



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

**Constructing Aesthetics:
Reassessing Vygotsky's Early Works in the
Context of the Russian Modernist Theatre**

Stella Medvedeva

Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh
2020



Lay Summary of Thesis

The lay summary is a brief summary intended to facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance accessibility, therefore the language used should be non-technical and suitable for a general audience. [Guidance on the lay summary in a thesis](#). (See the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study, General Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations. These regulations are available via: www.drps.ed.ac.uk.)

Name of student:	Stella Medvedeva	UUN	S1571325
University email:	S1571325@ed.ac.uk		
Degree sought:	PhD in European Theatre	No. of words in the main text of thesis:	83,363
Title of thesis:	Constructing Aesthetics: Reassessing Vygotsky's Early Works in the Context of the Russian Modernist Theatre		

Insert the lay summary text here - the space will expand as you type.

Lev Vygotsky has produced a significant yet largely understudied body of work in aesthetics, which focuses primarily on theatre and literature. This work was presented in several pieces of writing composed mainly in the years between 1915 and 1924, amid the significant artistic and cultural developments of Russian Modernism. This thesis examines Vygotsky's perspective on art against the general historical and cultural developments of his time and his later theories on human psychology and presents a comprehensive analysis and reinterpretation of his theories on the social psychological function of theatre.

The thesis provides a critical analysis of Vygotsky's methodology and of his theoretical views regarding the issues of emotion in art and the nature of aesthetic experience, with emphasis on the key term of catharsis. Moreover, it updates the definitions of these terms through the lens of Vygotsky's subsequent work in the field of psychology. Furthermore, it situates Vygotsky's aesthetics within the broader cultural context of 1910s and 1920s Russia. It engages critically with the scientific, philosophical and psychological influences under which Vygotsky performed his investigations in aesthetics and, thus, highlights the impact of the passage from the pre- to the post-Revolutionary era on Vygotsky's work. Finally, the thesis juxtaposes Vygotsky's approach to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the few—yet, pivotal—Russian Modernist productions of the tragedy and to the theoretical views of the play's psychological effect, as it was discussed by prominent figures of psychoanalysis. This part of the research acts as a case study to the application of Vygotsky's

Document control

K:\AAPS\D-AcademicAdministration\02-CodesOfPractice,Guidelines&Regulations\24-MainReferencesCopiesPolicies\01-Current\Assessment BOE SCC & Feedback\Forms\ThesisLaySummary

If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4990.

Date last revised:
20.06.19



Lay Summary of Thesis

perspective on the psychological effect of art on a society at a given historical time—here, within the transitions of the Russian Modernist period.

The thesis evidences the capacity of Vygotsky’s theory to encompass a significant part of the spectrum of Russian Modernist thought, which was often characterised by opposition and conflict, and its ability to bridge such contradictions by adopting a unique perspective that combines a subjectivist/idealist standpoint with scientific objectivism. It also highlights the dialectical wholeness of Vygotsky’s combinative approach and indicates its depth and ability to speak to the existential meaning of art amid the deep conflicts that humanity underwent in Russia during the 1910s and 1920s. Through this research, Vygotsky’s aesthetics gain a place among the scholarship of the Russian Modernist theatre and emerge as a distinct topic of study, pertinent to today’s investigations in the field of aesthetics.

Document control

K:\AAPS\D-AcademicAdministration\02-CodesOfPractice,Guidelines&Regulations\24-MainReferencesCopiesPolicies\01-Current\Assessment BOE SCC & Feedback\Forms\ThesisLaySummary

If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4990.

Date last revised:
20.06.19

Abstract

Lev Vygotsky has produced a significant yet largely understudied body of work in aesthetics, which focuses primarily on theatre and literature. This work was presented in several pieces of writing composed mainly in the years between 1915 and 1924, amid the significant artistic and cultural developments of Russian Modernism. In line with the emerging 'revisionist revolution' in Vygotsky Studies, and in response to the lack of specialised research on the topic, this thesis examines Vygotsky's perspective on art against the general historical and cultural developments of his time and his later theories on human psychology.

The research follows an interdisciplinary approach to present a comprehensive analysis and reinterpretation of Vygotsky's understanding of the nature and social psychological function of theatre. It engages primarily with Vygotsky's journalistic activity, his essay on *Hamlet*, and his book *The Psychology of Art*. The thesis provides a critical analysis of Vygotsky's methodology and of his theoretical views regarding the issues of emotion in art and the nature of aesthetic experience, with emphasis on the key term of catharsis. Moreover, it updates the definitions of these terms through the lens of Vygotsky's subsequent work in the field of psychology.

Furthermore, the thesis situates Vygotsky's aesthetic writings within the broader cultural context of 1910s and 1920s Russia—a period that maps the passing from the Russian Silver Age to the Avant-garde and to the beginnings of Socialist Realism. It engages critically with the scientific, philosophical and psychological influences under which Vygotsky performed his investigations in aesthetics (among which, the trends of spiritualism, individualism and psychoanalysis, the scientific revolution of the 1920s and the emerging objectivist/scientific methodologies, the Modernist aesthetic paradigms, and the political developments of the time). Consequently, it highlights the impact of the passage from the pre- to the post-Revolutionary era on Vygotsky's work; specifically, on the questions of effect of the developing theatrical styles on the changing audiences and theatre's role in human society. Reviewing the theatrical experiments and theorisations of theatre's effect on its audience, the research locates Vygotsky's theory on the social purpose of theatre among the visions for the 'new' and 'Revolutionary' theatre that emerged in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution.

Finally, the thesis juxtaposes Vygotsky's approach to theatre, in general, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in particular, to the few—yet, pivotal—Russian Modernist

productions of the tragedy, with the focus on the themes and problems they highlighted; and to the theoretical views of the play's psychological effect, as it was discussed by prominent figures of psychoanalysis. This part of the research acts as a case study to the application of Vygotsky's perspective on the psychological effect of art on a society at a given historical time—here, within the transitions of the Russian Modernist period.

The thesis evidences the capacity of Vygotsky's theory to encompass a significant part of the spectrum of Russian Modernist thought, which was often characterised by opposition and conflict, and its ability to bridge such contradictions by adopting a unique perspective that combines a subjectivist/idealist standpoint with scientific objectivism. It also highlights the dialectical wholeness of Vygotsky's combinative approach and indicates its depth and ability to speak to the existential meaning of art amid the deep conflicts that humanity underwent in Russia during the 1910s and 1920s. In this light, Vygotsky's aesthetics—and his particular understanding of the social psychological function of theatre—provide a multifaceted insight to the transitions in the philosophical outlook towards art in the highly dynamic times of Russian Modernism.

Acknowledgements

Doctoral study is a solitary process. Yet, there are some important people that left a profound and defining mark on my research and writing journey. My path in academia has been defined by the lucky circumstance of studying under Dr Konstantina Ritsatou—a remarkably gifted educator who saw a scholar in me before I could imagine such a path for myself. I am deeply grateful to her for instilling in me a principled work ethic and a genuine love for research. I owe my progress over the past few years to my primary supervisor, Dr Alexandra Smith. I would like to express my deepest gratitude for her gentle guidance and ample trust that allowed me to grow as a scholar and has inspired my future academic endeavours. This project would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of Dr David Overrend and Prof. Olga Taxidou. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to them for always offering their support and insights readily and generously. My sincere thanks go to Dr Anton Yasnitsky, for an intriguing conversation over my project's potential and his generous offering of sources. I would like to pay special regards to the program's subject librarian, Dr Shenxiao Tong. I was touched by the kindness and the care with which he handled my requests and questions. Finally, I want to thank my life partner, Alexander, whose enduring admiration lighted up my moments of self-doubt and my daughter, Luna, in the company of whom I learn the greatest lessons in humanity.

Contents

Lay Summary of Thesis	1
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	5
Notes on Translation, Transliteration, and Style	11
Introduction	13
A New Perspective on Vygotsky's Aesthetics	13
The Early Works of Vygotsky	15
Vygotsky and Cultural Developments in Modernist Russia	18
Vygotsky and the Russian Modernist Theatre	20
Subjectivism, Objectivism, and Vygotsky's Dialectical Synthesis of the Two	22
Vygotsky's Aesthetics and Vygotsky Studies: Placing His Early Works in their Right Context	24
Thesis Overview	34
PART ONE: Vygotsky's Theoretical Approach to the Psychology of Art	39
Introduction	41
Chapter One: Vygotsky's Psychology of Art: The Dynamic Structure of Literary Works	43
Vygotsky's Methodology	44
Art as an autonomous entity under study	44

Vygotsky’s “objective-analytical method”: Placing the artworks under study	47
On the unity of form and content	50
Vygotsky’s Essay on Hamlet (1915/16)	54
Vygotsky’s Theatrical Critiques (1922/23)	58
Vygotsky’s Analyses of Literary Works in The Psychology of Art	65
The fable	66
The short story	69
The tragedy	72
The Structure of a Work of Art	74
Chapter Two: Vygotsky’s Psychology of Art: A Dialectic Merging of Psychologies and Philosophies	77
Vygotsky and Psychoanalysis	79
Vygotsky and the Scientific Revolution of the 1920s	84
Vygotsky and the Vision of the ‘New Human Being’	90
Marxism and dialectics in Vygotsky’s thought	92
Chapter Three: Catharsis and the Social Effect of Art	97
‘Counter-feeling’ and Psychological Balance: Vygotsky’s Definition of Catharsis	97
Updating Catharsis through Vygotsky’s Studies on Perception, Emotions, Imagination, and the Notion of Perekhivanie	102
Perception	103
Emotions	105
Imagination	108
Perekhivanie	110
Art as cultural mediation or the social function of art	111
PART TWO: Vygotsky and the Russian Modernist Theatre	115
Introduction	117
The Crisis of the Russian Modernist Theatre	118

Chapter Four: Bridging the Inner with the Outer: Spirituality, Psychology, and Theatre	121
Theatre and Spirituality	121
The symbol as a gateway to the divine	124
Spiritualism and physicality	126
Theatre as a Window to the Soul	128
Psychoanalysis and literature	128
The monodrama	131
The symbol as a gateway to the shared psychological truth	131
Subjective versus objective interpretation	133
Chapter Five: Theatre and the Revolution: The Purpose of Theatre in the New Social Era	139
Theatre and the Revolution	139
Theatre for the 'New Human Being'	143
The 'New' and the 'Old' Theatre	146
Theatre Organising Life	155
Chapter Six: Theatre's Effect on Its Audience: Theatrical Experimentations and Theories of Reception	163
Theatricality	163
Theorising the Theatrical Experience	173
The Emotion in Theatre and its Social Significance	177
PART THREE: Shakespeare's Hamlet in Modernist Russia: A Case Study in Vygotsky's Aesthetics	189
Introduction	191
Chapter Seven: Vygotsky's Vision of Hamlet and Prominent Interpretations of the Shakespearean Tragedy during Russian Modernism	193

The Tradition of Hamlet in 18th and 19th Century Russia	195
Hamletism	197
Hamlet in the Modernist Russian Theatre	201
Craig-Stanislavsky	203
Michael Chekhov	208
Other early Soviet productions	212
The modernisation of Hamlet	213
The politicisation of Hamlet	215
Akimov	216
Meyerhold	218
Radlov	220
Chapter Eight: The Psychological Effect of Hamlet	223
Hamlet Analysed: The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Hamlet	224
Freud and Jones	224
Lacan	230
Hamlet's Function in Modernist Russia through the Vygotskian Lens	235
Conclusions, Points of Criticism, and Future Perspectives	253
Criticism	254
Future Perspectives	256
Afterword	265
Bibliography	267

Notes on Translation, Transliteration, and Style

The Russian names and terms cited in the text and the bibliography have been transliterated according to the international scholarly system GOST 7.79. The exceptions are internationally well-known names—such as Vygotsky, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Eisenstein, etc.—which are given, in the text only, in their traditional Western form.

Wherever possible, the Russian sources are cited in their published English translations with references to the English publications. Otherwise, quotes from Russian sources have been translated by myself. In all cases, the original spelling and the emphasis in the citations remain unchanged.

In line with some academic publications I have chosen to capitalise all artistic movements—such as Symbolism, Avant-garde, etc.—while schools of philosophical or scientific thought—such as psychoanalysis, reactology, etc.—appear in lowercase form. The word Revolution, when capitalised, refers to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Introduction

I do not believe I know an overview of art as a human phenomenon more fruitful and practical than the works of Vygotsky. (Sedakova, 2011)¹

A New Perspective on Vygotsky's Aesthetics

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), renowned for his work in psychology, begun his career with a significant body of work in aesthetics. Yet, his highly promising engagement with the criticism and the theory of art—and, more extensively, literature and theatre—was buried under his subsequent work. To this day, Vygotsky's activity as a literature and theatre scholar is commonly viewed as only a prelude to his later discoveries in the field of psychology. This is partially explained by Vygotsky's great popularity in the fields of psychology and education today,² paired with the complete absence of Vygotsky's name in the discussions regarding the theoretical landscape of the Russian Modernist theatre. As a result, the only scholars that studied Vygotsky's aesthetics, at least in recent times, came from the aforementioned fields, a condition that has led to a single-sided perspective on the work; one that has highlighted the importance of Vygotsky's engagement with the arts in the development of his scientific thought, but has failed to appreciate its significance for the fields of aesthetics, in general, and theatre studies, in particular.

These studies—which remain few and brief—have highlighted another feature that hinders the examination of the early phase of Vygotsky's work: the inconsistency and fragmentation of his thought regarding the psychology of aesthetic reception. Indeed, spanning almost over a decade, Vygotsky's perspective on aesthetics was subjected to radical shifts that affected the very foundations of his theories. Furthermore, several of the scientific premises that Vygotsky employed in the construction of his psychology of art were soon superseded—some, even by Vygotsky himself. All this paints the picture of an incomplete system of psychology based on outdated scientific models. The vast majority of scholars that have, thus far, undertaken the study of Vygotsky's early works juxtapose these texts to his later, much more mature and concise work, thus deeming them obsolete.

Nonetheless, once examined with a different purpose in mind—that of the

1 All cited excerpts from Sedakova's article have been translated by myself.

2 Though, as I expound later in this introduction, in the recent years, this popularity has given way to a more sober discussion over Vygotsky's contribution to the fields.

construction of a theory of aesthetics rather than a psychological theory—Vygotsky’s early writings appear not only philosophically sound but also relevant to today’s aesthetic theory. Such a reading is based on the understanding that, for the largest part of this early phase in Vygotsky’s career, he considered himself to be not a psychologist but a theatre critic and a scholar of literature and art. The majority of his early texts have little or nothing to do with psychology. They are predominantly theatre reviews, and papers that present Vygotsky’s subjective interpretation of either a drama—as in his essay on *Hamlet*—or the general state of theatre, in his time. All the while, the manuscript that references both psychological and aesthetic/philosophical models—*The Psychology of Art*—presents a highly sophisticated philosophical argument based on a broad understanding of the existent aesthetic theories and their practical implications. His thought, therefore, was predominately aesthetic and most often appeared in dialogue with predominant views of aesthetics and theatre.

Indeed, when juxtaposed to its historical and cultural background—a scope much wider than that adopted by the scholars of psychology—Vygotsky’s aesthetics emerge as a unique and multifaceted theory that stands in dynamic dialogue with the charged discussions that characterised the spheres of the arts and culture during his time. Indeed, Vygotsky’s thought in aesthetics is a product of the theoretical conflicts that characterised equally the philosophical, artistic, and scientific developments of the first three decades of the 20th century and could not be truly understood without all these contexts. As a matter of fact, once examined in conjunction with the theoretical debates regarding the psychological significance of art that arose at the time, Vygotsky’s interpretation reads as the bridging of antithetical outlooks and methodologies, and greatly informs our understanding of the cultural terrain of the time, as well as theatre’s position in it.

All this suggests the need for a targeted and in-depth research in Vygotsky’s theory on the psychology of the arts that would situate his first period of work within its right historical context. By adopting a novel perspective on the problem of Vygotsky’s psychology of art—one that focuses on its relevance to questions of aesthetics, as they affect the field of theatre studies—this thesis performs a comprehensive analysis and reinterpretation of Vygotsky’s early works while connecting them to the general historical and cultural developments of his time as well his later theories on human psychology. This project does not disregard the importance of psychology in Vygotsky’s early thought; on the contrary, it celebrates the dynamic synthesis between an objectivist standpoint and a deeply humanistic sensitivity, which characterises Vygotsky’s aesthetics. However, in order to

overcome the difficulties that psychology scholars have faced in the past when assessing these texts, this thesis presents a holistic interpretation of Vygotsky's system of aesthetics. This interpretation derives from the various diverse sources of his early writings, as well as his general thought in the field of psychology manifested in his later, more mature works. As a result, this thesis displays Vygotsky's aesthetics as a distinct topic of study that can be independently and, thus, effectively assessed and further investigated. This thesis also places Vygotsky's theories in their rightful place within the scholarship of the Russian Modernist theatre and makes them available for what I believe can be a fruitful dialogue with the theory and practice of today's theatre.

The Early Works of Vygotsky

Vygotsky's active involvement with the criticism and scholarship of the arts, focusing mainly on literature and theatre, spanned for almost a decade, with the earliest piece of writing—the first draft of his essay on *Hamlet*—dating back to 1915.³ This extended analysis of the Shakespearean classic was submitted as Vygotsky's master's thesis for the Shaniavsky University, under the instruction of Iulii Aikhenval'd, and reflected Vygotsky's love for literature, theatre, and poetry, and his fascination with Hegel's philosophy.⁴ In the years that followed, Vygotsky wrote and published over 80 articles, the majority of which were literary and theatrical reviews, while some provided a commentary on significant cultural issues pertaining to Jewish history, and others engaged with the excitement over the 1917 Revolution. All these texts evidence Vygotsky's extensive knowledge of the prevailing philosophical ideas of his time and his intuitive sensitivity in the reception of a text or a performance. Vygotsky's engagement with aesthetics was finally summarised and systematised in his book titled *The Psychology of Art [Psihologiya Iskustva]*, which was written as his doctoral thesis for the Institute of Experimental Psychology, in Moscow, under the direction of the reactologist Konstantin Kornilov. In this work, one can easily observe Vygotsky's transition to the field of psychology; the book, however, stands as a common denominator to Vygotsky's work in theatrical and

3 There are two unpublished manuscripts, dated 1915 and 1916 respectively, located in Vygotsky's family archive. A version of the text has been published in Russian and is included in the third edition of the *Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1986).

4 Vygotsky was raised in the small town of Gomel by a middle-class Jewish family that encouraged him to read books and visit the theatre. His aptitude in philosophy and his sensitivity in approaching questions of history, culture, and aesthetics was evident from his gymnasium days in Gomel (see Dobkin's memoirs of his childhood friend in Feigenberg, 2000).

literary criticism, philosophy, and psychology.

This first period of Vygotsky's work is characterised by a youthful enthusiasm and a constant search for a deeper understanding of humanity. Young Vygotsky had moved to Moscow, in 1913, to begin his studies as a medical student—under the insistence of his parents—but he switched his degree to law only a month later, while he simultaneously took a significant number of classes from both the Moscow State University and the Shaniavsky People's University⁵ in the fields of humanities and psychology. During his university years, Vygotsky gained a wide education in philosophy, psychology, and linguistics, while he had been a regular visitor of the theatre. His growing insights on the subjects were expressed in several articles—mainly book reviews—published between 1916 and 1917. This early journalistic practice ended abruptly with the coming of the October Revolution, following which Vygotsky returned to Gomel, presumably to offer support to his family within the difficulties of the political turmoil. In the years that followed, until his final relocation to Moscow in 1924, Vygotsky undertook an impressive number of positions, all related to the cultural life of his town. He taught literature, psychology, and philosophy in local schools and through private lessons, published a large number of theatre and literary critiques,⁶ and worked as a cultural official, in which capacity he “travelled all over Russia to bring the best theatrical companies, poets and novelists to Gomel” (Van der Veer, 2014, p. 21). These travels brought him in contact with leading artists of the Russian Avant-garde and placed Vygotsky in an advantageous viewpoint for the observation of the rapid developments in the field of the arts brought by the Revolution.

During that time, Vygotsky's interests shifted towards the questions regarding art's effect on the human psychology. Vygotsky engaged with the profound aesthetic-cum-political issues that the Avant-garde raised—the most crucial of which being the impact of the developing theatrical styles on the changing audiences. All the while, he taught literature in the local schools and furthered his understanding of human psychology. All this must have invoked in Vygotsky an interest in the nature of the psychological experience of reading a novel or auditing a performance. The same period also marked the gradual turn of Vygotsky to the field of experimental psychology; it is not thus surprising that, in 1923, he set up a small laboratory within a local college, where he performed his first experiments on the effects of literary

5 Shaniavsky was an unofficial institution created in 1906 that gathered a great sample of Russia's intelligentsia who had been expelled by their respective institutions on the grounds of their participation in the revolt of 1905.

6 About 70 of the theatre reviews, written for the newspapers *Nash Ponedel'nik* [Our Monday] and *Polesskaya Pravda* [The Polesky Truth] can be now found in digital form (Yasnitsky, 2012).

texts on the reader's breathing rhythm—and consequently feeling—using his own students as subjects. These experiments, as well as the general development of his thought during that time, led Vygotsky to believe in an “objective” effect of art, which makes it plausible to analyse artistic creations and their purpose in an objective-analytic way.

Only a year later, Vygotsky was asked to join the Institute of Experimental Psychology in Moscow, where he had the chance to repeat the same experiments. Vygotsky's appointment at Kornilov's Institute signified the beginning of a highly productive career in psychology; in the ten years that followed, Vygotsky worked simultaneously for a number of institutes and laboratories,⁷ delivered lectures and supervised dissertations, worked for publishing houses and for governmental bodies, and wrote and published an impressive amount of articles and books (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Fortunately, in the year after his relocation to Moscow, and during a tuberculosis attack, Vygotsky took the time to summarise his work on the psychology of the arts in the format of a doctoral thesis. The book, titled, *The Psychology of Art* (1971), forms an approach to the question of the nature and the function of art, from a teleological perspective, examining the psychological impact of art on the individual and the public, while addressing the issues of emotion in art, the nature of aesthetic experience, and the semiotic nature of the psychological processes of the aesthetic experience—that is the dynamics between the structural and contextual characteristics of an artwork that guide its psychological reception.

The book, Vygotsky's last work on the topic of aesthetics, was not published while he was alive, presumably due to its similarities with the Formalist movement, which would have attracted attacks from the leading ideologists (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Yet, *The Psychology of Art* raised questions and elaborated on issues that followed Vygotsky across his career. Among them are the application of dialectics to problems of psychology, the topics of imagination, emotion, and intelligence, the body-mind problem, the cultural-historical nature of human activity, and finally, the nature of creativity in life in general, and in theatre, more specifically.⁸ Vygotsky returned to many of these topics in the last two years of his life (1932-34) and developed them through his growing expertise in psychology. Nonetheless, his untimely death at the age of 37 interrupted his investigations on the questions that relate to his earlier studies in art, leaving much of his work

7 See (Van der Veer, 2014) for a list of laboratories and institutions with which Vygotsky has been associated.

8 The last topic was addressed, by Vygotsky, in an article titled “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work [K voprosu o psihologii tvorchestva aktjora]”, written close to the end of his life (Vygotsky, 1999b).

unfinished.⁹

Vygotsky and Cultural Developments in Modernist Russia

Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology remains, to this day, an incomplete system. What is more, the course of development of Vygotsky's thought in aesthetics, from his first essay on *Hamlet*, to *The Psychology of Art*, and to his final studies in emotion, imagination, and creativity, appears relatively discontinuous, and at times even self-contradictory. The discrepancies between his various texts are caused, to an extent, by Vygotsky's personal development as a scientist. In this light, the youthful exclamations of admiration found in his 1915 essay were replaced by systematic theorising in 1924—which, however, relied on disputable theories of psychology, some of which Vygotsky proceeded to refute later—while, the final writings of the early 1930s present a well-established and consistent theoretical and scientific outlook. All the while, the line of development of Vygotsky's perspective on art also reflected the general developments in the philosophical, scientific, and cultural terrains of his time. In this context, Vygotsky's first essay reads as an echo of Symbolistic and Impressionistic ideas, with an appropriate to the times flirtation with the mystical and the spiritual; while the writings leading to his doctoral thesis demonstrate his dedication to the cause of the Revolution in the regeneration of human culture and society.

