental experiences, to answer the question about the structure of the psychological mechanism? In addition, for example, M. Bakhtin seems to have a completely different understanding of the connection between artistic form and aesthetic experiences. Here the artistic form does not shape the psyche, but is its other existence, or, in other words, by mastering the form, moving in it, the individual lives in art.

It is necessary, Bakhtin wrote, "for the creator to enter into the visible, audible, pronounced and thereby overcome the material non-creative-determined nature of the form... when reading and listening to a poetic work, I do not leave it outside myself, like the utterance of another... but I am in a certain degree, I make it my own statement about another, I internalize rhythm, intonation, articulatory tension, internal gestures... as an adequate expression of my own value attitude towards the content... I become active in the form and in the form I take a value position outside the content - as a cognitive-poetic orientation" [2, p. 58-59].

In this case, it is impossible to enter into opposition - "Bakhtin versus Vygotsky", as well as "development through art or life in art"? [7, p. 169-170].

I tried to show that both points of view, both members of the opposition, turned out to be fruitful for understanding art. Although, as is known, Bakhtin had a attitude towards the psychological approach, his distinctions and concepts are very heuristic for the psychology of art. In this regard, modern humanitarian-oriented psychology of art comes from both Vygotsky and Bakhtin, whether we continue and further develop their ideas or polemicize with the latter.

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