The historical time and place, in which Vygotsky developed his thought, was indeed characterised by profound transitions and radical shifts on all levels of human thought. The turmoil was first and foremost political and, in part, shared between Russia and Europe. Within the first few years of the 20th century, a series of regional wars and revolutions escalated to world-wide events: the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and the First World War. The magnitude of these events had devastating effects on all facets of life; every involved nation's economic, political, and cultural life was disrupted and eventually transformed. The transitions brought by Modernism also had an existential effect on human life. In French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon's words:

The present epoch is one of these critical moments in which the thought of mankind is undergoing a process of transformation. Two

⁹ Comprehensive biographies of Vygotsky, that include extensive references to his early life and work are found in (Yasnitsky, 2018), and in (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Dobkin's memoirs—a childhood friend of Vygotsky—in (Feigenberg, 2000) also paint a vivid picture of the life and developing thought of young Vygotsky. An exhaustive list of Vygotsky's works can be found in ("Bibliography of The Writings of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky", 1999).

fundamental factors are on the base of this transformation. The first is the destruction of those religious, political, and social beliefs in which all the elements of our civilization are rooted. The second is the creation of entirely new conditions of existence and thought as the result of modern scientific and industrial discoveries. The ideas of the past, although half destroyed, being still very powerful, and the ideas which are to replace them being still in process of formation, the modern age represents a period of transition and anarchy. (Le Bon, 2001, p. 7)

Nonetheless, the transitions that were experienced in Europe as chaotic, in Revolutionary Russia, led thinkers from all fields to unite under a common purpose: the re-imagination of the new society and the new human being living in it. The promises for a new era of life raised by the 1917 Revolution, blurred the lines between philosophy, political studies, art, and science, the representatives of which turned to the past with a highly critical lens and engaged with vigorous experimentation dedicated to the creation of the future. The enthusiasm over the historical and cultural changes, taking place during the 1910s and 1920s, led to the emergence of extreme perspectives that were often contrary to one another. This is the reason why it is hard to discern a single Modernist canon, and if one does so, they will soon find that the majority of works produced during the time are actually excluded from it. Yet, Modernism, as a whole, was not binary. In contrast, it seems that the most prominent characteristic of Russian Modernism was its ability to bridge the contradictions that marked the period: the old and the new, the scientific method versus the human experience, and the individual life in contrast to the social and the political.¹⁰

It is not surprising that Vygotsky's work on the psychology of art, in its overall arc, appears to address these very same issues. Vygotsky developed his thought in dialogue—whether direct or indirect—with the emerging credos of the various Modernist schools of thought, as he joined the search for the arts' purpose in the construction of the new post-Revolutionary era. His 1919 article titled "Theatre and Revolution" (Vygotsky, 2015) is the most profound example of his beliefs regarding the potential of art to cultivate the Revolutionary ideals for the public. The theatrical and literary reviews that followed abided by the same conviction that theatre, probably more than any other artform, needs to find new, 'Revolutionary' forms in order to lead the cultural shifts prescribed by the Revolution. Finally, in *The*

¹⁰ When discussing the revolution in the scientific and philosophical activity of the 1920s and early 1930s, it is necessary to distinguish between the methods of the Bolsheviks and the totalitarianism of Stalin, that gradually dominated the intellectual terrain of Modernist Russia. It is also important to note the continuity in the transition from the former to the latter. In this sense, the period that Vygotsky lived and worked was a time of creative experimentation as well as a gradual lapse towards a Stalinist canon.

Psychology of Art, Vygotsky proceeded to systematically investigate the ways in which art could not only head the cultural evolution of the country, but affect the society on the psychological level, thus promoting the evolution of humankind, under the new values.

Vygotsky and the Russian Modernist Theatre

Vygotsky's gravitation towards the theatrical art is understood by the fact that the Russian Modernist theatre was placed in the epicentre of the cultural developments of the time. Theatre combined a series of essential characteristics: it bore a unique immediacy in its relationship to the public, it was able to combine all other artforms, and it stayed in constant dialogue with the developments in other essential domains of life—namely, philosophy, spiritual practices, politics, and science. The work of the theatre artists in Russia, during the time, often became the subject of philosophical debate, while the observations and demands of modern thinkers would have a profound effect on theatrical production. It is indeed rare that an artist of the Russian Avant-garde worked solely in creating theatre. As the reigns of culture passed from the elite to the public, the modern Russian theatre artists saw themselves and their art as part of a grander scheme of social change. In this manner, the theatrical activity of the time demonstrated and even exaggerated the transitions that characterised Modernism in its totality.

This was also reflected in the rapid artistic developments that marked the period. From the turn of the 20th century to the establishment of the Socialist Realist canons, theatre artists found new aims for their productions and developed corresponding styles and techniques. The leading theatrical directors would assume a plethora of roles, ranging from acting teachers, to theorists of theatre, and from set designers to production managers, seeking the optimum ways to express their artistic beliefs, and experimenting vigorously on all dimensions of theatre. This dynamic approach to theatre-making resulted in a multiplicity of new forms, “both epic and miniature, new practices based on theatres of the fairground, the circus ring and the music hall, and new spectator-performer relationships” (Leach, 2018, p. 72). In a way, artists and theorists had dedicated their work in finding the optimum ways in which theatre could achieve its Revolutionary social purpose. Vygotsky's work, at the time, answered to this very issue; however, he refrained from forming an opinion as to which theatrical style would fit the new cultural era. In his theatrical reviews, Vygotsky commented on issues of style and technique and advocated the development of new, Revolutionary theatrical forms. Yet, his focus was not on the

nature of these forms, but on the effect that they had or could have on the new spectators. The focus on the psychological impact of theatre on the social psychology—regardless of its style—was even more prominent in Vygotsky's book. *The Psychology of Art* lacks any reference to elements of performance as it is dedicated to the discussion of the psychology involved in aesthetic reception and the significance of art in general, or literature—including dramatic literature—more specifically, for the formation of the social mind.

Though he did not engage with the specifics of the form that the Revolutionary theatre may obtain, Vygotsky embraced the ability of Modernist theatre to merge within its practice the developments in the fields of philosophy, politics, and science. Indeed, the theatrical activity of the time, fancying itself central to the life of humans, did not remain within the realm of aesthetics, but developed an outward gaze towards all other domains of human life. In the early, pre-Revolutionary years, theatre was often envisioned as a space for spiritual growth, a means for humans to achieve a metaphysical union with each other and with a higher dimension of themselves. With the establishment of individualism, and the spreading of the theories of psychoanalysis, theatre became a means towards one's inner world—a place where one would reach their true self through means of intuition. After the events of 1917, the political developments attracted a great number of theatre makers and especially in the case of the Futurists several dedicated their art to the political agendas of the government. At the same time, the artists' and critics' careful examination of form, the discussions on the relationship between artistic form and content, and the constant experimentations with and improvements of technique delineate an effort to bring a scientific methodology in artistic creation and theorization, and scientific objectivity in artistic appreciation. This yielding of science and philosophy to the theatrical practice attracted Vygotsky who not only found his thought equally nurtured by all three fields but also shared the conviction, popular for his time, that it was theatre's task to lead the development of the new human beings and their novel society.

Overall, the October Revolution served as a relevant marker to a major transition in the understanding of theatre's function: from a subjectivist and humanistic perspective, that emphasised the individual's inner world, to an objectivist and mechanistic outlook, that attempted to incite change by altering the external behaviour of humans, usually intertwined with its political impact. This division manifested itself in Modernist thought—and more importantly, in Modernist theatre—in a plethora of forms. Yet, the influences from the two perspectives, and elements from the artistic movements that they fuelled, were not contained within

one or the other timeframe leaving Modernist theatre with a series of controversies. While most artists and critics fiercely advocated their beliefs regarding theatre's role in the changing society, and while most appealed to both popular philosophy and science to back their claims, it was rare to find two artists or scholars in agreement as to which perspective was fitting to the times and affective for the audiences. This multiplicity of voices, found even within the same artistic movement, led to tensions that were expressed through both the adoption of extreme positions and the severe criticism of the works of others. All this made the Russian Avant-garde theatre scene a pool of contrasting elements, fertile disputes, and simultaneously barren polemics between extreme ideologies.

Subjectivism, Objectivism, and Vygotsky's Dialectical Synthesis of the Two

Within this highly provoking climate, Vygotsky adopted a unique position. Indeed, one of the most significant qualities in Vygotsky's work—and in my opinion, the one that allowed his theories to reach a deep understanding of human nature—is his particular resistance to fully subscribe to a single school of thought. Vygotsky appeared to be highly aware of the plethora of theoretical debates of his period and also most critical of the methodologies that led to each perspective. His criticism, however, was not absolute; from every system of thought or artistic endeavour that he examined he would systematically select those elements that survived his assessments and would thus synthesise his unique perspective. In doing so, Vygotsky's work was able to encompass a significant part of the spectrum of Modernist thought, often characterised by opposition and conflict: his early thought married Western humanism with Russian Formalism, psychoanalysis with Marxist psychology, and a dedication to the Revolutionary cause with the values of the Russian Silver Age. As a result, one finds in Vygotsky's aesthetics a unique combination of idealistic subjectivism and scientific objectivism.

Vygotsky's thought is, indeed, rooted in the philosophical, artistic, and psychological approaches that dominated the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. All the while, Vygotsky's perspective was formed largely by his experience of the scientific revolution that took place in Russia soon after the October Revolution, and gave rise to a series of unique and original theoretical concepts and scientific methodologies. In his work, Vygotsky strived to raise the study of art—as he did with the study of psychology—to a scientific level, governed by objectivism and rationality; however, he was not a rationalist that denied a deeper

philosophical meaning to art's existence. On the contrary, Vygotsky was highly critical of all kinds of mechanistic approaches to both psychology and aesthetics and often exposed the superficiality of such perspectives. All the while, he shared in the enthusiasm over the Marxist ideals, as propagated by the Revolution. This led him to search for the essential purpose of art in the specific historical period of his country.

This particular pairing of scientific method with philosophical thought poses a considerable difficulty to the study of Vygotsky's aesthetics. Scholars from the field of psychology have found Vygotsky's reliance on philosophical ruminations, rather than empirical methods, to be a great weakness of his theory. Yet, for the field of theatre studies, Vygotsky's philosophical consideration is not only valid but also valuable, let alone relevant. Most importantly, Vygotsky's interpretation of the empirical findings in the psychology of his time through a philosophical lens allowed him to avoid the mistake of oversimplification that was so often made by his contemporaries¹¹ in the fields of aesthetic theory and theatrical practice. This distinct filtering of science through aesthetics can also serve as a response to the criticism towards Vygotsky's early theories, due to the objective psychological models that formed the basis of his manuscript, *The Psychology of Art*, most of which became obsolete quickly. Such criticism, though valid in its evaluation of Vygotsky's psychology, stems from a psychology-centred perspective and overlooks the combinative nature of Vygotsky's deeply interdisciplinary process. Yet, as this thesis argues, Vygotsky's approach to aesthetics is described equally by an objectivist approach to the psychological function of art, a profound belief in its psychologically transformative power, and a constant search for the role of art in the aftermath of the Revolution.

What is more, much of the essence of his work lies in the ways in which these aspects met and interacted with each other. Vygotsky's combinative position presented a dialectical wholeness, where opposite perspectives merged to create a new, deeper, and more holistic approach. This new level of understanding of art, presented in his work, spoke to the existential meaning of art amid the deep conflicts that humanity underwent during the time. Indeed, Vygotsky argued for art's potential to facilitate the cultural changes promised by the Revolution—a shared characteristic with the popular post-Revolutionary beliefs—but also placed the nature of these changes deeply within the psychology of the individual and the society—a hallmark of the pre-Revolutionary outlook—all the while, focusing his

11 Chapter Six discusses several such theories and practices that relied on oversimplified interpretations of popular psychological theories of the time.

investigations on the ways in which an artwork incites such changes, applying the popular scientific methods of his time. With his unique combination of outlooks and methodologies, Vygotsky managed to surpass any division of thought that characterised his time, and to portray the human experience in a period when humanity had cut its connection with its disappointing past and had not yet figured out its future.

Vygotsky's Aesthetics and Vygotsky Studies: Placing His Early Works in their Right Context

This rich interconnectedness between Vygotsky's work on aesthetics and the cultural developments of his time has been largely overlooked in the field of Vygotsky studies. The majority of the scholars that study Vygotsky's life and work read in his high interest in the significance of arts for the human psyche only a prelude to his main work in psychology. This approach has been adopted by most biographers of Vygotsky (see Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; and Yasnitsky, 2018); it also characterises a small number of publications specifically on the topic of Vygotsky's early writings (namely West, 1999; Bayanova, 2013; Van der Veer, 2015; and Sobkin, 2017). Few studies engage specifically with the topic of Vygotsky's aesthetics and follow the development of his thought from the 1915/6 essay on Hamlet, to *The Psychology of Art* (namely Sedakova, 2001; Smagorinsky, 2011; Kotik-Friedgut, 2012; and González Rey 2016 and 2018). These are attempts to examine Vygotsky's early works as a distinct system of thought and respond to a difficulty found in the latter's texts: due to the rapid development of his thought, paired with his hasty writing style, Vygotsky's overall thought appears difficult to grasp and summarise. Among them, some connect Vygotsky's early ideas with his very last studies on the emotion, imagination, and creativity. Yet, Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology remains, to this day, an incomplete system that requires careful examination, reinterpretation, and specialised attention.

Unfortunately, the majority of the above studies begin with the aim to discover the seeds of Vygotsky's later thought in this early period of writing; as a result, these studies often adopt an underlying critical tone towards Vygotsky's early psychological premises and do not appreciate his aesthetics as a distinct topic that can be studied autonomously and inform today's discussions on the psychology of

the arts.¹² West (1999) dedicates a paper to providing the reader with a detailed presentation of Vygotsky's arguments, as they are found in *The Psychology of Art*. The structure of his analysis follows the book closely and his comments are not critical, but serve to clarify and elucidate Vygotsky's thought. West's paper does not provide the reader with any particular argument regarding the validity of Vygotsky's thought, nor does it challenge any views of the early works of Vygotsky. However, considering the chronology of its publication, it must have served as an important introduction to Vygotsky's work on aesthetics for a field that focused on his latter work alone. West's critique towards Vygotsky's thought appears only at the very end of the paper and focuses on the passive role that is assigned to Vygotsky's recipient of art. West finds the root of this problem in both the psychological system that characterises Vygotsky's thought—which, in his view, leans towards biological determinism—and the book's methodology, which ignores the specific historical and sociocultural environment of the recipient. These conclusions regarding Vygotsky's thought are explained by the nature of West's primary interest in Vygotsky, which is the analysis and evaluation of the development of his psychological system of thought. Under this light, West found *The Psychology of Art* to present

surprisingly unsophisticated comments [...]—surprising, because we think of Vygotsky now as the author of *Thought and Language* and *Mind in Society*, texts which have at their centre the notion of the human mind as a creative entity, at once determined by and determining its environment. (West, 2001, p. 25)

Yet, West concludes his paper by pointing at how Vygotsky's understanding of the emotionally transformative power of catharsis overcame the very problems created by his premises and placed the value of Vygotsky's early works in the latter's attempt to formulate a scientific theory about the psychology of artistic reception—a task that is yet to be tackled effectively.

West looks at the overall work of *The Psychology of Art* with a positive attitude: “Vygotsky's work in aesthetics is partial and provisional, but nonetheless rich and suggestive enough to be of interest and importance still to literary theorists and teachers of English” (West, 1999, p. 47). Nonetheless, his analysis, completed from his own, scientific perspective, exposes the rather simplistic views of the human psyche that derive from the psychological models Vygotsky followed at the time of the composition of *The Psychology of Art*: that is, the resonance from

12 Gonzalez Rey (2018) provides an additional source for the disregard that psychology scholars tend to show towards Vygotsky's early work: Leontief's introduction to the first edition of *The Psychology of Art*, which accompanies the text in most subsequent editions. In this introduction, Leontief, a supporter of socialist realism, provided a rather biased view towards Vygotsky's early work, presenting it as a work with historical but not theoretical value.

Vygotsky's reflexological phase from the years leading up to his entrance to Kornilov's institute, and his subscription to the model of reactology that followed. These reductive models of psychology (that were later renounced by Vygotsky) are the focus of criticism for most psychology scholars that have engaged with Vygotsky's early writings. In his paper, Smagorinsky (2011) provides a comprehensive list of the problematic psychological and methodological premises of Vygotsky, as they appear in *The Psychology of Art*. Next to the reactological background, Smagorinsky appears highly critical towards Vygotsky's Marxist association, arguing that it acts as a 'cultural blinder' for Vygotsky, and his heavy reliance on philosophical deduction, which, in his view, reduces the validity of his arguments. As with the case of West, Smagorinsky's criticism, and his resulting reprehension of Vygotsky's early works, derives from his narrow perspective: in line with his colleagues, he perceives Vygotsky as a psychologist—not a philosopher—and is concerned with situating his early writings within his legacy as a psychologist.

Nonetheless, not all studies conducted by psychology scholars deem Vygotsky's early thought as obsolete. In his two papers (2016 and 2018), Gonzalez Rey retains his psychological perceptive but arrives to conclusions that are dramatically different from those that precede him: he finds *The Psychology of Art* to be "one of the more important contributions of Vygotsky to the development of psychology" (González Rey, 2016, p. 306). Of course Gonzalez Ray does not overlook the obscure nature of Vygotsky's psychological arguments in *The Psychology of Art*; however, he proposes a different way of examining these early works. In his two papers, he focuses on the notions of perezhivanie, emotion, and imagination and engages with these concepts as they are found both in *The Psychology of Art* and in Vygotsky's last phase of work. In this manner, Gonzales Ray creates a theoretical synthesis of the two phases in Vygotsky's thought which allows him to elucidate the incomplete argumentation of the early Vygotsky and, thus, overcome the difficulties in the appreciation of Vygotsky's aesthetic theory, posed by scholars such as West and Smagorinsky. Larrain & Haye (2020) follow the example of Gonzales Ray in proposing a very interesting cross-study between Vygotsky's later work on emotions, his general psychological theory and his early writings in *The Psychology of Art*, that shed a clear light on Vygotsky's perspective of the dynamic and transformative nature of artistic emotion.

This thesis adopts a similar perspective to that of Gonzales Ray and Larrain & Haye in employing Vygotsky's psychological perspective, as it is found in his later texts, in order to illuminate his early writings. Such an inter-textual reading seems necessary when engaging with Vygotsky's aesthetics, as his thought in his early

phase appears often incomplete, leading to conclusions that can demean the value of Vygotsky's aesthetic theory. Responding to West's criticism regarding the passivity of the recipient, for example, this thesis employs Vygotsky's later studies on imagination and creativity to demonstrate the mentally active involvement of the reader or the spectator in the artistic experience. So far, many of the psychology scholars have correctly deemed *The Psychology of Art* as a text that is based on a confusing flow of arguments, conflicts in influences and potential conflicts in thought, and overall an incomplete system of psychology. Juxtaposed to Vygotsky's later, much more concise work, this early text is unavoidably deemed obsolete. Yet, when one wishes to reconstruct Vygotsky's aesthetic theory, the dismissal of these early texts is not an option, as Vygotsky did not return to the subject in his later career. The reading of *The Psychology of Art* through the lens of Vygotsky's later work serves as a means to reconstruct a concise and stable theory of aesthetics, as it derives from the totality of his works. However, it is important to note that, since this is a project that aims to discuss Vygotsky's aesthetics and not his aesthetic psychology, the assessment of Vygotsky's overall psychological premises are conducted only to the extent that they inform the philosophy of his aesthetics.

This is another way in which this project overcomes the criticism towards Vygotsky's aesthetic theory: staying true to its aim, which is the reconstruction of Vygotsky's theory of aesthetics. This theory, as it is presented in this thesis, encompasses Vygotsky's writings on psychology—such as *The Psychology of Art* and other subsequent works—and his very early writings—such as his essay on *Hamlet* and his theatrical reviews—that have very little to do with psychology. Under this light, the points of criticism described above lose much of their meaning. The reliance on philosophical deduction, for example—a major point of previous criticism—is an expected and perfectly valid means of construction of an aesthetic theory. While Vygotsky's association with Marxist culture can be now discussed as a dynamic dialogue with the cultural developments of his time as opposed to a form of 'cultural blinder'.

Indeed, as Vygotsky's aesthetics developed in close contact with the sociocultural life of Russia in the 1910s and 1920s, the study of such associations elucidate his theory greatly. The reading of Vygotsky's early works with reference to its cultural and historical context also clarifies aspects of his theory that have been previously misconceived. One such aspect is the exclusive association of Vygotsky's ideas in *The Psychology of Art* with the Formalist school (Lima, 1995 and Van der Veer, 2015). This is an inference that ignores a large part of Vygotsky's sources of inspiration—such as the school of Symbolism that served as a starting

point in Vygotsky's thought development (see Mal'cev). This assessment also overlooks the complexity of the framework that characterised the various schools of artistic thought that influenced the work of Vygotsky. But most importantly, it disregards the remarkable ability of Vygotsky to synthesise a unique approach while drawing from disparate and often contrasting movements in thought. Another misconception can be found in Smagorinsky's paper (2011), where Vygotsky is criticised of believing that classical, canonised works of art have a stable meaning outside the time and the culture of the receiver. Smagorinsky is right to point out that Vygotsky reads his chosen works of art from his specific sociocultural background and then assigns a level of universality to his outcomes, which is, in itself, a disputable induction. However, this universality does not apply to the meaning of those classical texts, but on the psychological function prompted by the dialectic nature of their innate structure. In Vygotsky's aesthetic theory, as it is discussed in this thesis, the meaning of any given work of art is not stable but results from the artwork's psychological function, which is directed by the interplay between the work's form and content, paired with its social effect on a given society in a given historical time.¹³

The examination and reiteration of Vygotsky's early works as a theory of aesthetics that is proposed in this thesis does not only clarify common misconceptions about them, but also places them in their rightful context in order for them to be fairly and constructively evaluated. This work responds to the general stance adopted by Vygotsky scholars, which disregards his role as a theatre critic and literature scholar and views him solely as a psychologist. Bayanova's paper (2013) is the extreme of this trend: in it, she attempts to trace the seeds of the dialectics of the personality's birth—a psychological concept of the later Vygotsky—in the latter's essay on *Hamlet*, written when he was a 19-year-old literature student. The tracing of Vygotsky's later thought in his early writings has been attempted by several other scholars (most notably, Van der Veer, 2015; and Sobkin, 2017) and is a justifiable and even illuminating practice. Bayanova, for example, correctly notes that, at the time Vygotsky was composing his essay, the social aspect of the creation of the person appeared to be a hot, albeit problematic topic, as the Russian society was undergoing fundamental and violent changes. As I argue in this thesis, the question of the role of art in the construction of a novel human being served as a

13 My discussion of *Hamlet* in the final part of this thesis illustrates the importance of this distinction. There, the attempts by various early Soviet artists to find the *meaning of Hamlet* are juxtaposed to Vygotsky's approach, which investigates the *effect* of the specific structural characteristics of the drama on the general psychology of the people of the time.

strong force behind practical and theoretical experiments conducted by Vygotsky's contemporaries, while the same question lies deep in the foundations of Vygotsky's aesthetics.

Unfortunately, Bayanova reads Vygotsky's essay as an attempt to illustrate a problem of psychology as opposed to a discussion of aesthetics: "In my opinion [...] his study of Shakespeare's tragedy is focused on the art form as a means of scientific reflection on the psychological content of the individual" (Bayanova, 2013, p. 37). Such a claim not only disregards the true intentions of Vygotsky at the time of writing the essay, but paints the wrong picture of Vygotsky's early thought formation. To support her claims, Bayanova bases her reading of Vygotsky's 1915/6 essay on a sociological interpretation of *Hamlet*, which she presents in the paper. According to her, the king symbolises the old cultural norm and Laertes the new dawning era, while Hamlet's suffering and death symbolise the end of the old world. Bayanova may or may not be aware that her interpretation of the drama was common in Russia throughout the 1920s—but not as early as 1916, the year Vygotsky composed his essay.¹⁴ However, she appears unaware of the fact that such an analysis lies in opposition to the analysis in Vygotsky's essay and to the core of Vygotsky's theory in its totality. The result is that Bayanova's interpretation of Vygotsky's early works obscures, rather than clarifies, this early period of Vygotsky's works—a truly unfortunate effect, as her intention throughout the paper is clearly to praise the young Vygotsky.

The aforementioned articles—all of which draw on the lack of a comprehensive study of Vygotsky's early works—provide a clear view to some interesting topics within his aesthetics and highlight the development of his thought on these issues. Nonetheless, they contain their examination within the borders of Vygotsky's works, providing little or no connections to the historical context of his thought. Three studies (Lima, 1995; Mal'cev 2012; and Sobkin, 2016) extend beyond Vygotsky's work and attempt to draw its meaning from its relation to the general cultural developments of his time. These studies lie in line with some distinguished attempts to situate Vygotsky in the broader philosophical context of his period, starting with the collective effort that produced *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* (Cole, Daniels, & Wertsch, 2007). Indeed, the last two decades have seen a commendable effort to revise the intellectual biography of Vygotsky and to integrate his ideas into the general developments that took place in the early 20th century Russia. An archival revolution in Vygotsky studies brought forth many

14 The popularity of such interpretations of the Shakespearean tragedy is discussed in Chapter Seven.

previously unknown examples of his original thought and revealed several missing links between the different stages of the psychologist's work.¹⁵ These new findings have led several scholars to engage with the effort to correct a series of misconceptions regarding Vygotsky's ideas, created from the fact that most scholars have had a partial and indirect access to his body of work until now. This restricted view of Vygotsky's life and achievements, often guided by inaccurate translations or bold editing choices, had created the impression that Vygotsky's thought resulted from merely his own individual genius. The emerging collective effort in Vygotsky studies—often referred to by the name 'revisionist revolution' (see Yasnitsky & Van der Veer, 2016)—aims at the reconnection of Vygotsky with his historical and scientific background and the distinction between the achievements that belong to Vygotsky personally and to those shared with his contemporaries, colleagues, teachers, and students, stressing the reliance of Vygotsky on the work fulfilled by a larger circle of people.

Two studies of Vygotsky's work pertaining to art can be safely characterised to be revisionist. The first concerns the publication, in Russian, of the first volume of Vygotsky's complete works, which includes all of Vygotsky's early writings on the topics of theatre and literature—all but *The Psychology of Art*—and is accompanied by a lengthy introduction and commentary by the editor (Sobkin, 2016). In his lengthy introduction, Sobkin provides the reader with an impressive amount of historiographic details pertaining to Vygotsky's early writings, making it a great initial resource for anyone wishing to engage with these texts more deeply. However, Sobkin's work is not critically framed, as its aim is to accompany the publication of Vygotsky's own writings. In the introduction, Sobkin lists Vygotsky's early works, summarising their content and choosing some topics that appear to be of importance to discuss in more detail. Though the majority of these topics do not concern matters of aesthetics, Sobkin does draw some valid connections between various themes that appear among Vygotsky's theatrical reviews and his other texts regarding art. Among these, is the tracing of psychoanalytical thought, the highlighting of seeds of his cultural-historical thought, and indications towards his dialectical scheme of catharsis. He also attempts a few simple but valid connections between Vygotsky's comments and the general theatrical life of the time: Stanislavsky, Tairov, Meyerhold, and Eisenstein are all mentioned in conjunction with one or the other comment found in Vygotsky's texts, but the parallelisms are not

15 One of the most important contributions to the reconstruction of Vygotsky's intellectual biography is Ekaterina Zavershneva's study of Vygotsky's family archives, published in several articles (see Zavershneva, 2010a and 2010b). Equally important are Anton Yasnitsky's in-depth depiction of the sociocultural conditions of Vygotsky's life (Yasnitsky, 2018).

explored in any depth, as this does not fall under the aim of the introduction. What is more, the discussion of these connections, as well as the overall organisation of Sobkin's analysis, follows a psychological/scientific systematisation that appears foreign to the general reader. Coming from the world of psychology, Sobkin's interest focuses primarily on the traces of Vygotsky's future psychological thought in these early texts. Therefore, the majority of his comments in the paper serve to draw links between these early texts and Vygotsky's later psychological research. Overall, and in accordance with the general trend of his field, Sobkin presents Vygotsky's early works to be valuable to us today, mainly as the evidence of the development of his later thought.

A stance that is contrary to Sobkin's is found in the second revisionist study of Vygotsky's early writings—a paper published by Mal'cev (2012). In it, Mal'cev performs an analysis of Vygotsky's response to various types of performances as a theatre critic—based on Vygotsky's critiques from the Gomel period—in order to extrapolate his general ideas about theatre. The experiment is based on Mal'cev's belief that Vygotsky writes critiques in order to discuss his general ideas about theatre and appears quite successful, with the paper outlining the fundamental ideas behind Vygotsky's aesthetics comprehensively. The paper presents no argument regarding the validity or the significance of these ideas. However, Mal'cev's admiration of Vygotsky's perspective and his enthusiasm regarding these texts is loud throughout the text. Characteristic is Mal'cev's closing sentiment, stating that Vygotsky's commentaries on the provincial theatre of Gomel are “not outdated—one still reads them today with much interest”¹⁶ (Mal'cev, 2012, p. 153).

Though elucidative in themselves, the examinations of both Sobkin and Mal'cev focus mainly on the immediate connections between Vygotsky and his contemporaries, overlooking several generalised theoretical discussions raised by the artists and scholars closely before and after the Revolution, as well as the broader philosophical and political dimension of the aesthetic paradigms of the Russian Avant-garde. Among these, are crucial issues such as the role of spirituality in theatre, the role of theatre as a laboratory for the new Revolutionary human being, the form of the new theatre in the dawning epoch and the transitions from the pre- to the post-Revolutionary era in aesthetics. To my knowledge, the only attempt to connect young Vygotsky's philosophical outlook to the general transitions in thought that marked the first three decades of the 20th century in Russia belongs to Priscila Marques, and her doctoral thesis completed in 2015. Though access to this research is difficult for the non-Portuguese speakers, Marques has published

¹⁶ The translation is my own.

several articles on the topic in English (Marques 2012, 2018a, and 2018b and 2019). These short papers concern themselves with Vygotsky's aesthetics and adopt a positive stance towards the texts. However, they also lie in line with most publications in adopting a rather historiographical stance and provide more of a summary of Vygotsky's early ideas, rather than an argument regarding their validity. They also present his early writings as a source for his later thought: Marques appears to support the idea that "the works of *young Vygotsky* can shed light into his formation as an author, particularly if we take into account his constant concern about the cultural and symbolical dimension for human psychology" (Marques, 2018b, p. 3).

Yet, Marques's very last paper (2020) adopts a different approach. In it, she attempts to apply Vygotsky's view of the psychological structure of an artwork, to discuss the peculiar nature of psychological realism in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. This is a rather significant treatment of Vygotsky's ideas, as it suggests the validity and applicability of his aesthetic theory for today's studies in literature. A similar attempt to apply Vygotsky's aesthetics is presented by Kastler (2017), who discusses a reading of Alexander Vampilov's dramatic texts under the lens of Vygotsky's aesthetics. Kasler continues to suggest that such an analysis is crucial in order for the success of a performance in the delivery of catharsis, as Vygotsky has defined it. Both of these studies are very brief and leave much unanswered; however, they evidence the potential that arises when theatre and literature scholars engage with Vygotsky's early texts.

All the aforementioned articles—a rather short bibliography for such an important topic—were published only in the last 10 years (many, while this thesis was being written). This activity shows a rising interest in the early works of Vygotsky, not only in their capacity to inform the development of his later thought, but also as a distinct topic of study. Yet, the small number of studies paired with their brevity¹⁷ point to the lack of an extensive and comprehensive study on the topic of Vygotsky's early writings. This shortage is also present in the fields of aesthetics and theatre studies: though the theoretical landscape of the Russian theatre in the first three decades of the 20th century has featured in many research projects, Vygotsky's perspective is missing from all relevant discussions. In effect, in the field of theatre studies, Vygotsky's work is virtually unknown. All this suggests the need for further and in-depth research in Vygotsky's theory on the psychology of the arts. This research must define and clarify Vygotsky's aesthetics and situate them within

17 With the exception of Marques' doctoral thesis, all studies on the topic are rather brief, published as journal articles.

their right historical context, thus opening a dialogue between his work and the prominent theoretical discussions in the spheres of the arts and culture of his time. This shall pave the way for a dialogue between Vygotsky's aesthetics and today's discourse in theatre and for the practical application of Vygotsky's theoretical approach in the work of dramaturgs and theatre artists.

The proposed treatment of Vygotsky's aesthetics is already practiced in a related field—one that intercepts drama and education. Scholars and practitioners of educational drama have indeed embraced the broader work of Vygotsky and have brought it into conversation with contemporary theories and practices alike (see Daniels & Downes, 2018; Davis, Ferholt, et al., 2014; Fler, Marilyn, et al., 2017; and Rubtsova & Daniels, 2016). Most such studies build their arguments based on Vygotsky's mature work—his theory on the social formation of mind, as well as his studies on creativity and imagination, with references to the term *perezhivanie*. However, all pay at least a passing tribute to his work on aesthetics. The dominant element imported from Vygotsky in these studies is the view that suggests that theatre is a tool of self-reflection within the world, a means for the exploration of other possibilities of the self within the world and, thus, a medium for social and individual growth. Drama education scholars employ Vygotsky's relevant theories to help argue towards the theoretical foundation of their work or to elucidate specific aspects of their practice. Among the numerous examples of such studies one stands apart for its attempt to examine the early works of Vygotsky and bring them into a more contemporary discussion. The collection of Davis, Ferholt, et al. (2014) seeks to illuminate Vygotsky's understanding of drama and the psychological processes that guide theatrical engagement and is the only one of its kind to search the roots of this understanding in Vygotsky's early texts and their historical context. Nonetheless, as the study focuses predominantly on the educational—and not aesthetic—aspect of Vygotsky's ideas, it does not overcome in any way the lack of an aesthetically focused study of Vygotsky's theory.

The current thesis is a response to this need: it presents a comprehensive analysis and reinterpretation of Vygotsky's perspective on the nature and social psychological function of art—and more specifically, theatre—while connecting it to some of the major debates on the topic raised in 1910s and 1920s Russia. The aim of the thesis is to examine Vygotsky's writings between 1915 and 1924/5 under the light of the general historical-cultural developments of the time and his later theories on human psychology in order to form a thorough understanding of his aesthetics. This is achieved by following a route that is opposite to most scholarship regarding Vygotsky's early works: instead of searching for the seeds of his later ideas in his

early writings, this thesis examines Vygotsky's later work in psychology to better inform and complete the ideas that he expressed regarding the psychological function of art.

Additionally, this project accomplishes its aims by tracing the connections between Vygotsky's work and the artistic and cultural advancements of his time, a process that illuminates important aspects of Vygotsky's argumentation, as well as the developmental path of his early thought. In this manner, this research—though mostly interpretive by nature—adheres to the revisionist viewpoint, as it offers a place of reconsideration, re-evaluation, and deeper investigation of Vygotsky's aesthetic theory. What is more, the specific perspective that I have adopted throughout this research—one that is interested in the relevance of Vygotsky's writings to the field of theatre studies—allows me to fulfil my aim of writing Vygotsky's aesthetics in the tradition of Russian Modernist theatre scholarship, and enables me to bring his aesthetics to the foreground of the field. All the while, the investigation of Vygotsky's early works, in conjunction with the theatrical developments of his time, informs our understanding of the aesthetic and ideological zymoses of Russian Modernism.

By placing Vygotsky's aesthetic texts in their right context, this thesis promises to shift the attention on Vygotsky's early writings from the psychological and educational to the aesthetic/philosophical. Therefore, it will provide the reader with a series of corrections and clarifications regarding both the value of these texts and their meaning. The ultimate aim of this project is the reconstruction of Vygotsky's aesthetics and their introduction to the field of theatre studies so that they can join the contemporary discourse on several topics—such as studies of the post-dramatic theatre, the contemporary definition of the tragedy, and the political nature of theatre—on present day methodologies—such as the intersection of theatre and cognitive studies—and in ongoing practices—such as applied theatre and drama education.

Thesis Overview

The multifaceted nature of my research's aims dictated an interdisciplinary approach—one that combined a revisionist perspective when approaching the intellectual history of Vygotsky and an argumentative and interpretative outlook towards the field of theatre studies. In order to ensure a focused and thorough process of examination, I found it helpful to divide my writing in three parts: the first, focusing on the reinterpretation of Vygotsky's early works, drawing from the newly found sources from this period, the well-known texts of his essay on *Hamlet* and

The Psychology of Art, and his subsequent works in the field of psychology; the second, which juxtaposes Vygotsky's beliefs on the psychological function and social purpose of theatre to those developed in Russia in the first three decades of the 20th century; and the third, which employs the Shakespearean tragedy of *Hamlet* as a case study to the application of Vygotsky's perspective on the psychological effect of art on a society, at a given historical time.

Vygotsky's theoretical construct on the nature and function of theatre, though it appears in a rather small quantity of works, covers a wide spectrum: his early views (formed under the pre-Revolutionary schools of thought); his post-Revolutionary enthusiasm about the function of theatre; the formation of his psychology of art; and, finally, his work on psychology and the development of his cultural-historical approach. This dictated that I engaged with the material's theoretical frame in an interrogative manner and attempted to re-articulate his theoretical foundations. In doing so, I performed the thought experiment of reading Vygotsky's work retrospectively—that is, reading his early work under the light of his later discoveries. The result was a rather fruitful dialogue among Vygotsky's own texts, which led to Part One of my thesis—an attempt to provide the reader with a concrete and wholistic view of Vygotsky's work in the psychology of aesthetics.

More specifically, the first chapter presents a critical analysis of Vygotsky's methodology when approaching aesthetic issues and introduces the reader to Vygotsky's conclusions regarding the nature and the structural characteristics of art—and more specifically literature and theatre—as it developed over the first ten years of his career. In his introduction to the first publication of the book Aleksei Leontiev urged the reader to interpret *The Psychology of Art* both “as the psychology of *art* and as the *psychology* of art” (Leontiev in Vygotsky, 1971, p. vi). Therefore, while Chapter One focuses on the *art* in Vygotsky's theoretical approach, Chapter Two places the emphasis on the *psychology*: it engages with the scientific and philosophical/psychological influences under which Vygotsky performed his investigations in aesthetics, highlighting the shift in his perspective over time, displaying the problematic nature of some of the psychological theories that Vygotsky relied on, and situating Vygotsky among the scientific developments of the first three decades of the 20th century. In Chapter Three, I attempt to overcome some of the problems arising from the outdated nature of Vygotsky's scientific and philosophical influences as well as from the discrepancies found in the development of his own thought. For this reason, I elaborate on the key term of catharsis and present a reinterpretation of its meaning in Vygotsky's work, updating it in accordance to his later work. This chapter reveals the essence of Vygotsky's beliefs on the

psychological function and the social nature of art in general, and literature and theatre in particular.

In the second stage of my research, I engaged with situating the above conclusions within the theoretical frame of Vygotsky's time period. Defining this period is not without its difficulties, as the term Modernism pertaining both to the arts and the general cultural developments, is more of a family name "and there is no necessity for all the different members of the family to have any one particular feature" (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017, pp. 66-7). What is more, the beginning and the end of the Modernist period, as well as its geographical borders, appear to be rather fluid. That being said, for the needs of this research project, I remained within the geographical borders of Russia, and more specifically Moscow and Petersburg (not engaging directly with the relevant activity in the rest of Europe, the Russian periphery, and the exiled intelligentsia), and I contained my examination to the first three decades of the 20th century, mapping the passing from the Russian Silver Age to the Avant-garde and to the beginnings of Socialist Realism.

Within this frame, I proceeded to make patterns of meaning between Vygotsky's work and that of his contemporaries. Abiding by Vygotsky's example, my discussion of the Modernist developments in theatre pays less attention to the performative aspects of the various productions that became a staple of the theatre of the time, focusing, instead, on the theoretical axioms that they embodied. The reason for this lies in the nature of Vygotsky's approach, which is the theoretical exploration of the abstract notion that is the psychological effect of theatre on the individual and the society. Indeed, Vygotsky's early writings contain very few references to matters of performativity, focusing primarily on mapping the effect that art, as a general concept, has on its recipient.¹⁸ Therefore, the bridges between Vygotsky's work and the Russian theatre of the early 20th century were constructed around the theoretical understandings of theatre's social purpose and the various arguments regarding the effect of theatre on its audiences.

I then used the emerging connections to inform our scope of Vygotsky's work in aesthetic psychology and to highlight the discrepancies between his and his contemporaries' work. The findings from this process are presented in Part Two of my thesis. In this part, Chapter Four examines the role of theatre as it was envisioned in the years leading up to the October Revolution and highlights the ways in which the prominent views of the time affected Vygotsky's perspective.

¹⁸ It is important to note that Vygotsky's theatrical reviews do comment on issues of staging; however, their primary focus is the effect of each component on the audience's process of reception of the overall performance and how the various performances uphold theatre's role in the changing society.

Chapter Five juxtaposes Vygotsky's theory on the social purpose of theatre to the visions of the 'new' and 'Revolutionary' theatre that emerged in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution. Finally, Chapter Six reviews a series of popular experiments and theorisations regarding theatre's effect on its audience and locates Vygotsky's relevant research among them.

For the final stage of my research, I employed the tragedy of *Hamlet* and Vygotsky's two analyses of the drama as a case study for his psychology of aesthetics. Following Vygotsky's example, I approached the play primarily as a text—not a performance—and I focused the resulting chapter on the connecting threads between the various thematic analyses of *Hamlet* that appeared around Vygotsky's time. Chapter Seven—the result of this process—discusses the themes and issues highlighted in the few—yet, pivotal—Russian Modernist productions of *Hamlet*, in relation to Vygotsky's two visions of the tragedy. Chapter Eight focuses on the psychological effect of the Shakespearean tragedy, as it was discussed by prominent figures of psychoanalysis and as it was imagined by Vygotsky. This last chapter combines the case study methodology with a phenomenological standpoint to articulate the function that the tragedy gained within the setting of life in Modernist Russia, as it derives from Vygotsky's theoretical predictions in conjunction with specific studies on the psychological condition of the time, in Russia.

This thesis in its totality is an interdisciplinary project and, as such, it creates outcomes that affect various fields of study. Above all, it informs the field of Vygotsky studies by providing a focused and holistic insight in his early period of work, followed by concrete evidence of his tight connections to the developing thought of his time, while stressing the value of Vygotsky's theoretical outlook towards the nature and function of theatre. This project also impacts the field of theatre studies, by writing Vygotsky's aesthetics into the tradition of Modernist theoretical beliefs on art and theatre in general, and by illustrating the unique place that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* gained in Modernist Russia, in particular. Finally, this work affects Russian studies, as it provides—through the careful examination of Vygotsky's writings—a multifaceted insight to the transitions in the philosophical outlook towards art in the highly dynamic times of Russian Modernism.

**PART ONE: Vygotsky's Theoretical Approach to the
Psychology of Art**

Introduction

Part One engages critically and analytically with Vygotsky's key texts on topics of aesthetics. These include a series of sources that were recently made available to the public—namely, Vygotsky's theatrical critiques and parts of his personal notebooks (Sobkin, 2015; Zavershneva, 2010a & 2010b)—as well as his well-known essay on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and his manuscript *The Psychology of Art*. With the aim to discern and re-articulate the core notions of his aesthetics—while overcoming the discrepancies present among his texts and between the early and later period of his overall work—this part of the thesis places Vygotsky's various texts in dialogue with each other. This re-interpretative reading focuses on those aspects of Vygotsky's works that are most relevant to the fields of aesthetics and theatre studies, preparing the ground for a juxtaposition of Vygotsky's perspective to respective views of artists and theatre scholars during the years of Russian Modernism.

This unprecedented and in-depth reading of Vygotsky's early texts revises and articulates his definition for the social psychological function of art while describing his methodological approach and its philosophical and scientific origins. What is more, it reveals the unique perspective into the question of art's place within a changing world: nurtured in both Gomel and Moscow—the periphery and the epicentre of the Revolution—Vygotsky's thought combines philosophical and political enthusiasm over the potentials of theatre within the dawning era with a retained and balanced outlook onto the theatrical life of Modernist Russia and its impact on the social psychology of the public.

Such rare perspective gave Vygotsky the ability to create a strong theoretical system that explains the ways in which art—and more so the theatre—could stimulate and facilitate the processes of social evolution propagated by the ideological shifts of the time; a question that troubled deeply theatrical critics and practitioners in the beginning of the 20th century, in Russia, and motivated the majority of theatrical endeavours of the Avant-garde.

Chapter One: Vygotsky's Psychology of Art: The Dynamic Structure of Literary Works

Vygotsky's theoretical construct on the nature and function of theatre, though it appears in a rather small quantity of works, covers a wide spectrum: his early views (formed under the pre-Revolutionary schools of thought); his post-Revolutionary enthusiasm about the function of theatre; the formation of his psychology of art; and, finally, his work on psychology and the development of his social-historical approach. This first chapter aims at providing a wholistic exposition, clarification, and summary of Vygotsky's key principles that form his psychological approach to theatre, as they derive from a critical exploration of his early writings. These key principles of Vygotsky's aesthetics derive from his analyses of various works of art: in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky used three examples of artworks, all from the domain of literature and drama: the fable—specifically Ivan Krylov's fables—the short story—namely Ivan Bunin's *Gentle Breathing*¹⁹—and the tragedy—with a focus on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. To this collection of analyses of artworks I add some writings completed prior to *The Psychology of Art*: his master's thesis with the title 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by W. Shakespeare' [Tragedija o Gamlete, Prince Datskom, U. Shekspira] (Vygotsky, 1986), and a collection of over seventy theatre reviews that he wrote while living and working in Gomel, in the years 1922 and 1923 (Sobkin, 2015).

The chapter presents the methodological approach of Vygotsky in his engagement with the aforementioned literary and theatrical works, which employed critical analysis and exposition of the structural characteristics of various artworks, to form an understanding of the nature and psychological function of art. It also exposes the premises that became the foundation of Vygotsky's methodology. That is, the belief that artworks bear integral structural characteristics channel the reception of the readers, viewers, or audience members towards specific, common directions, thus eliciting certain aesthetic reactions. What is more, the chapter organises and summarises the conclusions of Vygotsky's investigations regarding the psychologically active structural elements that determine art's aesthetic function. Among these, are his understanding of the dynamic relationship between form and content and the power of art to transform both its subject and its receiver.

By engaging critically with the key principles of Vygotsky's theory on art, as

19 One may find several variations on the translation of Bunin's title *Legkoe dyhanie*, among which: *Gentle Breath* and *Light Breathing*. I have chosen the version *Gentle Breathing* in order to preserve the continuity of the action of breathing—which, as I will argue later, is highly relevant to Vygotsky's analysis of the story—and to avoid some meanings that the word 'light' can obtain in English, such as small, faded, or cheery.

they are presented in Vygotsky's own works, this chapter will provide the reader with a definition of the structural dimension of Vygotsky's aesthetics, and a concrete starting point, prior to examining the connections between Vygotsky's work on aesthetics and the work of his contemporaries.

Vygotsky's Methodology

Art as an autonomous entity under study

Vygotsky's methodological approach to the study of the psychology of art appears to be one of the most crucial aspects of his work in aesthetics. Indeed, his effort to deliver a dynamic 'program' for the study of art, paired with the unique viewpoint that he adopted for its analysis, calls for a focus on his methodology. The methodology of research was a recurring topic in Vygotsky's writings. As a psychologist, he argued extensively for the need for a common, concrete methodology for the science of psychology, urging his contemporaries to re-define both their research methods and the very subject of psychology (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 143). It is of no surprise, then, that he begins his study of the psychology of the arts with a concise presentation of his methodology. The first chapter of *The Psychology of Art* is dedicated to a lengthy discussion and inevitable critique of the methods thus far used when approaching the psychological problem of the aesthetic experience.

In this manner, Vygotsky developed his own methodological perspective through his opposition to the approaches that he criticised. Therefore, Vygotsky arrived to his first fundamental methodological rule—the requirement to study art as an autonomous and separate domain of human behaviour—by contradicting several approaches to the study of aesthetics; namely, philosophical perspectives on morality and education, and the scientific views from the field of experimental psychology. Vygotsky noted that the theorists that abided by these schools applied the methodological approaches of their discipline on the examination of art, a practice that resulted in the distortion of the subject under study. Under these circumstances, art is judged according to characteristics that are foreign or secondary to its nature and its purpose is reduced to serve the aims of a different discipline.

One of these 'points of confusion', that Vygotsky exposed, was the equation of the function of art with the teaching of an intellectual message or a moral stance.

Tolstoy's attack on Shakespeare's work and his definition of art's purpose in his monograph, "What is art" (1897), is probably the strongest example of such approaches to art. Along with many Russian literary critics (Senelick, 1981, p. xxxvii), Tolstoy adopted the belief that art's function was to propagate virtue, and he condemned all art that portrayed or idealised immoral behaviour. Vygotsky found this tendency of Russian literary criticism—that also characterised children's literature—to be rather frivolous:

It is for this reason that children's literature usually represents a vivid example of bad taste, of the coarse violation of all notion of esthetic style, and of the most dismal misunderstanding of the mind of the child. We must, above all, reject such an approach, the belief that experiences should possess some kind of direct relationship to moral experience, as if every work of art incorporates a kind of incentive to moral behavior. (Vygotsky, 1992)²⁰

Analogous was Vygotsky's attack on the speculation that art, not unlike scientific knowledge, provides its recipients with intellectual wisdom. Vygotsky referred to two such attempts to reduce art to the mere representation of reality: the view of art as an allegorical medium in the process of understanding new concepts, as it was described in the late 19th century theories of Potebnya and Onianiko and Kulikovskij,²¹ and the use of art as a medium of teaching History in education:

It is not hard to see that, in this as in any other figure drawn from literature, the truth of art and the truth of reality exist in extraordinarily complicated relationships, and that, in any work of art, reality is always so transformed and so altered that there is no way whatsoever that meaning may be transferred directly from phenomena in art to phenomena in real life. (Vygotsky, 1992)

Vygotsky rejected such intellectualistic approaches to art on two premises, which, as I will argue in Part Two, corresponded to significant debates in the field of theatrical criticism in Vygotsky's time. The first is the equation of art and reality. The second is that such visions of art entirely bypass the emotional aspect of the artistic experience, which Vygotsky believed to be the principal effect of art. He postulated that an essential characteristic of art is its ability to interact with human psychology through the induction of emotional responses. Though art may sometimes engage people on an intellectual level, or challenge their moral beliefs, this is only a

20 In the same article which discusses the role of art in education, Vygotsky used a series of examples of moral interpretation of some of Krylov's famous fables, to demonstrate how "often, a literary text not only does not help us when we wish to gain an understanding of the text itself, but, on the contrary, suggests a moral conception which leads altogether in the opposite direction" (Vygotsky, 1992).

21 Vygotsky presented and argued against these theories in *The Psychology of Art*. For further information see (Todd & Stanford University, 1978).

byproduct of art, a consequence, while emotional engagement remains its primary aim.

Vygotsky stipulated that art's ability to affect human psychology through the induction of emotions lies in the heart of what makes artistic creations last through time and space. Art's transcendence of time and space—another one of Vygotsky's conclusions that acquired a great significance in the debates of his time—is possible due to the fact that a work of art affects people of different eras and different cultures through the same psychological mechanism. Vygotsky accepted the fact that the culture in which the creator and the recipient live, affects both the creative process and the reception of the work of art. The social and historical circumstances, as well as the creator's individual psychological complexes, leave a clear trace in the artistic creations. Thus, there is no argument in his writings against the examination of works of art in order to approach truths about the artist's socio-historical circumstances or their personality. Vygotsky's argument, however, lies in the fact that these practices do not shed any light on the questions of the nature and function of art. They do not explain the reasons why and the ways in which the works of art affect human beings transcending time, space, and often culture.

Yet, simple emotional engagement with the artwork does not describe the aesthetic effect sufficiently. Vygotsky argued against the legacy in aesthetics that saw the artistic effect as the mere feeling of pleasure produced by the reception of aesthetically pleasing forms. He pointed out how these premises served as the starting point of several experimental approaches of psychologists towards art—such as those of Gustav Fechner and Oswald Külpe. However, in his view, this perspective “reduces the entire meaning of aesthetic experience to the unmediated sense of pleasure and joy” (Vygotsky, 1992). The arbitrary reduction of the complexity of the aesthetic experience to the sensations of pleasure and appraisal that is found in those theories fails to distinguish, for Vygotsky, artistic behaviour from any other aspect of human life.

When examining the above theories, Vygotsky identified two main lines of aesthetic analysis, what he called 'aesthetics from above' and 'aesthetics from below'. Under the first label, Vygotsky grouped those theories that do not engage with the science of psychology and remain in the realm of idealistic speculations, usually approaching the works of art from a preconceived philosophical worldview; under the second, he placed the attempts to systematise understandings of the meaning of art through the scientific analysis of aesthetic behaviour—that is, through the application of studies in experimental psychology. His criticism of both approaches was equally dismissive:

Aesthetics from above drew its laws and evidence from the 'nature of the soul', from metaphysical premises, or from speculative constructions. [...] Aesthetics from below, on the other hand, concerned itself with extraordinarily primitive experiments in order to clarify the most basic aesthetic relationships; it was thus incapable of lifting itself even slightly above this combination of primordial and fundamentally meaningless facts. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 10)

Vygotsky believed that the failure of both approaches to deliver meaningful conclusions on the nature of art lies primarily in their methodology. He, thus, urged against approaching a problem from a predetermined set of rules that guide the research process, or diving into the study of an issue with a preconceived definition for it.

What set Vygotsky apart from the theorists of his time—and what I believe makes his work relevant in today's world—is his effort to create every time a unique methodology that responds to the problem at hand. His understanding of methodology, as it derives from the total of his work, is not a tool that can be equally applied to different topics, but an activity that “generates both tool and result at the same time and as a continuous process” (Holzman, 2014, p. 181). Vygotsky's methodology was thus grounded upon a dialectical perspective: the method and the topic under investigation were tied in the same process, the one uniquely created for the other, so that the merging of the two can create the synthesis of the new understanding. This perspective dictated some of the fundamental principles of Vygotsky's theory: that art must be investigated as an autonomous area of study, as a domain of human behaviour that possesses its own distinct purpose, the nature of which must be determined through methodological tools that have been conceived specifically for that purpose.

Vygotsky's “objective-analytical method”: Placing the artworks under study

Following his own advice, Vygotsky proceeded to determine the problem of art and develop a suitable methodology for its investigation. For this purpose, he defined aesthetic behaviour as a problem of aesthetic psychology, the purpose of which he placed on the “proper psychological investigation” of the “laws governing the feelings and emotions in a work of art” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 20). In his investigation, Vygotsky paid special attention to the social dimension of art, as he advocated a science of psychology that does not segregate itself from sociology. This characteristic combination of psychology, sociology, and aesthetics allowed his theoretical approach to benefit from the scientific objectivity that characterised many strands of psychological research. The application of psychology in the study of art

was not new to Vygotsky; however, he found that the work of his contemporaries missed the mark:

The psychological study of art has hitherto followed but one of two trends: either the psychology of the creator (artist) was studied as it revealed itself in the work of art, or the psychology of the receptor (viewer, reader, etc.) was investigated. The imperfection and futility of both methods are sufficiently obvious. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 22)

In Vygotsky's view, the high complexity of the human psyche and the enormous number of factors that affect the individual, subjective psychology of both creator and recipient of art make it impossible to study art. His quest for objectivity in the analysis of art led Vygotsky to his focus on the work of art itself, an invariable and concrete anchor for his research.

Vygotsky did not deny the possibility of subjective variations of the aesthetic reception of an artwork; however, he did not believe that a study based on the subjective elements of an aesthetic response can lead to fruitful conclusions. The personal reaction of each individual to the messages provided by an artwork are subjected to an infinite number of variables, among which is the unique idiosyncrasy of each person. Yet, Vygotsky noted that in all the individual reactions to the message of the artwork, there is a common thread—a mechanism that was imposed by the message itself. This is Vygotsky's reasoning in his effort to focus and ground his research on a concrete, objective locus: the work of art itself. However, Vygotsky did not suggest the application of psychological laws on the work of art itself—quite the contrary. As he demonstrated, as early as 1915, in his analysis of *Hamlet*, the psychological analysis of a constructed character (or any construction, for that matter) in a story or play is futile. Vygotsky noted that works of art of course do not possess a psychology of their own; they do, however, possess a structure, created by the artistic creator which causes specific psychological reactions (aesthetic reactions) when perceived by the recipient. This structure can be objectively observed, analysed and studied, and conclusions about the effect of art on its recipients can be drawn without stepping into the subjective world of the psychology of each individual.

By using the artworks as the locus of his analysis of art, Vygotsky accepted a notion of tautonymy in art: for him, the artistic work overlaps with its meaning. In the case of an artist that has written a novel, for example, "the only way to reconfirm himself is to repeat the entire novel with the same words he used in the first place" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 40). This precept makes it possible to arrive at a valid conclusion concerning the analysis of an artwork by focusing solely on the elements found in the work itself. Therefore, for Vygotsky, anything a researcher might need

to understand the nature and function of art can be found in the objective-analytical examination of works of art.

In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky performed such an analysis on the structure of three kinds of artistic creations—the fable, the short story, and the tragedy. As Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991) noted, Vygotsky’s approach to the analysis of these works of art contradicts his own proclamation about his sole focus on the message. Indeed, Vygotsky studied art from the perspective of the recipient. His viewpoint presupposes a belief that art does not stand by itself, but it is a medium with a psychological purpose. He was thus interested in discerning how this purpose is fulfilled. In Vygotsky’s view, the fundamental aim of the specific structure of an artwork is to generate a predetermined response in the recipient—responses that, in spite of the multiplicity of interpretations that they can lead to, are common to all readers or viewers. Under this light, Vygotsky’s focus on the recipient of art does not appear as a methodological inconsistency, but as a tool for discerning not only art’s nature but also its purpose.

Yet, Vygotsky’s methodology presents a different point of inconsistency: since Vygotsky aimed at the creation of a program that acknowledges all the essential elements of art and responds to all kinds and genres, the search for this psychological mechanism must take place among different types of art, from various historical periods and geographical locations. In his work, however, Vygotsky performed the analysis of solely three genres of art - the fable, the short story, and tragedy, all from the domain of Western literature.²² Though he brought examples from other types of art, such as music and painting, these short references are not sufficient in communicating Vygotsky’s views on artistic creation beyond the field of literature. Therefore, his conclusions on the nature and purpose of art, as a whole, can only be induced from the generalisation of his findings from the analysis of the three aforementioned genres. For the purposes of the current research project, however, such generalisations, combined with Vygotsky’s early essay on *Hamlet* and his theatrical critiques, provide sufficient material to articulate and critically

22 Here it is worth noting Vygotsky’s words: “I have not studied the fable, the tragedy, and still less a given fable or a given tragedy. I have studied in them what makes up the basis of all art—the nature and mechanism of the aesthetic reaction. I relied upon the general elements of form and material which are inherent in any art. For the analysis I selected the most difficult fables, short stories and tragedies, precisely those in which the general laws are particularly evident. I selected the monsters among the tragedies, etc. The analysis presupposes that one abstracts from the concrete characteristics of the fable as such, as a specific genre, and concentrates the forces upon the essence of the aesthetic reaction. That is why I say nothing about the fable as such. And the subtitle ‘An analysis of the aesthetic reaction’ itself indicates that the goal of the investigation is not a systematic exposition of a psychological theory of art in its entire volume and width of content (all types of art, all problems, etc.) and not even the inductive investigation of a specific number of facts, but precisely the analysis of the processes in their essence” (Vygotsky, 1927).

examine Vygotsky's vision of theatre's nature and social psychological function.

On the unity of form and content

Central to Vygotsky's understanding of the structure and function of art is the relation between what he calls the form and the content of the artwork. As content, Vygotsky describes the message of the work of art, the theme, or the story narrated. As form, he defines the structural modifications that the artist has applied to the message, the way in which the artist presents the content. Probably one of the strongest convictions for Vygotsky was that:

form is not separated from content; rather it *penetrates* into it [...] the content we have in mind is not simply injected into the work of art from the outside, but it is *created* in it by the artist. The process of creation of this content is crystallized, embodied in the structure of the work of art, just as, say, a physiological function is embodied in the anatomy of an organ. (Leontiev in Vygotsky, 1971, p. viii)

Form and content are therefore not only united in the work of art but also presuppose each other.

Vygotsky's understanding of the concepts of form and content and his conviction regarding their unity stemmed from his engagement with the theoretical foundations underlying two of the most influential movements in literature and literary criticism that appeared in Russia, in the first two decades of the 20th century – Symbolism and Formalism. In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky dedicated two chapters to deconstructing the theoretical axioms of the two artistic movements and connecting them with popular psychological theories of the time. The criticism against the inconsistencies that he found in the psychological premises of these theories, along with his appreciation of their contribution to the development of artistic criticism became the foundations for the construction of Vygotsky's understanding of the notions of artistic form and content.

Vygotsky was very well versed in the theoretical arguments of both Symbolism and Formalism. His alliance with the Symbolist movement characterised the first years of his involvement with literature and theatre. During his Gomel period, Vygotsky used vocabulary and imagery inspired by Symbolism (Mal'cev, 2012), and he wrote several poems (1915, 1921) which appeared to follow the style of Symbolist poetry closely (Zaversheneva 2010a). What is more, during his short-lived attempt to create an educational publishing house in Gomel, Vygotsky published a collection of works of the Symbolist poet Jean Moréas, while he appeared to be well acquainted with Maeterlinck's theoretical writings (Feigenberg, 2000). All these examples illustrate how "as an artistic-cum-aesthetic movement,

Symbolism was extremely important to the shaping of Vygotsky's worldview" (Sobkin, 2016a, p. 28). Vygotsky identified with the Symbolists in their common desire to find universal and larger-than-life truths in art.²³ The emphasis on the significance of symbols in the content of literature, the dominance of spirituality in the theme, and the justification of subjectivity in literary criticism—all characteristics of the Symbolist movement—are also found in Vygotsky's first essay on *Hamlet*.²⁴

Nonetheless, by the time he was writing *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky's focus on the theoretical foundations of aesthetic psychological theories led him to identify and criticise an inconsistency found in some of the Symbolist views.²⁵ In the book, Vygotsky connected the Symbolist vision of art as a communion between the reader or audience member and an eternal, often spiritual, world with theories of representation in art. Such theories are based on the premise that the effect of art stems from the receiver's successful contact with that which is being represented. In that sense, the external form of an artwork becomes a symbol for an idea that is otherwise hard to grasp. Indeed, the Symbolists' experimentations with form in poetry and in theatre aimed at establishing the most effective way of conveying larger-than-life ideas. For example, the somatic practices of Isadora Duncan and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze—both of which had a significant influence in Russia—had a similar goal: to evoke, through the engagement with a set series of movements and rhythmical patterns, a spiritual state in which fundamental and universal ideas could be shared. According to Vygotsky, the theoretical premise behind these practices equates the function of art with its perception, giving it an allegorical character.

Vygotsky found this conviction problematic on two levels. First, it indicated a reductive and intellectualistic view of art's purpose. Art's effect, in this light, is equated to the effect of language—a problematic issue for Vygotsky, who sought a unique purpose for art, one that could not be achieved through any other means. Second, this stance allowed for the assumption that the ideas that an artwork conveys exist on a plane beyond itself, while the artistic form is a mere vehicle for their revelation. Vygotsky criticised this belief, which was propagated by the influential, at the time, linguist Alexander Potebnya:

The belief that poetic thinking can be completely independent of any

23 I elaborate more on this in Chapter Four.

24 It is worth mentioning that Vygotsky wrote this essay while participating in a seminar under the direction of I. Aikhenval'd, one of the most prominent representatives of Impressionistic criticism (Lima, 1995).

25 It is important to note that Vygotsky did not discuss the movement as a total, nor he commented on the artistic works of its followers.

external form [...] is a complete contradiction of the first axiom of the psychology of artistic form, which states that a work of art exerts its psychological effect only in its given form. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 36)

Indeed, the central part of Vygotsky's criticism of this prevalent psychological theory of art was located on "its failure to understand the psychology of form" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 52). In contrast, Vygotsky hoped to construct his psychology of art around an understanding the psychological function of form, not as a vehicle for the communication of a message, but as a message in itself.

In his book, Vygotsky declared that "art begins where form begins" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 37), thus echoing part of the Formalist manifesto. He was evidently highly influenced by the movement that arose from a similar reaction to the Symbolist-inspired literary theories. His convergence with the overall stance adopted by the Formalists manifested in various ways. Vygotsky's assertion that the theoretical study of art should stand as an autonomous field and his emphasising of literary works when examining the psychology of art were both characteristics of the movement (see Erlich, 2012). The attempt to provide definitions for the constituent parts of a literary work, the dynamics inherent in its structure, and the characteristics of its aesthetic effect also evidence a clear connection between Vygotsky and the Formalist movement. Not surprisingly, *The Psychology of Art* features a lengthy discussion on the contribution of Formalist theories to the study of the psychology of art and several quotes from Victor Shklovsky, one of the most prominent voices of the movement.

A crucial aspect of Vygotsky's appreciation for the Formalists' views lay in their revision of the definition of form. The movement established the idea of form as the arrangement of the content, or material of art, artfully made by the artist with the purpose of causing an aesthetic effect. Shklovsky's words on the role of the poet illustrate this vision: "Images belong to no one: they are 'the Lord's' [...] poets are much more concerned with arranging the images than with creating them" (Shklovsky, 1917/1998, pp. 217-8). This definition, according to Vygotsky, expanded the understanding of form from the narrow idea of technique to a concept with a psychological interest that could be applied to different artforms equally. Vygotsky endorsed this new definition of form which, under the Formalist vision, came to refer to:

the way in which this material is structured, placed, and distributed [...] irrespective of whether we refer to the arrangement of sounds in a verse of poetry, to the arrangement of events in a story, or the sequence of thoughts in a monologue (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 53)

These ideas became the cornerstone of the influence of Formalism on his thought.

Vygotsky was indeed enthusiastic with the movement's contributions to the field of aesthetics. Yet, in his book, he identified an important shortcoming that mirrored the one-sided view of Potebnaya's intellectualistic theory. Though Vygotsky commended the movement for recognising the indispensable nature of form for the production of an aesthetic effect, he believed that its followers succumbed to the temptation of placing the entire effect of an artwork on its form, disregarding the content (Vygotsky, 1971). Vygotsky found the Formalist's focus on the function of form and the study of its effect as an objective quality to lack the inter-dimensionality of a psychological theory for art.

The main point of Vygotsky's argument against the Formalist ideas lay in the conflict found between the very nature of form and the locus of the Formalists' study. As he commented: "The formula 'art as technique' immediately triggers the question, 'technique for what?'" (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 56). Vygotsky found this exclusion of the content of artwork from the Formalist theory of the artistic effect not only restricted but also self-contradictory. As an example, Vygotsky discusses Shklovsky's theory of estrangement, which presents art's primary function as a device for a novel—and thus clearer—perception of the world:

In determining that purpose, the formalists run into a surprising contradiction when they affirm that neither things nor material nor content is essential in art, and then claim that the ultimate purpose of artistic form is to 'make a thing felt', 'make a stone stony', etc.; that is, to enhance and increase the sensorial experience of that very material, the significance of which was denied in the first place. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 57)

Contrary to the Formalist thought, as discussed here, Vygotsky concluded that form cannot exist separate from its own content.

As Formalism matured, the proponents of the movement reached a similar conclusion. Formalists discovered that the separation of form from content practiced in the early phases of the movement is impossible, whether that refers to the separation of the meaning of a word from its sound, or the overall content of a literary work from its form. Thus, Formalists, such as Shklovsky, began to discuss the artwork's content as part of its form (Gorman, 2018), while the research that formally focused on form alone now shifted to examine the interplay between the form and the meaning of an artwork (Erlich, 2012). Under this light, Formalism began engaging with the structure of an artwork.

The development of Vygotsky's thought, as it is presented in *The Psychology of Art*, took a similar path. From his critical examination of the theoretical approaches to art of his time, Vygotsky concluded that in art there could be no form

without content, and no content can achieve an aesthetic response without artistic form. Therefore, in his quest to decipher the psychological mechanisms embedded in the structure of art, he placed equal importance on the examination of the form and the content, and focused on the dynamic relationship of the two, as it appears in the structure of the artworks, and as it is reflected in the emotional experience of the artwork's receiver.

We can finally describe Vygotsky's methodological approach to the psychology of art as thus: In his study of art, Vygotsky attempted to create a definition of art that can contain all those elements that transcend individuality, genre, and era. He studied art as a unique and independent facet of human life that can be approached from a so-called 'objective-analytical' standpoint. His focus was to investigate the questions 'What is art?', 'Which elements of art differentiate it from other facets of life?' and 'What is art's function in human life?' Therefore, Vygotsky investigated the purposes of art and the means that art employs to achieve them. These means, for Vygotsky, are embedded in the works of art, in the form of psychological mechanisms that lead the recipient to an aesthetic experience. Therefore, he placed the focus of his analyses on the works of art, but with respect to their effect on the recipient. When approaching the works of art, Vygotsky applied a dialectic viewpoint, through which he saw the form and the content in a contrasting relationship, but as part of the same united whole. To illustrate these conclusions, I dedicate the following section to the exposition of Vygotsky's views on aesthetics as they derive from his writings on art—here presented in chronological order.

Vygotsky's Essay on *Hamlet* (1915/16)

As early as 1915, in his first attempt to define the role of artistic criticism, Vygotsky advocated the distinction of the field of artistic critique from all other domains of human thought. Anticipating his remarks in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky argued in the introduction of his essay on *Hamlet* that a critique should not serve the needs of science or philosophy, but stem from the viewpoint of the individual reader. Nonetheless, in this early manuscript Vygotsky interpreted this conviction as a justification for a critical exposition based on the subjective interpretation of a text. He thus presented his criticism as "not powered by scientific knowledge, or philosophical thought, but by the immediate aesthetic impression. That is—a genuinely subjective critique, that does not pose as anything else, a

reader's critique" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 337).²⁶ It would not be until much later that Vygotsky would resort to the laws of psychology, in his attempt to understand the nature and function of art, and would defend an objective-analytical approach to artistic criticism. At this early phase, he was more concerned with the creation of a critical lens that would help the critic study a work of art—not to prove a doctrine imported from a neighbouring discipline, but to develop a better understanding of the work of art itself.

Though Vygotsky's approach to the criticism of art at this initial stage bears significant differences with the more mature views presented in *The Psychology of Art*, one can read in his essay on *Hamlet* some of the fundamental principles found in his later conclusions. Next to the need for autonomy of the field of art studies, is the placement of the focus on the artwork itself and the view of the artwork as independent from its creator, but dependent on its receiver. In his view, "a work of literature does not exist without the reader", it is the reader that "recreates it, recomposes it, reveals it" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 340). Here we already find Vygotsky's elemental interest in the study of the ways that an artwork is received, and art's effect on the human psyche. Indeed, Vygotsky's belief that art is only fulfilled when received points to the premise that art has a purpose and its purpose, lies with the receiver.²⁷ Thus, Vygotsky's viewpoint placed the researcher on the side of the receiver and dictated that the critique "would consider the creation of the author through his own soul" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 342). This perspective—though bestowed with more scientific principles—would be present in all of Vygotsky's approaches to art, even when he had entered the realms of psychology.

In this early approach, Vygotsky argued that, since art is made to be received, one ought to study an artwork based solely on its reception. And, since reception is individual and subjective, each critique will be unique and idiosyncratic.²⁸ The above reasoning justified for the young Vygotsky of 1915/16 the dependence on subjective observations in artistic critique. This allowance for subjectivity, however, was not presented without boundaries. Vygotsky urged the art critic to remain within their own reception of the piece of art and compose an analysis that is unique and original and consistently true to itself. With these rules,

26 All cited excerpts from Vygotsky's analysis of *Hamlet* have been translated by myself.

27 In Vygotsky's words: "The work of art, once created, is detached from its creator; it cannot withstand without the reader; it is only a potential, that is actualized by the reader" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 338).

28 At this young age, Vygotsky lacked the proper psychological tools to unify the various individual subjective receptions of art, under an objective umbrella. This contextualisation would take place a lot later and would signify his passage to the sphere of experimental psychology.

Vygotsky posed an interesting criterion: though the critic must accept the fact that all subjective interpretations of the piece of art are valid, in the moment of the composition of his or her critique, the author must believe that their point is the uniquely correct one—for Vygotsky this is a prerequisite to creating a consistent analysis. Such consistency was of utmost importance for the young Vygotsky who argued that the critic “must confine himself to the sphere of his creation, and not even momentarily abandon it” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 341). The reason for these terms lies in Vygotsky’s belief in the existence of a significant meaning, a *raison d’être*, embedded in each artwork. This meaning coincides precisely with the work of art and could not be articulated in any other way. For this reason, the critic, in Vygotsky’s view, should refrain from any attempts to explain a work of art or solve its mystery. Instead, they should be contained within what feels like artistic irrationality: “Acknowledging the irrational character of the work of art, the critic does not want to clarify it in any way” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 343). This standpoint stresses Vygotsky’s belief that the essential meaning of the tragedy is not meant to be understood, but to be experienced.

In his essay on *Hamlet*, therefore, Vygotsky talked of a specific ‘sensation of tragedy’, stressing that “the elusiveness and ineffability of the tragic plot which constitutes the actual reception of the tragedy, is inexplicable to the critic” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 344). Young Vygotsky placed this unexplained aspect of the tragedy on a metaphysical, mystical plane. Indeed, his analysis of *Hamlet* followed the tendencies for mystic philosophical world-views and the popularity of religious or spiritual practices that characterised the Russian intelligentsia of the time. These mystical tendencies were clearly reflected in Vygotsky’s interpretation of the Shakespearean tragedy, which he viewed as a myth that could serve as a vehicle to a spiritual reality.²⁹

Therefore, in his analysis of *Hamlet’s* myth, we read the exposition of a rather mystical world. This world is divided into light and darkness, reason and madness, word and silence, and surrounds a highly spiritual character, who is caught alone within the battle of these forces. In Vygotsky’s reading of *Hamlet*, the force that sets everything in motion arrives with the appearance of late Hamlet’s ghost. The Ghost, for Vygotsky, represents the obscure force that haunts Hamlet’s world, and it is from there that the tragedy springs. It seems that the world of Hamlet is ruled by a dark force, that moves through the plot despite the characters’ efforts against it. According to Vygotsky, the characters not only recognise in this force an

29 This belief brought Vygotsky’s impressionistic critique of *Hamlet* very close to the credos of the Russian Symbolists.

inevitable fate but focus their actions against it, purposefully delaying its outcomes. This is a battle between the world of the living and the world of the dead, where the tragedy's heroes fight to remain within the world of the light, logic, free will, and action, but, nonetheless, continue to drift along with the tragedy's strong currents, towards darkness, apathy, and death. This darkness, Vygotsky argues, forms the very essence of the tragedy.

In this battle of the two worlds, Hamlet stands right on the verge, aware of the two opposing forces, yet completely alone in his awareness. None of the other characters are able to understand their place in the tragedy, the reasons for which they act one way or another, and that is because the reasons come from the dark world of the tragedy, the dimension that Hamlet's ghost introduced, a world that they remain stubbornly oblivious of. Hamlet, however, by standing right on the brink has a unique view of the tragedy: he can see the living as well as the dead, he can understand reason, and can experience madness, he can act with free will and simultaneously indulge passively in the tragedy's own flow.

This interpretation of the content of the tragedy reflected the tendencies towards mysticism among the Russian scholars of the turn of the century, when "the ideas that life is absurd, the persons do not really know each other, that everybody is ultimately lonely, that there must be 'something more', and so on, were quite common" (Van der Veer, 2014, pp. 37-8). It also reflected and anticipated a series of staged interpretations of *Hamlet* that took place on the Russian stages shortly before and after the Revolution. In this sense, Vygotsky's perspective on the Shakespearean tragedy was not remarkable, but rather typical of his time. Yet, his analysis was highly consistent to itself, truly impressionistic, and in many of its details original and authentic. All this gave his work a notable maturity and an air of authority that is surprising for an author in his late teens (Van der Veer, 2014).

What is more, this essay bore the seeds for the fundamental notions of Vygotsky's later approach to art. Therefore, next to the compliance with the 'fashionable' in the time mystical worldview, found in Vygotsky's essay on *Hamlet*, we see equally present a revolutionary exposition of a dialectical play between the form and the content of the tragedy that shaped his reception of the Shakespearean drama. In his argumentation, the mystical force that dominates the tragedy, what he calls the world of darkness, night, absurdity, and death, serves as the content of the story. As an antithesis to this lies the world of light, day, reason, and life. Within it are the actions of the story's heroes, as Shakespeare has shaped them—the tragedy's form. The dramatis personae deny, fight against, and delay the effects of the content. They, thus, act in a catastrophic manner towards the tragedy. Within

this dynamic, Hamlet, the hero, becomes the synthesis of the two opposing worlds, the point on which the whole tragedy is unravelled.

Examined against the scheme of the artistic structure proposed in *The Psychology of Art*, we can see that Vygotsky's argument in his *Hamlet* essay is consistent with the concept of contradiction in the relationship between form and content. The battle of the two worlds, the character of Hamlet, and the play's resolution, as read by Vygotsky, all serve the dialectic scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, which played a central role in Vygotsky's understanding of art as a whole.

In this early essay, Vygotsky demonstrated an impressive skill in "discovering the opposing sides within the same whole" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 21) —a viewpoint that paid tribute to his early interest in Hegelian philosophy. What is more, he made evident the sphere of his interests: the reception of the works of art and the ways in which this reception is guided by the structure of the artworks. This pragmatic focus of Vygotsky, along with his dialectic reasoning, would characterise his worldview in the totality of his work as he entered the field of developmental psychology. This gradual shift towards psychology, just as with all of Vygotsky's works, mirrored the general developments of his time. The October Revolution condemned subjectivism and spirituality: under the new regime, a focus on the phenomenological reception of reality—or a work of art for that matter—became contrary to the demand for rationalisation of all aspects of human life. By 1925, when Vygotsky would complete his monograph on the psychology of art, the field of psychology echoed the Revolutionary demands for objectivity and a materialistic perspective. In this shift, "the once popular flirtations with spirits and ghosts have been swept away by talk about reflexes and brains" (Van der Veer, 2014, p. 42). In line with these developments, Vygotsky progressed to focusing his research on the objective elements of the artistic structure. This change in his methodology, however, was not without basis. In the field of experimental psychology Vygotsky found a scientific language which allowed him to formulate better the problem of artistic reception and examine the works of art with an objective-analytic criterion.

Vygotsky's Theatrical Critiques (1922/23)

As the presentation of the essay on *Hamlet* demonstrated, significant elements that form the core of Vygotsky's thought on the nature and function of art were already present in his early writings during his long engagement with literature and theatre. A significant period for the development of Vygotsky's thought on art—

of which we, fortunately, have some evidence³⁰—were the years 1922 and 1923, which he spent living and working in Gomel. During that period, Vygotsky held many positions related to the arts; one of them was member of the Art Council [Xudozhestvennyj Sovet], which allowed him to follow all the theatrical activity in his region. This activity involved a large number of touring productions from Moscow, as well as regional theatrical troupes of Russian and Yiddish theatre. The theatrical repertoire involved authors like Chekhov, Dostoyevski, Schiller, Gogol, and Gorky among many others, while the theatrical seasons also included poetry nights, operettas, ballet performances, and children’s theatre (Yasnitsky, 2018). Vygotsky followed closely all this cultural activity and wrote numerous critiques on the shows, in addition to a few articles that commented on the general state of the theatre in his region. These reviews and articles were published in the local Gomel newspaper Nash Ponedel’nik [Our Monday] and the regional newspaper Poleskaya Pravda [The Polesky Truth].³¹

In these critiques, Vygotsky addressed the problems of the proletarian poetry, discussed the issues that rose with the development of a new audience, and pointed out the need for a new theatrical and critical language. What is more, he illustrated his beliefs on what constitutes effective acting and directing, and repeatedly attempted to expose those elements of each performance that successfully lead the audience to an aesthetic experience. Finally, he demonstrated an extensive knowledge of the artistic and scholarly happenings of his time and a great sensitivity to art itself. Overall, these critiques combine extensive knowledge of the theatrical developments of the time with a youthful enthusiasm about the potential of theatre, while they project authority and genuine concern about the cultural future of Gomel.

Vygotsky’s critiques are highly affected by his post-Revolutionary enthusiasm in the potential of theatre to raise a new audience that would eventually replace the old intelligentsia.³² His work is thus based on his belief that the critic is responsible for the critical education of the audience. In his own words, the job of the critic “is not to give a mark: good or bad, not to issue certificates in talent and

30 In the recent years, *PsyAnima, Dubna Journal of Psychology* has published close to eighty theatrical reviews written by Vygotsky in 1922 and 1923.

31 Though the reviews have not been yet translated into English, since their publication, there has been several studies that attempt to discern seeds of Vygotsky’s theories on art, psychology, and pedagogy in these early writings. See (Sobkin & Mazanova, 2014), (Van der Veer & Jovanovi , 2015), (Sobkin, 2016), (Sobkin, 2017) and (Kotik-Friedgut, 2012).

32 This belief was widely spread among the theatre makers and critics of the time and was expressed more extensively in an article titled “Theatre and Revolution”, published in 1919 (Vygotsky, 2015). This article is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

mediocrity, but to help the critical member of the audience to build the performance in their own understanding” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 172). By educating the new audience, Vygotsky also hoped to extend and better the theatrical repertoire in Gomel. To achieve such aims, he wrote earnestly and methodically distinguishing the particular theatrical effect of those performances—and discerning their specific characteristics—that he believed advanced theatre as a whole. In this light he interrogated all, new and old, dramas, staging methods, and acting techniques with the question: “What is their real theatrical meaning and value?” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 174). Vygotsky placed great importance on his endeavour to shape the theatrical life of his town and expected the same degree of engagement and professionalism from the people involved in the artistic creation process. His criticism was thus quite demanding and was directed at all aspects of the theatrical event—the actors, the directors, the dramatists, the designers, and even the technicians.

Vygotsky’s reviews show that he sought a deeper, meaningful revolution in theatre and literature. This brought him to sharply criticise parts of the proletarian poetry and the tendency of certain poets to term their work ‘Revolutionary’ and ‘Leftist’ in the mere attempt to present their work as Revolutionary. Vygotsky, who preferred art that was Revolutionary in its very essence, and not only in its appearance, called these attempts “the needle of the compass, that points backwards, not forward, and that looks not towards October, but away from it” (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 205). The essence of Vygotsky’s disagreement with the habitual infusion of poetry and drama with symbols of the Revolution, lies in Vygotsky’s methodology, that does not allow the application of the same phenomenological laws within different spheres of human life. For him, the various symbols that might have inspired and animated the Revolution, as it was experienced in the streets of Petersburg, or in the realms of the government, did not automatically reflect October’s essence, when transferred into poetry—a common practice in his time. Vygotsky believed that such a practice is condemned to fail because of an integral characteristic of art: “in the point of view of any audience member the artistic truth does not coincide at all with the truth of life” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 223). Art’s aim, according to Vygotsky’s writings, is to represent a “bigger truth”, and to do so it needs to employ its own devices, even if that means that its content diverges from real-life facts. Thus, in the case of the “revolutionary enthusiasm, even if it is necessary for its realisation to go beyond the frame of history and to deviate from the true facts, the artist creates a conventional, clearly scenic image—the vessel of his big truth” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 223).

With this stance, Vygotsky joined a series of heated debates over the form

and content that the new, Revolutionary theatre must obtain. Responding to these discussions, Vygotsky advocated the development of new theatrical languages able to contain and communicate the essence of the new phenomena of life. This is a common theme in Vygotsky's critiques: "The new art that wants to say a new word needs to first and foremost obtain a new language" (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 174). Vygotsky's belief that this language needs to differ from the realistic display of life—that it ought to be conceived within the theatrical art and serve the theatrical event—also led him to criticise more traditional performances. In his reviews, he often appeared highly critical of performances that preserved theatrical elements of the past which no longer met the needs of the new audience. Among these were productions that followed the methods of the schools of Realism and Naturalism, and many productions of Yiddish theatre that, according to Vygotsky's reviews, reflected a stale and decadent artistic state. Such theatrical styles, in Vygotsky's view, did not respond to the changes in life that the historical and social events leading to and following the October Revolution had caused. In a metaphor where the psychology of the audience is hidden behind a door and the theatrical language appears as the key, Vygotsky wrote:

The keys that yesterday would so easily open the most secret doors of the spirit, today lie impotent faced with the new locks that seal the soul, and will not even properly fit in the keyholes. What is left to do, is not to experiment with the keys, but to search for—or better make—new keys. (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 221)

Yet, Vygotsky did not imply the complete negation of the culture of the past. The new 'keys', he believed, could only be created from the proper development and reform of the existing theatrical languages. Vygotsky, indeed, honoured the richness of the Russian and European theatrical traditions deeply. In contrast to several of his contemporaries,³³ he did not turn against the artistic and cultural wealth of the pre-Revolutionary Russia; he believed that the new theatre would and ought to stem from that rich pool of theatrical languages and methods.

Moreover, and despite the tendencies of some of his contemporaries, Vygotsky did not advocate a single method or school of artistic creation. On the contrary, he urged, in many instances, for multiformity and diversity of style:

33 In the months between February and October 1917, formed a massive cultural organisation under the name Proletkult, which adopted a nihilistic stance towards the classics and advocated the total reformation of art, under the new proletarian ideals. Though Proletkult's leaders, Alexander Bogdanov, Platon Kerzhentsev, and Valerian Plentev presented a rather extremist stance against all art of the past, the majority of artists-members of the organisation took a more conciliatory approach to their work. Nonetheless, Proletkult's proclamations fuelled a heated debate concerning the value of the pre-Revolutionary art in the post-Revolutionary culture, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Even if my criticism stays within the limits of the realistic possibilities of our scene and repertoire, I cannot but stress every time, and at each instance, that the eyes cannot bear the flatness of a single grey shade within the whole house, that the winds of the new theatrical styles are knocking on our windows. We are waiting for them; we want them all. (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 215)

Vygotsky envisioned the cultural life of his town embracing and cultivating the artistic advances and innovations that took place in Russia and Europe in that time. He, thus, insisted on the need for careful planning of the theatrical seasons of Gomel; he believed that Gomel possessed the resources to select its repertoire responsibly and to successfully organise an inspiring and progressive plan for the cultural life of the year. Therefore, he campaigned for the fulfilment of this possibility, with a youthful vigour and determination: “We want to prod theatre away from its dead state, pull it out of the swamp of its routine, and this can be easily done” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 216). Vygotsky’s openness to all kinds of theatrical—and generally artistic—styles is consistent with his belief that the artistic language needs to be unique for each artwork. Since the theatrical language reflects the essence of a play and serves as a device for its communication to the audience, it ought to be invented in real time and serve the specific needs of each theatrical production. Part of this language are all the artistic choices made by the playwright, the creative team, and the actors.

Vygotsky thus criticised many of the productions presented in Gomel at the time, for a lack of consistency and homogeneity among these choices. In his reviews he condemned decisions about style and technique, as well as other elements of the productions, that seemed to be made at random, or through a habitual force. Vygotsky asked for well-planned productions, that approach the artistic material with sensitivity and clear intention. With his demands for consistency, clarity, and originality Vygotsky stressed the role of the director. In his eyes, the complexity of the ‘performance’s symphony’ and the multitude of elements it entails made the role of the director crucial and fundamental for the success of a production. In an effective production, according to Vygotsky, “the single directorial idea—no matter what it is—penetrates the whole show from beginning to end: everything is thought through, calculated, weighted, pre-considered, executed with awareness” (Vygotsky, 2011, p. 201).

In Vygotsky’s vision, the director’s authority unites all the artistic choices made under one plan, and the resulting production is delivered to the audience as one holistic piece of art. Yet, Vygotsky attributed the responsibility for the success of a production on all the components of the theatrical event: the text, the direction, the acting, the elements of visual and spatial design, even the theatrical space itself. As

his insistence on clarity of style shows, Vygotsky sought a holistic theatrical experience, where nothing is out of a carefully considered place. In his view, “even the stage mechanic, by being a member of the common orchestra and by participating with his work in the general tempo and rhythm of the performance’s symphony, he becomes an artistic, and not just technical, worker” (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 165).

That being said, Vygotsky did place great importance on the actors’ work in the communication of the essence of a play to the audience, and in the leading of the audience to a significant theatrical experience. He thus devoted a large part of his reviews to the criticism of each of the actors’ work. In these critiques, Vygotsky demonstrated a good knowledge of the acting techniques of his time, often quoting Stanislavsky’s writings. However, his vision of acting was distinct from that of the Naturalistic techniques. He demanded from the actors a fierce presence on stage, full of pathos and expressivity but he praised most of all that actor that was able to control and even resist the free expression of their emotion:

We need to pause on the movement of this interesting actor. His gestures and movements are always [...] on brakes, held back. The arm wants to take off—the body to dash forward, but the driving force, is brought to stillness, the impulse is suppressed from its beginning. This is a very smart and very needed practice. The arrested gesture —is the very same gesture but with an exceptional intensity. (Vygotskij in Sobkin, 2015, p. 340)

In this acting approach, full of contrast, Vygotsky saw a powerful aesthetic effect. The need for antithesis in a work of art would later form the basis of his theory on the reception of literature and theatre. At this early period, Vygotsky sought that contradiction in the craft of the actors. He thus advised them to engage with contrasting elements in their role, embrace the variety of emotions that a character might bear and allow for conflict between the gesture and its content, noting that staging such a conflict between the feelings of the role and the way that these are expressed by the actor amplifies the emotional tension for the audience (Van der Veer & Jovanovi , 2015).

In a period when theatre transitioned from Naturalistic techniques to the new experimental—and at times eccentric—relationships between the actor’s emotion and gesture, Vygotsky’s demands joined a multitude of artistic voices. The period of the Russian Avant-garde saw many examples of approaches to acting that emphasised conflict and stylisation. Characteristic are the Expressionistic elements in Vakhtangov’s theatre, which embraced intensity and contrast in acting, Michael Chekhov’s bridging of the ordinary with the grotesque (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988),

Radlov's vision of highly abstract acting, which formed "a kind of theatrical Suprematism" (Leach, 2018 p. 105), and Shershenevich and Ferdinandov's experiments which aimed at discovering "the path of most resistance" (Shershenevich in Leach, 2018 p. 117). The most successful example of juxtaposition between the form and the content in the actor's work—as well as in the overall production—appeared in Meyerhold's theatre of the grotesque. Similarly to Eisenstein's experimentations with his 'montage of attractions', Meyerhold's work on the grotesque aimed to 'shock' the audience by opposing their expectations, thus leading them to create unexpected emotional associations. These practices lay in line with Shklovsky's notion of 'ostranenie' (defamiliarisation) and were applied in hope of causing a perceptual revelation for the audience. In Vygotsky's terms, however, a vision of acting founded on contrast reflected the Hegelian dialectic principle, where, the actor's behaviour (antithesis) expresses the deeper psychological and spiritual dimension hidden in his speech (thesis), in order to synthesise a new more dynamic emotional state (Vygotsky, 2011).

It is thus possible to locate, in Vygotsky's critiques, the fundamental ideas on the nature of art and its effect that would later develop into *The Psychology of Art*. In addition to the central function of an embedded antithesis in the structure of a work of art (here in the acting style of the actor), we find the scheme of parallel exposition of contrasting lines of narration which meet in a 'catastrophic', emotionally highly charged point, that forms the climax of the narrative. In his review of a performance of Lunacharsky's *Royal Barber*, Vygotsky wrote characteristically:

These two lines—the ascending line of the development of the personal passions, the fall into drunkenness with power and authority, and the descending line of the exposition of the pettiness of this power—are unraveled in a parallel, harmonious, and convincing manner—beautifully and simultaneously arriving to the highest (lowest) point of the general resolution—the catastrophe. (Vygotsky, 2012b, p. 122)

This examination of Vygotsky's theatre reviews reveals that his beliefs on the nature and function of art were developing long before the composition of his doctoral thesis. In this fragmented exposition of his thought we have found Vygotsky's positions on the distinction of art from life—and thus his urging for embracing theatricality and diversity of styles; the potential and aim of theatre to engage its audience emotionally and produce powerful affective reactions; the idea that the meaning or reason of a performance is not located in its content, but in the effect of this content on the audience; the belief that the reception of a theatrical event by the audience is guided by the structural and technical characteristics of the

performance; the dialectical nature of the relationship of these structural characteristics: the view of the theatrical event as an indivisible whole; and the dynamic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis embedded in the overall structure of the work. What is more, through the definition of his role as a theatre critic, Vygotsky highlighted theatre's potential as a leading force for the cultural developments, called for by the new Revolutionary era.

Vygotsky developed all these views, which he would later systematise in his doctoral thesis, by examining the live theatre: acting, directing, design and scenic architecture—the fulfilled potential of the theatrical text. This fruitful view is missing from *The Psychology of Art*, where, though he makes some references to the performative aspects of theatrical writing, his focus lies in the narrative characteristics of the written text. As Vygotsky moved more and more into the field of psychology, his active engagement with art withered, leaving in its place an interest in the psychological mechanisms involved in the processes of aesthetic reception. Yet, the essence of his interests remained the same. As a theatre critic, Vygotsky appears particularly interested in understanding the ways in which the development of a new, Revolutionary culture could affect the traditional Russian psyche and aid it in transitioning to a new, more developed state. As a psychologist, Vygotsky continued to investigate the role of cultural interaction in the formation of the mind. This correlation reveals the extent to which Vygotsky's early engagement with the role of theatre in a changing society paved the way for his more mature works in psychology.

Vygotsky's Analyses of Literary Works in *The Psychology of Art*

The Psychology of Art stands at the intersection of Vygotsky's interests in art and psychology. Written one year after his full-time engagement with experimental psychology in Kornilov's Institute, it reflects the scientific, objective-analytic viewpoint that characterised his new profession, while still bearing the echoes of a deep and enthusiastic involvement with the teaching of literature and the curating of theatrical life. Considering the amount of works that Vygotsky left unfinished, and the rapid rhythm in which his interests developed, it is of great fortune for us that, by making use of the time he had to stay confined due a tuberculosis attack, Vygotsky returned to the analysis of the arts in order to combine his newly-gained discoveries with his previous searches.

In this book, Vygotsky presented and explained several characteristics which he found embedded in the structure of the artworks and which he considered

responsible for leading readers and audience members to an aesthetic experience. Vygotsky arrived at his conclusions on the nature of these features through a methodical analysis of the aesthetic reactions produced by three genres of literature: the fable, the short story, and the tragedy. The choice of these genres was, of course, not arbitrary; Vygotsky viewed each genre as a more advanced and complicated structure than the previous. Therefore, he used the conclusions from the analysis of the structure of the fable to inform his analysis of the short story, and from the outcomes of these studies, he built his way up to the examination of the structure of tragedy.

The fable

When writing about the fable, Vygotsky stated that the “fable is a basic, elementary form of poetry and therefore contains the seeds of lyric, epic, and drama” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 140). This is the belief that led him to search for the fundamentals of the concept of art in the essential characteristics of the fable. In his pursuit for a general theory of the arts, Vygotsky engaged with interpreting several fables searching for those elements that form the core of the genre and are responsible for causing aesthetic reactions in its readers. In the book, Vygotsky began his analysis of the fable by distinguishing between what he called the ‘prosaic’ fable and the ‘poetic’ fable. This way he differentiated his work from those theories that place a moral teaching at the heart of the fable’s function, such as the popular, at the time, theories created by Lessing and Potebnya (Vygotsky, 1971). A poetic fable, as viewed by Vygotsky, is a piece of art, able to lead its reader to an aesthetic experience. Therefore, in order to examine the aesthetic function of the fable, Vygotsky focused on the poetic, or lyrical fable and pursued the reconstruction of a theory that would highlight those characteristics that guide the readers through the processes of artistic reception.

To achieve that, he performed what he called “experimental deformation (i.e., changing an element in the whole of the fable and investigating the result to which this leads)” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 96). Vygotsky imported this technique from the field of experimental psychology (Vygotsky and his colleagues used it later to understand the development and the function of the human brain) and used it broadly in his attempt to understand the various elements of the artistic structures. The method refers to the study of the functions of a structure once one element has been removed, a process that points to the functions of that specific element. Therefore, Vygotsky focused his study on the poetic fable—the kind of fable that bears an artistic, or lyrical dimension, such as the fables written by Krylov—and by

carefully replacing elements of the given fables with their opposites, he attempted to study the intrinsic characteristics of those elements. Then, through the interpretive analysis of several of Krylov's fables, Vygotsky studied the psychological functions, related to the aesthetic reception, that stem from the synthesis of these elements.

Through this process, he arrived at a number of conclusions that he believed could apply to all literary forms of art. Central to these conclusions is the prerequisite of clear differentiation between artistic event and life, a belief that stands in line with his previous work on *Hamlet*, and his theatrical critiques. Vygotsky showed that the "allegory and the poetic inspiration of a subject are diametrically opposed. The closer the similarity on which the allegory is based, the flatter, more trite, and duller becomes the subject itself" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 97). The need to distinguish and isolate the work of art from reality is, indeed, discussed in the book frequently, and is presented in all instances as an essential prerequisite for art to be effective. Without this distinction, as I will elaborate later, the psychological mechanisms involved in the processes of aesthetic reception could not be initiated.

Vygotsky defined art as "a voluntary state of hallucination into which the reader chooses to place himself" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 115). Consequently, the author of the fable is required to—consciously or unconsciously—organise his material in such a way that the presented story is clearly and unmistakably different from life. If the content of the fable is a piece of truth or a moral lesson derived from life, then the author can achieve this distinction through the use of artistic form. Such a form distorts the content of the story or even conflicts with it. Of course, not all distorted images of life can function as art; the author of a fable does not choose his form randomly, nor can he apply a formalistic recipe on any story, but constructs it out of the very content of the story. Though they exist in a relationship of conflict and contradiction, the form and the content, according to Vygotsky, are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin.

The second essential characteristic and a necessary condition of a poetic fable, according to Vygotsky, is its capacity to engage its reader emotionally: "Anyone reading a fable is completely enthralled by what he reads. He abandons himself to the feelings and emotions stirred by the fable and will not try to remember anything else" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 140). This property points directly to the fact that the aesthetic experience involves a strong emotional engagement. The author of a fable (or creator of any piece of art) aims at the affective excitement of his reader through the use of formal elements. According to Vygotsky, and in the example of Krylov's fables, the use of animals, or even inanimate objects, as the protagonists demonstrates the ways in which formal choices can conduct the reader's emotional

engagement with the story. “We can say that one of the main reasons poets resort to the representation of animals and inanimate objects is the possibility of isolating and concentrating one affective element in such a hero” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 102).

This affecting element derives from the specific animal’s or object’s active properties. We do not perceive the story’s heroes as complex psychological beings, like ourselves, but as simple and straightforward potential acting agents; that is, we perceive these characters as elements of form. From here, Vygotsky arrived at another essential characteristic of a literary work: the characters in a fable are elements of the form of the piece, and their nature is action based; the characters speak to us (or are received by us) not based on who they are—their supposed psychology—but based on what they can do or cannot do.

The nature of the characters presented in a fable, as well as the ways in which such characters can relate to each other, create a theme in the fable that is received by the reader as an atmosphere or a sensation. This atmosphere evokes specific emotions in the reader, emotions that stay with them and develop as the story unravels. Yet, Vygotsky discovered that every fable is devised in such a way that it resists or conflicts the very mood that it sets. It seems that a fable, through the use of poetic language and technique, creates a ‘counter-feeling’ for each feeling that it evokes: “In this carefully devised system, feelings are evoked on one level which are diametrically opposed to those evoked on the other. The fable seems to tease our emotions” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 121). It does so by presenting two parallel themes creating a contrast between “its words and its meaning” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 106), and by leading its reader to the simultaneous development of two contrasting reactions to its narrative. These two levels of development “represent a unit” both in the fable and our reception of it “and are tied in one single action, even though they remain dual and separate” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 141).

However, there exists one moment in every fable, where the separate lines of reception meet and become fused with one another. That is the moment that Vygotsky calls ‘the catastrophe’ and it coincides with the end of the fable:

The catastrophe (or *pointe*) of a fable is its concluding phase, in which the contrasts and contradictions are driven to the extreme, and the emotions that built up in the course of the fable are discharged. There occurs a short-circuiting of the two opposing currents. The contrast explodes, burns, and dissolves. [...] At this point, the fable gathers itself together in a last, supreme effort and in one blow solves the conflict of sensation and emotions. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 142)

As Vygotsky proceeded to show, once he had completed his analysis of all three genres, the divergence of the two emotional reactions creates a strong

psychological tension in the recipient of the fable, while the *pointe* of the narrative signifies the moment when the *catharsis* of this tension takes place.

From the analysis of the structure of the fable, Vygotsky inferred a number of conclusions that apply to all literary or narrative artforms. Among these conclusions, Vygotsky stressed the necessity for a piece of art to stand in clear distinction from real life, the power of an artwork to evoke affective reactions and engage its reader emotionally, and the location of this emotional reaction on the contrasting messages of the fable. In the simple narratives of the fables Vygotsky discovered an embedded contradiction, the parallel development of a dual system of opposing themes, which is reflected in the antithesis of form and content. The existence (or lack) of this antithesis, for Vygotsky, adds a level of complexity in the narrative and makes a fable artistic; without it, the story is bland, failing to evoke an aesthetic experience. What is more, the two contradicting levels of the story's development lead to a moment of meeting and simultaneous catastrophe, which signifies for the reader the release of psychological tension. As I will demonstrate, all these conclusions, which derived from Vygotsky's analysis and interpretation of Krylov's fables, form the heart of his perspective on the nature and function of art as a whole.

The short story

Vygotsky observed in the short story all those elemental structural characteristics that he discerned in the fable—that is, all the structural elements responsible for causing an aesthetic experience. He regarded the short story and the novella “as a pure form of writing, whose main purpose is the formal treatment of a plot and its transformation into a poetic subject” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 147).³⁴ Consequently, he believed that the study of the author's technique—the study of the formal treatment of the story—would reveal the teleologic significance of each component of the short story, thus pointing again to the general rules that govern aesthetic reception.

The first and foremost formal element of the novel that Vygotsky examined is the composition of the content. Every novel or short story uses as its foundational

³⁴ When discussing the structure of Bunin's short story, in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky made a parallelism between his definitions of form and content and the terms 'fabula' and 'syuzhet' that were employed by the Formalist literary theory, where 'fabula' connoted the material from which a narrative is composed and 'syuzhet' the story as it is poetically re-narrated by the artist. Indeed, Vygotsky's analysis of the short story grounded itself upon the Formalist conviction that, to understand the aesthetic effect of a novel, one must investigate the transformation of the original material—in this case, the story—by the author or the poet. Nonetheless, though the influence of the Formalist school on Vygotsky is evident—and acknowledged by him—he later proceeded to dissociate his work from the movement. When composing his theory on the psychology of art, later in the book, Vygotsky discussed the matter under the terms 'forma' and 'material' or 'soderzhanie', translated as form and material or content.

material a story. This story—that is, the events that the novel is narrating, or the content—could be recited in a linear fashion, where every event follows the previous one and causes the next one in a logical and chronological order. In the novel, however, this is never the case: by utilising a number of narration techniques, the author leads the reader to a different path, where the causal relationships of the events that are presented are disturbed, where the narrative weight is distributed unequally among the different events, and where the chronological order can be disordered. Vygotsky observed that this new way of narrating the facts is unique for every novel or short story and constitutes its artistic form. The composition of the content by the author—rather than its disposition—acts as an agent of transformation for the story. In Vygotsky's words, the author uses composition "to make life's events unreal, to transform water into wine, as always happens in any real work of art" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 154). Indeed, he notes, just as the specific arrangement of sounds creates music, or a particular organisation of words make up a poem, the composition of the novel's elements—the words, the sentences, and their meaning—mould the narration of some events into a work of art.

Along with the manner in which the author narrates the event, stand several means that the author uses in the creation of his form:

The language he uses, the tone, the mood, his choice of words, his construction of sentences, whether he describes scenes or gives only a brief summary, whether he transcribes the dialogues of his characters or just tells us what they have said, and so forth. All of this is quite important and has a great bearing on the artistic treatment of the subject. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 158)

For Vygotsky, the relationship between the authorial form and the facts that the author chooses to present—that is the content of the story—is key to the aesthetic potential of the short story and the novel. Indeed, from the analysis of the fable, Vygotsky inferred, that the aesthetic reaction of the reader is caused by the nature of the relationship between the form and the content. Similar to his previous deductions is Vygotsky's conclusion that in the short story the form (composition) and the content (events) exist in a contrasting relationship, where form acts as a catastrophic agent for the content.

Within this counteractive relationship of form and content, Vygotsky observed a feature that plays a significant role in the reception of the short story. This is an element of the artistic form created by the author, which Vygotsky named 'the dominating element':

A work of art—a narrative, painting, or poem—is a complete whole which consists of heterogeneous elements organised in different

ways and according to different hierarchies. In such a whole there always exists some dominating element which determines the structure of the entire story, as well as the significance of each of its parts. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 157)

In the case of Bunin's short story, the dominating element, as its title also suggests, is that of gentle breathing. The symbol of light or gentle breathing, with its twofold significance in the story, serves as a meeting point for the form and the content and defines with its meaning our understanding of all the events described by Bunin.

Yet, the element of gentle breathing has another surprising function. Vygotsky believed that it describes the reader's breathing pattern—and consequently his emotional state—when perceiving the story. Based on the belief that our emotional state is reflected in our breathing patterns (a hypothesis that is still supported and investigated today), Vygotsky attempted to examine the emotional effects of Bunin's *Gentle Breathing* on its readers. He performed several such experiments in the small laboratory that he was able to set up at the Gomel Teacher College, and in the Institute for Experimental Psychology, one year later. In these experiments, Vygotsky used a pneumograph to record the breathing patterns of his participants, as they read Bunin's story (Van der Veer, 2014). Vygotsky interpreted the resulting measurements as a light or gentle breathing, and he attributed this effect to the particular form used by Bunin's particular in his narrative.

What is more, Vygotsky stressed that this effect stood in contrast with the story's sad content. Here, Vygotsky found another strong piece of evidence for the integral existence of a contrast between the form and content and its reflection on the reader's emotional state. For Vygotsky, the relationship between form and content "illustrates the affective contradiction, the collision between two contrasting emotions which apparently makes up the astonishing psychological rules of the aesthetics of the story" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 160). Vygotsky called this relationship dialectical, pointing again to the Hegelian scheme of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. This synthesis, as with the contrast between the thesis and antithesis, takes place on two levels. On the level of the novel, once the narration reaches its point, the collision of the form and the content produce a new picture of the whole story; the scope changes to include a 'bigger truth', as we witness the synthesis of a greater image. On the level of the reader's emotional world, the witnessing of this synthesis, at the catastrophe of the novel, leads the reader's mind to proceed to its own emotional synthesis. As a result, as the reader's emotional landscape changes, they

see the novel—and their own inner world—under a new light.³⁵

The tragedy

In the third case study of *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky returned to *Hamlet*, dedicating a chapter to the analysis of the structural characteristics of the Shakespearean tragedy, in order to formulate the mechanics of aesthetic reception in the case of drama. There appear to be some substantial differences between Vygotsky's two takes on the tragedy: the analysis of *Hamlet* of 1916 and that of 1924/25. In this second approach, Vygotsky's viewpoint is clearly influenced by his interest in the specific ways that the structure of a literary text pre-determines the reader's psychological, and even physiological reactions. Vygotsky's youthful enthusiasm about his impressions of the drama, and his talk of mysticism has been replaced, in the book, by a careful and methodical analysis of the function of the play's elements. Yet, one can trace a clear line of development from the first essay to the analysis found in *The Psychology of Art*. This development is better understood in the context of the general cultural advances that took place in Russia, during the 1910s and 1920s, which I will be discussing in detail in the following chapters. In this section, I will focus on the similarities in the methodology and the conclusions that Vygotsky arrived to in his two analyses and interpretations of *Hamlet*, as it is these that bear the essence of Vygotsky's unique perspective and that characterised his thought throughout his involvement with art.

A crucial element, common to Vygotsky's two takes on *Hamlet*, is his belief that the play must be studied as it stands, and that the analyst focuses solely on the tragedy's structure, avoiding the 'trap' of engaging with the thousands of volumes already written about the tragedy. An example of such a 'trap', presented by Vygotsky is the attribution of Shakespeare's authorial techniques to an understanding of the technical limitation in the theatres of his time: Vygotsky argued that "within the limits allowed the poet by his technique, he retains freedom of creation and composition" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 175). Despite the limitations, the artistic choices made during the production (or composition) of a play belong to the author and through the orchestration of these choices by the author "each and every technical device acquires its own aesthetic significance" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 174).

As this last statement shows, Vygotsky saw a great significance in the composition of drama. As predicted by his two preceding case studies, Vygotsky

³⁵ Vygotsky pointed that this internal synthesis often gives the reader the impression of gaining knowledge. However, he considered this aspect the aesthetic perception only as a byproduct of the aesthetic experience, placing the essential function of art in the emotional sphere.

found in the structure of tragedy a contrasting relationship between the play's form and content. By exposing the structural characteristics of *Hamlet*, Vygotsky found that in the case of the tragedy, this contradiction is expressed on three levels: there is an antithesis within the narrated event itself, as in the fable, there is a contrast between the event and the way it is narrated (composed), as in the novel, and there is a contradiction embedded in a new element, that characterises the genre: the *dramatis personae*, and specifically the protagonist. According to Vygotsky, the main function of the protagonist is similar to that of the dominating element found in the novel. In his monograph, Vygotsky stated that the nature of the protagonist shapes our reception of the play, as the whole background of the tragedy, as well as all the other characters, are presented to us through the lens of his 'soul'. "The tragedy [...] shapes our feelings into a unity and forces them to follow the protagonist alone and to perceive everything through his eyes" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 192).³⁶ Through the mechanism of identification (here Vygotsky agrees with the psychoanalytic notion), the central hero keeps our attention focused on one point and helps direct our reception of the play.

Though the *dramatis personae* are created to give us the impression of human beings with a psychology of their own, Vygotsky sees them as merely formal elements within the tragedy's structure. Their function in a drama is to affect and guide our reception of it. Therefore, Vygotsky examined the protagonist's psychological function within the structural scheme of the tragedy. According to Vygotsky, "the task of art, like that of tragedy, is to force us to experience the incredible and absurd in order to perform some kind of extraordinary operation with our emotions" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 190). The extreme nature of the contradictions in a tragedy creates an increasingly absurd or irrational environment that can become unbearable for the viewer. The existence of a central hero, a character that holds within them the total of the absurdity, the madness, and the contradiction of the play, serves as a foundational pole holding the whole tragedy together. Vygotsky notes another device, used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, that has a similar function: it is the element of theatre within the theatre, where "the second convention, obliterates and conceals the absurdity of the first 'real' part" (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 190-1).

It is thus crucial that the protagonist concentrates upon them some of the contradictions that characterise the play within his or her own nature. The main character is an element created from both the content and the form of the tragedy, and his or her actions are dictated by both. "The new contribution of the protagonist

³⁶ As I will discuss in Chapter Four, Vygotsky's belief of the protagonist's function as a lens to the whole tragedy was associated with the emergence of the monodrama—a theatrical genre that became popular during the time.

is that at any moment, he unifies both contradictory planes and is the supreme and ever-present embodiment of the contradiction inherent in the tragedy” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 195). Through his or her actions, or moments of inactivity, the protagonist serves as a concentrating lens for our attention and guides our reception amidst the tragedy’s extreme antitheses, towards the catastrophic and cathartic end of the drama.

The Structure of a Work of Art

Following this examination of Vygotsky’s ideas, as they are exposed in his theatrical critiques and his analyses of literary texts found in *The Psychology of Art*, I can present the general scheme for the process of aesthetic reception, as it is guided by the structure of the literary artworks. In this scheme contradiction plays the central role: the form and the content of the literary piece, though they are inseparable parts of the same whole, they diverge in order to collide at the *pointe* of the text. This process, according to Vygotsky, is responsible for causing a predetermined, common for all (yet individually interpreted) aesthetic response.

To achieve the desired aesthetic response, the author puts into effect, from the beginning of any piece of literature, a series of technical elements. These entice the imagination of the reader and stimulate an emotional response. From that moment on, the reader follows the narrative through two distinct parallel pathways. The one is directed by the content of the piece—having engaged and identified with it the reader foresees the events of its catastrophe. The other is guided by the authorial form and is always contrary to that of the content. Through their engagement with the author’s formal treatment of the narrative, the reader experiences the content through a different point of view, a process that yields opposite reactions to those derived from the content.

The narrative continues to feed both emotional paths, and the reader, or audience member, is suspended between the two; this phase is the result of the author’s artful manipulation of their material and is characterised by an acute emotional tension. This tension is released at the *pointe* or catastrophe of the narrative. During this event, which coincides with the end of the narrative, the two pathways are joined at a single point. The narrative’s form allows for the events foreshadowed by the content to take place and the two emotional pathways of the reader suddenly meet. The release of the emotional tension that was created by the described antitheses is defined, by Vygotsky, as *catharsis*.

The term catharsis, as Vygotsky understood it, encompasses the fields of aesthetics, psychology, and sociology.³⁷ It forms the heart of Vygotsky's theory on art and informs his beliefs about the cultural function of theatre. As this chapter presented, Vygotsky reached his understanding of the psychological mechanisms that lead a person to the experience of catharsis by identifying the essential characteristics that are embedded in every work of art and their effect on the human psyche. The identification of these characteristics and the suggestion of their psychological function form the structural-analytical part of Vygotsky's legacy in aesthetics. This part comprises his definition of the artwork's content as its theme or material and its form as the structural modifications that the artist has applied to that material—that is, how the artist presents the content. Vygotsky described the artistic form as the structural reimagining of the content, or the formal treatment of the content which transforms it into a device with significant aesthetic-psychological effects. This definition is complimented by his view of the structure of an artwork in a state of dialectical synthesis, where the form and the content diverge from each other in order to collide at the *pointe* of the narrative—a process that is mirrored in the reader's or audience member's mental state and causes a predetermined, common for all (yet individually interpreted) aesthetic response—the catharsis effect.

Vygotsky's definition of the structural nature of a work of art informs the contemporary discussion of art as “a model of thought process— not as a representation of specific thoughts or ideas but simply as an abstract rendition of the structure of thought” (Lawrence in Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014, p. 49). This argument is present in modern day discussions on contemporary and post-dramatic theatre (see Lehmann 2006, Bleeker et al., 2019, Rancière, 2013) and it bears great importance in the theoretical and practical aesthetics of interactive or relational dramaturgy. Both terms, introduced by Milan Zvada (Zvada in Romanska, 2014) and Peter Boenisch (Boenisch in Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014) respectively, discuss an attitude towards the analysis of a dramatic (or theatrical) text with respect to its effect on the spectator. Like Vygotsky, these dramaturgs understand the theatrical world to be “constructed gradually and purposefully to evoke certain kinds of responses in the audience” (Zvada in Romanska, 2014, p. 203). Vygotsky definition for the structure of an artwork and its effect, can provide today's dramaturgs with a system of identifying the overall emotional (or thinking) score of an artistic text or, as Kastler (2017) has indicated, help the dramaturgs and the directors of a staged

37 The sociological aspect of Vygotsky's aesthetics will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

drama interpret the text in a manner that translates the conflictual nature of the form and the content for the stage.

Another aspect of Vygotsky's definition that informs today's discourse in theatre studies lies in its implication on our understanding of theatricality. The transformative power that the artistic form holds over the content paired with the need for the form to oppose the content brings Vygotsky's theory into a dynamic threshold between Freudian or Aristotelian identification and Brechtian distancing. For Vygotsky, the theatrical text or the performance needs to incite both effects simultaneously in order for the audience member or reader to be led to a catharsis. Modern day discussions have termed this interplay between emergence and identification as critical intimacy or liminality (Bleeker in Bleeker et al., 2019) and have deemed it an indispensable aspect of today's theatre. Theatre scholars that apply findings from the field of cognitive science on their studies have reached similar conclusions when discussing the conceptual-blending theory of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in relation to this doubleness, found in the reception of events in theatre (see McConachie & Hart, 2006). The agreement of Vygotsky's observations regarding the dialectical state of an artwork's structure with the above findings demonstrates the relevance of his theory to today's discussions, regardless of the limits of his initial range of perspective.

Vygotsky arrived at these definitions by applying his objective-analytic methodology, which was an attempt to bring scientific objectivity to the field of aesthetics. This perspective was genuine, but not unique for his time, as during the 1920s, in Russia, artistic criticism sought to liberate itself from subjectivity. What was characteristic in Vygotsky's overall aesthetic studies was that he presupposed the existence of a reader or audience member and placed the aim of the artwork on the effect on his or her psychology. Thus, the development of Vygotsky's understanding of the psychology of art was profoundly influenced by his work in the field of psychology, the particulars of which are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*: A Dialectic Merging of Psychologies and Philosophies

To fully appreciate the Vygotskian notion of catharsis it is first necessary to develop an understanding of the psychological and philosophical theories that influenced his thought at the time that he was writing *The Psychology of Art*. Following the presentation of Vygotsky's analysis of the structure of literature, this chapter presents the foundations of the psychological mechanisms involved in artistic reception, as viewed by Vygotsky, with reference to the philosophical and psychological theories that supported Vygotsky's approach to art. Furthermore, it places these concepts in the context of the developments in the field of psychology during Vygotsky's life, connecting his work with, among others, the Russian reception of psychoanalysis and other humanist philosophies, Kornilov's reactology and the broader Russian scientific revolution of the 1920s, Marxist philosophy and the emerging school of Marxist psychology. The synthesis of all the above schools of thought in his psychology of art makes apparent the characteristic combination of objectivism and humanism of Vygotsky's work.

Aesthetics and psychology are arguably indivisible in Vygotsky's overall work. This position has been developed by Vygotsky's reviewers over the last three decades, with scholars suggesting that it was Vygotsky's efforts to understand the psychological function of art that led him into the realms of psychology (Van der Veer, 1991; West, 1999). The study of Vygotsky's work in aesthetics can admittedly inform our understanding of his psychological oeuvre. Contrary to the older views that see Vygotsky's academic transition as a sharp shift, it is now widely believed that his engagement with the scholarship of art helped shape his future thought:

It could be argued that Vygotsky entered psychology precisely in order to answer the complex psychological questions which he had discovered in his dealings with aesthetics. Moreover, I would argue that it was because Vygotsky had worked in aesthetics, and had studied the most advanced and complex products of the human brain, that he was aware of the importance of resisting the reductionism and biological determinism in which the psychology of his time was steeped; and it was this awareness which enabled him to make such an original and brilliant contribution to the science of mind. (West, 1999, p. 49)

The same holds true about Vygotsky's contribution to the field of aesthetics. His distinctive methodology in the study of art was evidently the result of the synthesis of several major perspectives in psychology in his time.³⁸

Undoubtedly, Vygotsky's interest in psychology sprang from his engagement with the teaching of literature. From 1917, when he returned to Gomel, until his next departure for Moscow in 1924, Vygotsky taught in a number of local schools and "the issue of his students' understanding of literature became important" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 27). Vygotsky's interests in the reception of literature and its effect on the reader soon advanced to a scholarly level: Van der Veer (1991) makes a note of a presentation on the methods of teaching literature that Vygotsky presented in a local conference at the time. It was during the same period, that Vygotsky conducted his first series of psychological experiments—his attempt to 'measure' the emotional impact of Bunin's short story on his subjects. In these experiments Vygotsky claimed a link between breathing patterns and emotional states in humans—a connection that was not new³⁹ but reflected well Vygotsky's later expressed beliefs on various topics of psychology, such as the relations between biological and mental processes. In fact, it was the resonance of such views in Vygotsky's early psychological experiments that attracted the attention of the director of the Institute of Experimental Psychology [Institut Eksperimental'noj Psixologii], Konstantin Kornilov, who offered him a position and the chance to repeat his experiments in a more advanced laboratory.⁴⁰ Working in Kornilov's laboratory, Vygotsky fulfilled his transition from the position of a literary and theatre critic—one that attempted to articulate the subjective responses to an artwork—to that of a psychologist—one that was concerned with understanding the general psychological laws that shape the aesthetic responses (Van der Veer, 1991).

The move towards scientific analysis and study, was guided by Vygotsky's

38 In Chapter Six, I discuss the generalised trend of the Russian Avant-garde theatre artists to rely on contemporary theories of psychology for the development of their outlook on the theatrical practice. Usually, the artists sought to make such interdisciplinary connections in their attempt to endow their practice with elements of scientific accuracy and objectivity. As I will argue, though objectivity was one of Vygotsky's prerequisites for the development of a concrete psychology of art, his engagement with the field of psychology was far deeper and more consistent than the Avant-garde paradigms, even as early as 1924.

39 The idea for his experiments was based on the suggestions of another psychologist, the behaviourist Blonsky, who believed that the emotional reception of literary texts is directed by the rhythm of breathing when read (Van der Veer, 1991).

40 Though Vygotsky published the outcomes of these studies, he never presented the original data and "was not at all thorough in presenting those finding" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 31). It is thus hard to argue on the validity of his experimental findings. However, the obscurity of the methodology and results aside, these early experiments demonstrate the interconnection of aesthetics and psychology in Vygotsky's thought and reflect his position on the mind-body problem in psychology, a problem that he would engage with years later.

interest in discerning matters of aesthetic reception; its development, however, was facilitated by the general shifts in philosophical and scientific thought that characterised the first three decades of the 20th century in Russia. This gradual shift begun in the years before the 1917 Revolution, when the field of psychology in Russia, was still heavily based on the adaptation of Western schools of thought (Artinian, 2013). Essential among these was the school of psychoanalysis, which had a significant impact on the development of Vygotsky's thought. Equally formative for his worldview were the works of Spinoza, Marx, and Engels—theories that crossed “the borders between Philosophy, Science and Social Practice” (Toassa, 2015, p. 50).⁴¹ This pool of theoretical frameworks, that formed the background of Vygotsky's thought had in common a humanistic denominator. Yet, the turn of the century, in Russia, had already brought forth an interest in more scientific approaches of psychology, such as Pavlov's and Bekhterev's system of conditioned reflexes. This interest in an objective science of psychology would grow to become the dominant trend in the field during the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution. The so called ‘scientific revolution’ that followed the sociopolitical changes of the time, was characterised by the creation of original theoretical concepts and the search for objective methodologies for the study of psychology. This vast diversity in theoretical perspectives describes well Vygotsky's intellectual roots.⁴²

Vygotsky and Psychoanalysis

The most central among the theories that resonate in Vygotsky's understanding of the function of art are the works of Freud. *The Psychology of Art* is undeniably a scion of Freudian thought. That is not only because Vygotsky dedicated a whole chapter of his book to the discussion and criticism of the psychoanalytic take on art; but because it was the psychoanalytic methodology of Freud that allowed Vygotsky to tackle the problems of the human psyche in a pragmatic and yet humanistic manner. The introduction of Freud's work in Russia

41 Also important were the works of American philosophers and psychologists—namely Baldwin and Janet—that originated the sociogenetic approach, “the idea that human cognition originates in the social life of its carriers” (Valsiner et al., 1988, p. 119).

42 Such a diversity in approaches also characterised the work of Georgy Chelpanov, Kornilov's teacher, who, in the late 19th century, established the first psychological Institute in Moscow. His enterprise as the director of the Institute offered Vygotsky the international and interdisciplinary background against which the later began forming his early theoretical concepts.

came as a response to the Russian psychologists' need to focus on the human soul, devoid of the moral and metaphysical problems which dominated the philosophy of the late 19th century. For Russia, Freud fathered a new era for the study of the human psyche that aimed to bridge the inner, spiritual world with scientific thought; this appealed highly to the Russian intellectuals who engaged deeply in the conversation of psychoanalysis. For Vygotsky, the psychoanalytic heritage facilitated the passage from the metaphysical world of his 1915/6 essay on *Hamlet* to the objective-analytic approach of *The Psychology of Art*.

Following the first publication of *Interpretation of Dreams*, in 1904, Russia, translating and publishing Freud's works became a common practice. The rate and the volume of these publications made Russia "the leader in translating and publishing Freud's works" (Vasilyeva, 2000, p. 5) all until the 1930s. Indeed, during the early years of Vygotsky's work, psychoanalysis was spread in Russia as widely as, if not more than, any other European country (Etkind, 1994). Several initiatives such as the founding of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society and the launching of the journal *Psikhoterapiia* helped to popularise Freud's works and also create a platform for constructive debate on the newly established field of psychoanalysis. Though the 1st World War interrupted the development of practical and theoretical psychoanalysis in all European countries, in Russia, the psychoanalytic investigations continued after the Revolution with a renewed vigour. Alexander Luria, one of the founders of cultural-historical psychology, and a close collaborator of Vygotsky, founded the Kazan Psychoanalytic Association [Kazanskaya Psixoanaliticheskaya Associaciya]: an independent initiative, that brought together many students of psychoanalysis of the time. Around the same time, Vygotsky joined the ranks of the Russian Psychoanalytic Society [Russkoe Psixoanaliticheskoe Obshestvo], thus forming, along with several close associates, the core of the psychoanalytic movement in Russia. From this position, Vygotsky became part of the latest developments in the field of psychoanalysis, in Russia, and took an active part in the spreading and criticism of Freud's ideas.⁴³

It is thus not surprising that many of the views presented in *The Psychology of Art* reflect closely Freud's approach to the study of the human psyche and his views on the psychological function of art. The most significant of these is Vygotsky's acknowledgement of the role of the unconscious in the function of art.

43 Vygotsky was invited to give a speech on the use of the psychoanalytic method in literary criticism during a meeting of the Psychoanalytic Society in 1924, and he became a member of the society probably by the end of 1926 (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). He also authored the "Introduction to the Russian translation of Freud's *Beyond the pleasure principle*" (Vygotsky in Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994).

Vygotsky firmly believed that “we are not likely to find a solution to the fundamental problems of the psychology of art if we confine ourselves to analyzing processes that occur only at the conscious level” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 71). In his book, Vygotsky declared that the study of the unconscious is essential for the development of an understanding of art’s function in human life, believing that “the most obvious reasons for an artistic effect are hidden in the unconscious” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 71). For this reason, in his attempt to create a theory that would explain the psychological processes connected with this artistic effect, Vygotsky could not but engage with Freudian thought.

The impact of psychoanalysis on Vygotsky’s psychology of art is not confined to the centrality of the unconscious; it is also observed in Vygotsky’s understanding of the term of catharsis. In his early writings, Freud equated the function of art with that of dreams and fantasies. In this light, artistic pleasure was seen as a means of “getting rid of one’s own emotions by ‘blowing off steam’” (Freud, 1906, p. 305). In his later writings, Freud (1930) defined this need to ‘blow off steam’ as ‘cultural frustration’, a psychical tension which is the product of the suppression of the primitive, sexual, and aggressive desires by our cultures for the sake of regulating and ensuring safety in the relationships between their members (Freud, 1930). For Freud, the accumulation of such psychical tension was responsible for leading the individuals to a state of neurosis. Yet, Freud saw in art a potential of liberating one’s psyche from this impasse:

Kindly nature has given the artist the ability to express his most secret mental impulses, which are hidden even from himself, by means of the works that he creates; and these works have a powerful effect on others who are strangers to the artist, and who are themselves unaware of the source of their emotion. (Freud, 1910, p. 107)

Thus, for Freud, art could serve a role similar to that of psychoanalysis, in providing its creator and the recipient with a platform on which the long repressed unconscious desires—which exist in a state of conflict with the social norms and, therefore, with an individual’s consciousness—can be safely expressed.

Vygotsky agreed with the view of psychoanalysis that “art sits somewhere between a dream and a neurosis and that it is based upon a conflict” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 73), which, if matured, could become pathogenic. Years after his engagement with the problem of art, when exploring the notion of creativity, and specifically the psychological function of fantasy in the adolescents, Vygotsky presented a parallel between an adolescent experiencing a fantasy and an adult perceiving art (Vygotsky, 1994). This parallelism shows that Vygotsky’s views lie in agreement with the psychoanalytic belief that art offers a therapeutic catharsis from a

unconscious conflict, avoiding, thus, a lapsing into neurosis (Vygotsky, 1971). What is more, in line with Freud's views expressed in his monogram *Civilization and its Discontents*, Vygotsky attributed a social benefit to the aesthetic catharsis.

Nonetheless, Vygotsky found Freud's explanation of artistic creativity insufficient. In contrast to Vygotsky's aspiration to create a theory that would define the psychological function of the aesthetic elements of a work of art, Freud did not discuss any specific aesthetic matters. He argued that by claiming that art is nothing more than a route for unconscious desires to find a way of expression that does not go against the rules of society, psychoanalysis failed to distinguish between high and mediocre art; let alone to draw a line between works of art and private fantasies. Another point on which Vygotsky expressed his dissatisfaction with the Freudian explanation of the aesthetic affect, was that of the function of artistic form (Vygotsky, 1971). For Freud, artistic form is merely a "softening and disguise" (Freud, 1928, p. 188) of the artwork's content, which, left disclosed, would be intolerable for the individual to face. Freud's sole focus on the content of the artworks, in expense of the form, had a twofold consequence: it left the existence of different styles of form in art with no explanation while it directly contradicted Vygotsky's belief that form and content play an equally important role in the psychological processes of aesthetic reception.

What is more, Vygotsky highly disagreed with the tendency of psychoanalysis to reduce all human experiences and emotions to sexual impulses and infantile desires: "But how can it be", he exclaimed, "that a social man (*homo socialis*) who participates fully in the extremely complex forms of social activity has no other instincts, inclinations, or drives which, no less than the sexual ones, can determine his behavior or even dominate it?" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 80). Vygotsky strived to create a definition for art that, next to the individual's inner conscious and unconscious psychological world, embraces the social, historical and intellectual aspects of *homo sapiens*. In the Freudian interpretation of the problem of art, Vygotsky found some serious inadequacies: "by excessively emphasizing the role of the unconscious, psychoanalysts reduce the role of the conscious to zero" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 80); they also ignore art's social role. Vygotsky showed that in the psychoanalytic thought, "art begins to appear as an antidote whose task it is to save mankind from vice, but which has no positive tasks or purposes for man's psyche" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 79).

Following the October Revolution, Vygotsky joined those philosophers and psychologists that argued for what would be later named a cultural-historical approach. In the context of the psychology of the art, his departure from the

psychoanalytic thought and his entrance to a cultural-historical viewpoint were marked by the following words: "Art as an unconscious is a problem; art as the social solution for the unconscious is its likely solution" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 85). The turn to a social and historical view of the world characterised the general era of the 1920s and 1930s. The establishment of the Bolsheviks after the Civil War led to the gradual end of psychoanalysis' reign in Russia. The previously prevailing discipline was eventually dismissed as 'bourgeois', until "in February 1927, Freud was belatedly informed that the Bolsheviks found psychoanalysis 'hostile to their system'" (Rice, 1993, p. 202).

With the establishment of the Stalinist regime, the views towards psychoanalysis reached an extreme. Within the context of the Soviet policies, psychoanalysis, both as a theory and practice, became misunderstood as a sociopolitical tool for espionage and manipulation (Etkind, 1994) and traces of Freudian thought in Soviet psychology were eliminated. During the Stalinist era:

the human being was reduced to a combination of constitutional traits and conditional reflexes. Madness was madness; the result of biological damage. Under socialism, social and psychological reasons for psychic disorders were impossible; they could only be a trigger for biological/organic disease. (Vasilyeva, 2000, p. 7)

By the end of the 1920s, the advances in the field of psychology brought by the scientific revolution that followed the events of 1917 were narrowed into a pure mechanistic view of the human psyche. Under these circumstances, Freud's humanism had no place.

Vygotsky was deeply involved in the scientific advances of his time and his engagement with the prominent debates led him to develop a highly critical stance toward psychoanalysis. Unlike most of his contemporaries, however, he did not dismiss the Freudian approach to art as 'bourgeois', neither did he fully adopt a mechanistic approach to psychology. Rather, he viewed psychoanalysis as an incomplete theory that bore the possibility of development, to suit the changing needs of the field of aesthetic psychology during the turbulent times of the Bolshevik reign. By engaging critically with the Freudian approach to art and by challenging it on the concepts of artistic form, pansexuality and infantilism, and the social dimension of art, Vygotsky attempted to elevate the psychoanalytic foundations to the level of his contemporary psychological investigations. This synthesis of the humanistic values inherited by the cultural background of pre-Revolutionary Russia with the scientific mindset inspired by the Revolution characterised the core of Vygotsky's work on art and in psychology as a whole.

Vygotsky and the Scientific Revolution of the 1920s

Vygotsky conducted most of his research within the brief period between the October Revolution and the crystallisation of the Stalinist authoritarianism; this period was characterised by a rapid and relatively free development of various psychological disciplines. The end of the Civil War brought to light an unprecedentedly high creative activity in both arts and sciences. “Bolsheviks had a high regard for science and technology as the vehicles of social modernization and progressive transformation of national industry and the economy” (Yasnitsky 2016, p. 5). Thus, the government would offer ungrudging and relatively control-free support to the sciences, especially human and social sciences, enabling numerous scholars to contribute their work to the total of academic advances: this “elevated role of science was reflected in the explosion of scientific institutions in the country, from 289 in 1914 to 1263 in 1929, and an astonishing 1908 by 1932” (Yasnitsky, 2009, 37). Among these rapid developments was the appointment of Konstantin Kornilov as the head of the Institute of Psychology, where Vygotsky worked while writing *The Psychology of Art*. Working at the Institute had an immense influence on the development of Vygotsky’s scientific thought; it was there that Vygotsky was able to get in contact with prominent psychologists of his time and take advantage of an extensive library and state-of-the-art laboratory equipment. This section will briefly present the advances that took place during this decade and will explore the impact that they had upon the developing thought of Vygotsky at the time of the composition of *The Psychology of Art*, as well as on specific concepts from his subsequent work.

Amidst the innovative movements of the 1920s, the field of psychology presented astounding advances. Following the end of the Civil War a series of new schools of thought in psychology developed rapidly; characteristic is the plethora of psychological sub-disciplines that emerged during the 1920s; animal, evolutionary and comparative psychology; defectology; industrial psychology; and psychotherapy were all developing with a quick pace (Yasnitsky, 2009, pp. 40-41). Some of these attracted the attention of Vygotsky and framed his main body of work in psychology. One branch of psychology that vigorously evolved during this period was the field of pedology, a discipline that emerged in response to a dramatic situation left by the Civil War: a large number of orphaned and homeless children, vulnerable to child prostitution and criminality demanded immediate and effective mediation (Vasilyeva, 2000). At the time, pedology, “the Russian version of developmental psychology” (Vasilyeva, 2000, p. 6), was based on a rather simplistic approach to matters of psychology. Yet, it became, along with psychoanalysis, the most rapidly developing

tool for intervention. Childcare centres, experimental schools, and psychological laboratories applying the findings of psychoanalysis and pedology were spreading with great haste, and some of them became the settings of Vygotsky's own work on developmental psychology and the psychology of the arts. Taking advantage of this plethora of opportunities for research Vygotsky directed his interests to the development of the individual and the cultural and historical role in that process.

A second characteristic of the developments in the field of psychology during that time was the passage of the field towards the prevalence of scientific methods and principles. By 1925, the dominant school in psychology was that of objectivism; "what was, up to then, the leading institution in the country: The Institute of Psychology" (Artinian, 2013, p. 24), passed into the hands of objectivist scientists, like Kornilov himself. Vygotsky, who worked at Kornilov's Institute in 1924/5 when he was composing *The Psychology of Art*, became tightly tied to this progress. His subscription to the objectivist movement is evident in the active dialogue with his collaborators at the Institute. Indeed, a number of concepts and properties of psychology that are described in the book appear to derive directly from the work of his superiors and colleagues at the Institute. These concepts form an integral component of Vygotsky's theory on the psychology of art: in his book, characteristically, when talking about the response of an individual to a work of art Vygotsky favoured the term 'reaction', which he directly borrowed from Kornilov, and believed that could describe the physiological as well as the mental dimension of a response. Through the more experimental study of 'dominant reactions'—that is, through the investigation of the process in which a simple reaction dominates over the rest, leading to a new psychological quality—Vygotsky was able to continue exploring his early interests in the question of "how can qualitatively new emotional complexes arise in the course of reading?" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 32).

In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky identified three psychological aspects that are involved in the process of an artistic experience: perception, emotion, and imagination or fantasy (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 199). In his analysis of the psychological process of artistic experience, however, he focused only on the functions of emotion and imagination, quickly dismissing the study of perception:

Although the problem of perception is an important consideration in the psychology of art, it is not the main one, because it depends on prior decisions about other questions which form the very heart of our problem. The response to art begins with sensory perception, but does not end with it. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 199)

Vygotsky, thus, disregarded the study of the process of perception of an artform and proceeded to examine those psychological processes that take place after the

various elements of the work of art have been perceived, or better, the impact of these perceptions on the individual's psyche. For Vygotsky, the most essential aspect of this impact was the activation of the imagination and the emotion.

So, Vygotsky begun his examination with probably the most significant psychological process of the aesthetic experience, and, simultaneously, one of the most obscure topics of psychology even today—that of the emotions. The first problem in the study of emotions that he presented in his book is their classification as conscious or unconscious processes. Engaging with the open debate on the nature of emotions, that the empirical psychology of his time had created, Vygotsky wrote: “We seem to run into a contradiction here. On the one hand, emotions are necessarily deprived of conscious clarity, but on the other hand they cannot possibly be unconscious” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 201). To this debate Vygotsky juxtaposed the objective approach, which characterised his work in Kornilov's Institute: “We will try to describe emotions in general terms as nervous processes and specify the objective characteristics of these processes” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 201).

This statement was clearly influenced by the work of Kornilov whose perspective presupposed the existence of a psychic energy, “which would be as real as its physical counterparts, since it is based on the time, intensity, and form of the discharges of brain cells in response to external stimulations” (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 114). In line with this view, Vygotsky attempted to describe emotions in the same fashion as one would describe a physiological process. Therefore, the function of emotions would be subjected to the same natural laws as every other material process. Under this light, emotion is defined as the expenditure of neural energy, which is perceived by the individual in the form of a feeling. The origin of this energy may belong to the unconscious domain of the human psyche, but the effect of its expression is consciously experienced.

Vygotsky attributed this approach to the nature of emotions partially to the Freudian view that regarded emotions as an internal flow of energy that does not relate to the external environment (Vygotsky, 1971). Yet, Vygotsky's understanding of the psychic energy of emotions closely followed the reasoning found in Kornilov's law of reactions.⁴⁴ Indeed, by terming the processes that take place during an artistic experience as ‘aesthetic reactions’, Vygotsky subscribed, at least in part, to Kornilov's reactological worldview and applied the views on psychological energy expenditure in his study of the psychology of art. From this application, Vygotsky deduced that the energy carried by an emotion could be expressed through either

⁴⁴ According to Kornilov's law of reactions, psychic energy is expended in either observable behaviour (i.e. externally) or by firing a chain of mental processes (i.e. internally) (Van der Veer, 1991).

bodily reactions (a process which he called peripheral manifestation) or through the activation of imagination (which he regarded as the central expression of an emotional reaction). Nonetheless, according to Vygotsky, these two pathways of emotional neural expenditure are inversely proportional to one another; if an emotion finds its way of discharge through the creation of fantasies, its physical manifestation will weaken, while the greater the activity of the imagination, the weaker its bodily intensity will be. Due to this dynamic, Vygotsky was able to distinguish between artistic and ordinary emotion: “The enigmatic difference that exists between artistic feeling and ordinary feeling may be explained as follows: Artistic feeling is the same as the other, but it is released by extremely intensified activity of the imagination” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 211).

Another element from Kornilov’s work that exists in deep association with Vygotsky’s understanding of aesthetic emotion is the former’s application of dialectics in the study of therapeutic psychological processes. Kornilov viewed the conscious and the unconscious in a state of a dynamic relationship which has the potential to lead to syntheses with a therapeutic outcome. The therapeutic aspect, in Kornilov’s view, resulted from the reorganisation of the psychic energy, as it is expressed through mental and physical pathways (Van der Veer, 1991). In his psychology of art, Vygotsky developed a rather similar therapeutic scheme: the dialectic relationship between form and content in the piece of art is mirrored in the development of two contrasting emotions (thesis-antithesis). The act of emotional synthesis during the climax of a narrative, according to Vygotsky, causes the reorganisation of the psychic energy, leading to the sensation of catharsis.

Furthermore, Vygotsky linked Kornilov’s perspective on the matters of psychic energy expenditure, with the ideas of Karl Groos, regarding play; in Grosse’s view, during play, one experiences a delay of an emotional expression, without suppressing the emotion itself. Vygotsky (1971) postulated that during an aesthetic experience, one is subjected to a similar process. This new notion of delay of the external physical manifestation of a reaction explains the intensity of the imagination during an aesthetic experience and, thus, the extraordinary strength of an artistic emotion.

The above scheme presents art to provide the individual with a pathway for the release of neural energy in the form of emotion. However, this definition—which also agrees with Freud’s views—did not satisfy Vygotsky, as it could not explain art’s unique role in human life or expose the reasons for art’s existence in human societies. Vygotsky expressed this issue in his book: “A fundamental problem for the psychology of art is whether emotion is only a waste of psychic energy or whether it

has some value in an individual's psychic life" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 202). To answer this question, he referred to the laws of energy preservation in relation to emotion. In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky presented the idea that the fundamental principle of energy preservation—or, as he calls it, economy of strength—that dominates the majority of human behaviour does not seem to apply in the case of the arts. A quick examination of any work of literature, according to Vygotsky, shows that:

the poet intentionally attenuates the cause of the action, arouses our curiosity, plays with our ingenuity, makes our attention run to and fro; in other words, he wastes our strength and energies to the extent required by his work of art [...] art violates the principle of economy of strength, at least insofar as its immediate effect is concerned, and obeys an opposite principle in the construction of artistic forms. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 204-5)

Indeed, a significant expenditure of emotional energy appears to be an essential aspect of the aesthetic experience.

Vygotsky found that it is this specific characteristic that is responsible for art's cathartic function, as it responds to the human need to release any latent emotional energy that threatens to bring disorder to one's mental equilibrium (Vygotsky, 1997). By providing a source of output for any superfluous or latent form of emotional energy, art helps the individual remain in a state of psychological balance. It also supports the individual in the continuation of a peaceful civil life: "The emotions caused by art are intelligent emotions. Instead of manifesting themselves in the form of fist-shaking or fits, they are usually released in images of fantasy" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 212). In this respect, the therapeutic and cathartic capacities of art are experienced at the individual level but benefit the whole society.

So far, all these concepts lie in agreement with the Freudian perspective on the psychological function of art, which had formed the foundation of Vygotsky's understanding of art. Yet, through his work at Kornilov's Institute, Vygotsky obtained an objective-scientific vocabulary to express them. The adaptation of Kornilov's terminology illustrates Vygotsky's search for an objective methodology for his approach to aesthetics. It also shows how his objectivism did not rely on laboratory experiments but developed based on a philosophical approach to the question of art and a unique combination of objective-scientific and empirical studies of human psychology in relation to aesthetics. This merging of methodologies also illustrates how Vygotsky differentiated himself from the general trend. Indeed, Vygotsky was far from a typical member of the Institute:

the majority of the scientific collective of the Institute had been invited to join before his arrival. Vygotsky was thus something of an outsider, conducting many of his activities outside the Institute. These activities

were the study of the psychology of art, problems of defectology, pedagogical psychology, and (later) paedology. (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 44)

Nonetheless, these particularities did not isolate Vygotsky from the general activity of the Institute, and there is evidence that his work was received positively by his superiors. Characteristic is a letter that Kornilov wrote to Vygotsky, following the submission of the latter's thesis, in which he expressed great enthusiasm over Vygotsky's work: Kornilov found Vygotsky's approach and conclusions related to the monophasic energy expenditure and what he calls explosive reactions very similar to his own, despite the fact that he arrived at these findings from a philosophical rather than experimental path (Zavershneva, 2010a).⁴⁵

Gestalt psychology was another school of thought that came outside of the world of experimental psychology and became a source of influence on the formation of Vygotsky's aesthetic thought. In the midst of all the Russia-centred activity of the 1920s, this foreign discipline made its way into the debates of the field and the life of the Institute. Having appeared in Germany during the same decade, Gestalt psychology was immediately imported into Russia by the high number of German speaking Russian scholars. Once introduced to the scientific community, it attracted the interest of Kornilov, as well as a number of psychologists working at the Institute, and was welcomed as a fitting alternative to traditional psychology. Vygotsky remained interested in Gestalt psychology throughout his life. He edited translations of German works on Gestalt psychology and appeared to have met a few of the representatives of the field. In his works written from 1924 onwards, one can often find notions from the discipline or their criticism. The notion of synthesis, as it appears in Gestalt psychology drew Vygotsky's attention and provided him with new tools to study "both the external (behavioral) and internal psychological sides were linked but not reduced to each other, a mistake both behaviorism and empirical psychology made" (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 160).

Gestalt psychology, however, did not elude Vygotsky's criticism. Even though Vygotsky was greatly influenced by all the prominent psychological systems of his time, he found that they all shared the same flaw in their foundations: they were not based on a strong worldview, or rather, the worldview that derived from these theories was meaningless (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Interestingly enough, Vygotsky also criticised both Chelpanov's and Kornilov's work, basing his criticism in their methodologies and finding Kornilov's to be too mechanistic in his views of the human psychology (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). The reason for

⁴⁵ The following section will elaborate in more detail on the theoretical convergence between Vygotsky's psychology of art and Kornilov's work.

these multi-directional attacks lies in Vygotsky's method of philosophical thinking:

For Vygotsky any two opposing directions of thought served as opposites united with one another in the continuous whole—the discourse of ideas. This discourse is expected to lead us to a more adequate understanding of the human psyche, that is, to *transcend* the present state of theoretical knowledge, rather than force the existing variety of ideas into a strict classification of tendencies in the socially constructed scientific discipline of psychology. (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 393)

Indeed, the criticism to those disciplines that he found most promising, and the work towards a dialectical synthesis of new ideas produced from the opposition and clash of these schools of thought, was characteristic in Vygotsky's thought process in the totality of his work.

Such a characteristic attempt to compose new notions from the juxtaposition of diverse disciplines was his effort to apply psychoanalytic thought in conjunction with Marxist psychology. While some theorists of the time had attempted to bridge the Freudian and Marxist views, Vygotsky stood among those that found the two theories incompatible (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, pp. 98-99). However, and although his criticism of Freud was strong, Vygotsky found some of his ideas to be “a valuable step towards the creation of a dialectical and monistic psychology” (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 99). Thus, he did not dismiss the idea of combining the two disciplines, providing that the psychoanalytic system develops through criticism in order to embrace the social human. This notion of the social human being acted as an active centre in Vygotsky's bridging of mechanistic psychologies with Western humanism. What is more, it adhered to the popular at the time vision of a new human being that would rise from the cultural, social, and psychological developments brought by the Revolution.

Vygotsky and the Vision of the ‘New Human Being’

The 1917 Revolution brought to light the shared vision of the construction of a new society and the development of a new human being that is socially, psychologically, and even biologically superior to the humans of the past. Vygotsky responded to the Revolution and the ideas that it spread with enthusiasm.⁴⁶ The notion of the new human being is profoundly present in his psychology, and is reflected with clarity in his understanding of art's social function, as articulated in

⁴⁶ Dobkin's memoirs (Feigenberg, 2000) are probably the most vivid illustration of Vygotsky's response to the events of 1917. Vygotsky's vision of theatre's role in the Revolution, expressed in an article published in 1919 (Vygotsky, 2015), is discussed in Chapter Five.

The Psychology of Art. Indeed, art, for Vygotsky appears to fulfil the Revolutionary demand for social and psychological evolution. According to his views, the aesthetic experience serves as a means for elevating one's mental life to a higher state and a place of congruence with the general historical and sociological developments.⁴⁷ Such dedication to the cause of the development of a new, social human were common, not only among the scholars and the artists of the time, but also among the scientists. This section discusses the emergence and the impact of the notion of the new human being in the field of psychology during the 1920s, and examines the specific characteristics and origins of this vision, as it is found in Vygotsky's thought on the psychology of art.

In the formation of the idea of a new human, one can observe the clear echo of Nietzsche's notion of the Superman. Nietzsche had enjoyed great popularity in the late 19th century Russia, where he was read through a lens of religious morality connected with the idealistic demand for social change (Zakydalsky in Rosenthal, 1986, p. 115). For the Russians of the 1900s Nietzsche's theories embodied the Russian demand for a total change on all fronts of the human life, a demand that sprung from the sense of spiritual loss and moral confusion that characterised the very early years of the 20th century (Mihajlov in Rosenthal, 1986). In this light, the Nietzschean Superman came to symbolise the solution to social and spiritual decadence—a solution, nonetheless, that heightened the role of the individual. This perspective stressed the power of "individual will, subjective perception, self-reliance, physical, sexual liberation and artistic creativity" (Clowes in Rosenthal, 1986, p. 318), while placing the hope for social change in the actions of the private person.

The individualism, that characterised Nietzsche's reception in Russia, also became a target for sharp criticism by the majority of the Russian intellectuals, in the second and third decades of the 20th century. This criticism reflected the shifts in political, social, and moral thought that preceded the October Revolution highlighting the clash between the 'old' nature of morality that allowed for personal distinction and individuality and the 'new' demands for the subordination of the individual to the public and the common.⁴⁸ In line with the philosophical trends of his time, Vygotsky criticised Nietzsche's work on the grounds that they ignored the impact of the society on the development of the individual and to view humans as solely biological beings. Speaking of Nietzsche's Superman Vygotsky wrote:

47 In the book, Vygotsky supported his claims by referring to the works of Leon Trotsky, with whom he seems to share an interest in art's role in a period of Revolutionary politics. Both scholars shared a deep belief in art's ability to shape the human and to guide the social outcomes of the Revolution.

This theory is erroneous, because it ignores the fact that the laws of historical evolution of man differ fundamentally from the laws of biological evolution and that the basic difference between these two processes consists of the fact that a human being evolves and develops as a historical, social being. Only a raising of all of humanity to a higher level in social life, the liberation of all humanity, can lead to the formation of a new type of man. (Vygotsky in Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 182)

Nietzsche's fixation on the individual human seemed too narrow of a viewpoint to the Russian thinkers of the time who searched elsewhere for an approach capable of providing them with an understanding and an explanation of the multifaceted nature of the changes that were taking place before and after the October Revolution.

Marxism and dialectics in Vygotsky's thought

Such an approach was found in Marxist dialectics, which provided Russian thinkers with a model of reasoning that proved much more dynamic and fluid than traditional philosophical logic. Its innovation lay in the fact that, as an approach, it allowed change and transformation to be a part of the object under study, while taking into account the diversity of forces that take part in the processes of change. This characteristic made dialectics into an ideal methodology for the study of social phenomena and responded to the Russian intellectuals' need to contextualise and theorise the sociopolitical shifts that were taking place in their country around the turn of the century. What is more, as a worldview, Marxism pointed to the development of a new human being, emerging from sociocultural and historical clashes. For these reasons, Marxism, in Russia, soon became synonymous with the Revolution and dialectics dominated over all other philosophical methodologies, representing all the ideals of the dawning world: social change, detachment from the philosophical norms of the bourgeoisie, and a sense of empowerment derived from the dialectic character of the methodology.

This worldview made itself profoundly present in the field of psychology, leading to a collective attempt to create the so-called strand of Marxist psychology. The scientists that subscribed to this movement, became simultaneously critics of "the inadequacies in the method of the various then-influential schools of psychology" (Artinian, 2013, p. 7)—such as psychoanalysis and behaviourism—and

48 Alongside individualism, the criticism against Nietzsche by the Russian thinkers focused on the former's nihilist tendencies. Arguably, this opposition was in reality directed towards the predominant Russian intelligentsia that had formed the philosophical norm of what was now considered to be the past. Nietzsche, therefore, came to epitomise many of the elements from which the modern Russian thinkers were trying to distance themselves.

the advocates of dialectics as a scientific method fit for the study of the human being. It was among these two emerging directions—objectivism and Marxism—that Chelpanov, the former director of the Institute, was judged as an idealist in the face of the materialism that was represented in the work of Kornilov and his generation.⁴⁹ In the face of the rapid developments of the 1920s, “Chelpanov faced formidable opponents” (Kozulin, 1990, p. 76): the school of reflexology, with its highly objective, experimental methodology, and Marxist psychology, which embraced the social and political influence on humans’ mental life. Among Chelpanov’s opponents was Konstantin Kornilov, the director of the Moscow Institute, where Vygotsky undertook his main work. Kornilov’s Marxist perspective attracted Vygotsky, while both psychologists shared an interest in the dialectic synthesis of complex processes.

The dialectical perspective, profoundly present in Vygotsky’s work, represents his involvement with the Marxist tradition—a movement that was gradually taking over the life of the Russian intelligentsia in the years that preceded and followed the Revolution. Vygotsky’s move from the liberal-democratic scholar of Shakespeare, 19th-century literature, and Jewish history to a Bolshevik sympathiser and a supporter of Marxist psychology took place over the few years after the Revolution and was completed by the time he was writing *The Psychology of Art* (Yasnitsky, 2018). In his newspaper publications in Gomel, at the time, Vygotsky appears to be rather enthusiastic about the sociopolitical ideas that accompanied the Revolution, while the fantasies of a new man and a new culture served as a driving force for many of his works. Indeed, Vygotsky was known as a scientist adept in Marxist dialectics, and he considered himself a Marxist (Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut, 2008, 33).

Vygotsky’s association with the Marxist movement in psychology is beyond doubt. His entrance to the field of psychology—about a year before the composition of *The Psychology of Art*—was connected with the establishment of Marxism in the field. At the time, the new leader of the Institute of Experimental Psychology at Moscow University, Konstantin Kornilov, was urgently recruiting young Marxist psychologists, as an effort to ensure the authorities’ approval and secure his newly gained position. among them was Vygotsky, who was immediately classified as Marxist. The period was characterised by a series of campaigns by the authorities that labeled various philosophical theories anti-Marxist:

49 Chelpanov’s views, had undoubtedly left their trace in Vygotsky’s thought: Chelpanov’s appeal for an empirical and independent psychology echoed clearly in Vygotsky’s methodology in his studies in aesthetic psychology. While his opposition to philosophical reductionism followed Vygotsky until the last years of his life, when he expressed his objection to all dualist philosophies regarding the mind-body problem.

However, the labels 'anti-Marxist' and 'Marxist' were very flexible and nobody had any idea what a Marxist psychology should entail. The only thing that was clear in the 1920s was that 'the authorities' [...] demanded a Marxist psychology and that ignoring that demand was not going to advance and might even possibly harm one's academic career. (Van der Veer, 2014, p. 22)

It is safe to say that Vygotsky's enthusiasm with Marxism was not affected by the social pressures, but by the Marxist worldview as he alone understood it (Van der Veer, 2014). This worldview demanded for a dialectic approach as a fundamental methodology of investigation not only to matters of the historical-political terrain, but to all aspects of human life and behaviour. Thus, dialectics—inspired by Marx as well as Hegel—became an essential characteristic of Vygotsky's thought as a whole, leading to the ability to view the diverse disciplines and theories of his time through a dialectical lens and compose, by the dialectic juxtaposition of contrasting elements, new dynamic conclusions.

This characteristic was present from the earliest samples of his work. Vygotsky was a great admirer of Hegelian dialectics which forged his thought from an early age and led to the formation of his critical approach to *Hamlet* in 1915/6. It is no surprise, therefore, that his work in the field of psychology—including the psychology of art—was highly influenced by and closely connected to that of other Marxist psychologists, and especially Kornilov, who argued for dialectics as a method of investigation. Dialectic synthesis was, indeed, fundamental in the work of both psychologists. Kornilov found the state of contradiction to act as the moving force in the various developmental processes:

Every developmental process takes place as a result of contradictions, the negation of the 'thesis' by its 'antithesis', which leads to a 'synthesis' in the emergence of a novel form in the given development. Kornilov explicitly viewed conscious and unconscious processes as 'thesis' and 'antithesis' to each other and hence new psychological phenomena were seen as emerging as a synthesis of these two spheres. (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 121)

This idea is clearly mirrored in the way that Vygotsky viewed the contrasting relationship between the artistic form and the content of a work of art, as well as the role of the affective contradiction during the reception of literature, for the synthesis of the new state, called catharsis. His close collaboration with Kornilov, his deep interest in the application of dialectics, and his enthusiasm with the Revolution made Vygotsky an exemplar Marxist psychologist.

Yet, not all self-proclaimed Marxist psychologists proved as inspirational for Vygotsky. The vigour of the Russian theorists and politicians, in the years that followed the Revolution canonised and sanctified Marx's theories to the degree that

dialectics became equivalent to materialism—a development that was also mirrored in the field of psychology. In response to this trend, Vygotsky joined a group of psychologists who criticised such reductionist application of Marxist thought. Vygotsky, among others, noted that this process depleted Marxists dialectics of its humanistic dimension, thus leading the readers of *Capital* to miss out on one of its most central points: the concept of the human nature, which “constitutes the primary *standpoint* of his thought, precisely because ‘man’ is the subject and the main substance of the historical objective totality” (Tabak, 2012, p. vii). It was this precise dimension of Marxist thought that attracted some Russian psychologists, including Vygotsky, who not only managed to appreciate the humanistic goal of the Marxist worldview but also based their methodologies on it. This group of psychologists embraced Marxist dialectics while retaining a sense of humanism and made it their task “to find the means for the normative remolding of the ‘old man’ of the capitalist past and education the ‘new man’ of Communism” (Yasnitsky 2016, p. 6). In Vygotsky’s case, this humanistic standpoint sprung from his long engagement with Spinoza’s writings. It was in Spinoza’s philosophy that he found a model of a harmonious synthesis between elements that transcended the Marxist materialism and embraced the mental and spiritual dimensions of human life (Kotik-Friedgut, 2008). From this combinative standpoint, Vygotsky was able to examine the vision of the new human and the new society, while embracing all aspects of the human life of the past.

In this manner, Vygotsky’s work transcended the effects of Marxism in Russian psychology. Though he remained a dedicated Marxist until the end of his life, his enthusiasm did not diminish his tendency to approach the various debates with a sense of radical criticism. Consequently, and as Vygotsky continued to develop his theories in psychology, his criticism came to touch the work of his superior at the Institution, Kornilov. By 1926 Vygotsky had criticised the work of Kornilov on the occasion of the latter’s approach to the mind-body problem (Van der Veer, 1991). Vygotsky stood against all dualist approaches to the mind-body problem; his perspective, in line with Spinoza’s philosophy, was an interactionist one, where psychology and physiology are interdependent, but not equal or reducible to each other (Van der Veer, 1991). Kornilov had also rejected mind-body dualism; however, as Vygotsky argued, Kornilov’s reflexology retained this separation in its essence (Van der Veer in Cole, Daniels, et al., 2007). The gap that appeared between Vygotsky’s and Kornilov’s thought, as well as the former’s general critical disposition to all reductionist approaches, isolated him, in some way, from the work of some of his contemporaries. Yet, it was this unique and

passionately preserved disposition towards humanism, paired with his engagement with the schools of Marxism and objectivism in psychology, that led Vygotsky down a unique path of psychological investigation.

Vygotsky's approach to aesthetics derived from the interconnection of Vygotsky's psychological thought with the highly active investigations in the field of psychology that took place during the first three decades of the 20th century in Russia. Vygotsky's attempt to create a scientific/psychological theory for the reception of art, accords with his methodological breakthrough: the viewing of art as an autonomous domain of human behaviour that has the potential of being studied under psychological premises, paired with his focus on the structural characteristics of the artwork and those characteristics' effect on the receiver's psychology. This perspective towards questions of aesthetics remains promising even today. The turn to cognitive studies in search of epistemological justification for the prominent theories and practices in the fields of theatre and performance studies is an emerging trend among today's theatre scholars. Such studies set the scene for a fruitful dialogue between these two diverse disciplines and create holistic perspectives on crucial matters of theatre studies, which lies very closely to Vygotsky's aspirations.

These contemporary studies employ the recent discoveries of cognitive science regarding several functions of the human mind. This chapter has illustrated the predominant schools of philosophical and scientific thought that Vygotsky relied on for the creation of his particular synthesis: Freudian psychoanalysis, objectivism, Marxism and the effort of creating a Marxist psychology, and Kornilov's reactology. Due to Vygotsky's ability to engage critically with contradicting theories, *The Psychology of Art* is the product of both Vygotsky's subscription to and opposition to the above schools of thought, the key point of objection being the preservation of a sense of philosophical humanism. Nonetheless, and as I will proceed to argue, there is one aspect of Vygotsky's theory that was clearly dictated by and lay in an agreement with the major investigations of his time: his deep belief in the significance of the social function of art.

Chapter Three: Catharsis and the Social Effect of Art

Having discussed both Vygotsky's structural analyses of the various literary genres and the psychological concepts that he relied on when constructing his theory of the psychology of art, we can now focus on the Vygotskian term of catharsis. In Vygotsky's understanding of art, catharsis lies at the end of the psychological process of the aesthetic experience. As a term, however, catharsis embraces the individual psychology as much as the social. The critical analysis of this vital term, presented in this chapter, stresses these two fundamental aspects of Vygotskian catharsis: its scientific/psychological grounding and its social purposefulness. The dialogue between the individual psychological and the social, informs the core of Vygotsky's theory and reveals the great depth of his belief in the social psychological purposefulness of art, a belief that linked him deeply with the cultural developments of the 1910s and 1920s in Russia.⁵⁰

'Counter-feeling' and Psychological Balance: Vygotsky's Definition of Catharsis

Catharsis, Vygotsky discovered, is the end result of the particular psychological process that takes place during the aesthetic experience. When examining three different literary genres, in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky found that this process is guided by the specific relationship between the form and the content of the artwork, while he believed that this dynamic relationship is mirrored in the reader's or audience member's mental state when experiencing a work of literature or a drama. Therefore, by applying Vygotsky's view of the human psychology, at the time that he composed the book, I am now in the position to describe what happens in the individual's mental world during their engagement with a dramatic or literary text.⁵¹ This short speculative demonstration will shed light on the relationship of the structure of a work of art and the psychological reactions that it causes and will help me articulate Vygotsky's definition of artistic catharsis.

50 Part two elaborates on the bridges between Vygotsky's perspective and the generally popular demands for a socially purposeful art.

51 Vygotsky focused on literary forms of art and, specifically, on the fundamental relationship between the text's content and its formal treatment. His theoretical outlook, therefore, does not embrace the artistic and formal complexity of a theatrical production. For this reason, in my exposition of the psychological response of an individual to the fundamental scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that is embedded in the text, I will discuss the response to reading a text. However, as I argue in the end of this chapter, the conclusions could be transferred to the experience of an audience member of a theatrical production.

Furthermore, it will expose the social dimension that is deeply embedded in the Vygotskian definition of catharsis.

Every work of literature begins by exposing various elements from its content. Those elements, that can include symbolic images, atmospheres, or even sounds, activate the recipient's unconscious activity, which is expressed in their consciousness in the form of emotion. This emotional activity belongs to each individual recipient; however, it is generated and directed by the content of the artwork. Thus, though different recipients would experience their own distinct emotions, there will always be, according to Vygotsky, a common factor to the various individual feelings. Vygotsky expressed this interconnection between different individuals' responses to art, as early as 1915, noting the existence of a mystical, archetypical, and timeless emotion in art (Vygotskij, 1986). In his later (1924) writings the social aspect of the emotion produced during the aesthetic experience, echoed more closely the Revolutionary demands for the construction of a new society that is emotionally balanced. In either case, emotion appeared as the moving force of the psychological effects of art.

As described in the previous chapter, Vygotsky believed that emotional energy can be expressed through either physical activity or the activation of one's imagination and that these two pathways are inversely proportional to one another. Therefore, since the process of reading or observing a work of art does not justify physical participation, the emotion born in the recipient's psyche must be expressed mainly through his or her imagination. As with the nature of the emotion produced from the exposure of the recipient to the work of art, the fantasy developed by their imagination will exist in close relation to the work of art itself. The recipient's imagination is guided by the artistic, formal manipulation of the content while the fantasies that it produces recreate for the recipient the world of the artwork. The content of the literary or dramatic text, or, as Vygotsky has sometimes called it, the myth of the narrated story, is developed in the recipient's imagination as a whole, bearing a beginning, a middle and an end. This fantasy, constructed by the initial emotional reaction to the work of literature, or the theatrical production, is characterised by high emotional engagement. "When, with the help of fantasy, we construct some sorts of unreal images, the latter are not real, but the feeling which they evoke is experienced as being real" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 279). In response to a drama or a work of literature, for instance, one identifies emotionally with the protagonist, or a series of characters, bestowing, thus, on them, feeling that possess a certain reality. Similarly real are the emotions that spring from the imaginary recreation of the artwork's world and the specific circumstances that the artwork

presents.

Therefore, when beginning to read a literary text, the reader uses their own individual emotional world to give life to every aspect of the world of the story, including the characters. Most importantly, the reader creates in this manner a series of expectations for the outcomes of the story, which lie intertwined with intense emotions. The reception of the text takes place within such a dynamic. Yet, the events that unfold in the narrative differ from the reader's expectations. According to Vygotsky's theory, the formal treatment of the content by the artist is always such that the plot diverges from its expected path. Thus, the reader, while developing their own individual fantasies and expectations of the story, is exposed to a radically different narrative. This exposure generates an emotional reaction that is opposite to the first one leading the reader to the experience of a 'counter-feeling' (Vygotsky, 1971). Both emotional reactions are the product of the reader's reception of the tragedy, and their relationship mirrors the antithetical dynamic between the form and the content of the play. The discrepancy between the individual fantasy about the story of the work of literature and the formally treated narrative in the text cause the emotion incited by the work of art to develop simultaneously into two contrasting directions. By creating a dynamic stretch between these two directions, the artwork produces a high tension within its receiver. We could compare this tension to the mechanical stress created when stretching a physical spring: as long as the two directions originate from the same point in space, the further their divergence, the bigger the tension. When the stretching of the spring ceases, and the two ends converge, the mechanical stress is released. Similarly, when the two lines of development in the narrative—that is, the one directed by the content and realised by the recipient's fantasy, and the one directed by the artist and realised in the form—meet at a single point, the psychological tension within the individual is also released.

As the worlds created in the recipient's imagination—one reflecting the content of the literary text and the other its form—are united in the play's end, the dialectical synthesis takes place. Within that moment of joining of all contradictions, the contrasting emotions (thesis and antithesis) developed by the reader negate each other producing a new emotion (synthesis)—this is the catharsis effect. The emotional release of the psychic tension caused by the aforementioned affective contradiction leads the reader to a lucid sensation of calmness and psychological balance. The urging biological need for such a release is described by Vygotsky in *The Psychology of Art*:

The nervous system reminds us of a battlefield where the struggle

never ceases, not even for a single instant, and our behavior is an infinitesimal part of what is really included in the possibilities of our nervous system, but cannot find an outlet. [...] In our nervous system, the realized part of life is only the smallest part of the real life contained in us. [...] It is obvious that the unrealized part of life, which has not gone through the narrow opening of our behavior, must be somehow utilized and lived. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 247)

Through art, therefore, the individual achieves the realisation of parts of this pool of possibilities, in a manner that is both safe—for the individual and their society—and highly effective, due to the great intensity of the neural energy that is released during the catharsis effect. Consequently, it is no surprise that art deals with those aspects of life that would pose the greatest problems for both the individual and their society if they were to be expressed through external behaviour: “This is why the action of art, when it performs catharsis and pushes into this purifying flame the most intimate and important experiences, emotions and feelings of the soul, is a social action” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 249). The benefits that this process bears for the society paired with the common denominator among all the different individual experiences of catharsis caused by the same work of art give art an important social therapeutic function.

The definition of catharsis lies in the heart of Vygotsky’s theory and is a clear product of his dialectical point of view. With his application of dialectics, on the one hand, Vygotsky created a definition for the structure of an artwork, that not only gives equal weight to the significance of form and content but fuses the two notions into a dialectic relationship that is more dynamic and impactful than its counterparts. On the other hand, he elucidated the psychological synthesis that takes place within the mind of the individual when experiencing art. Vygotsky presented a dialectic scheme in the aesthetic experience, as early as 1916, in his analysis of *Hamlet*, where he spoke of a new quality emerging from the interaction of two opposite forces. In his work in psychology during and beyond the composition of *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky continued to rely on the dialectic methodology for the study of consciousness and the development of emotions. That is, he believed that emotional development occurs when two contrasting emotions collide, negate each other, and lead to the creation of a new emotion that is relevant to the ones that led to its creation and, yet radically different from them. In his theory on the psychology of art, as it was articulated in 1924/5, this new emotion appears to be a product of catharsis. This view of catharsis as a synthesis of a new mental state appears to be the most crucial aspect of Vygotsky’s theory, as it bestows on art the ability to lead individuals and their societies to psychological growth and development.

However, in *The Psychology of Art*, this aspect of catharsis is not clearly

defined, leaving the very definition of the key concept of catharsis open to misunderstandings. Vygotsky's writing in the book gives often the impression that catharsis is nothing more than a sensation of release, or a feeling of lucidity, balance, and peace. Yet, this view is problematic. Firstly, in the scheme presented above, the sensation of catharsis is not defined as an emotion, but as a state of mind paired with the consciousness of this state. Thus, the formula thesis-antithesis-synthesis is here understood as the juxtaposition of two emotions for the synthesis of a state rather than a new emotion. This notion contradicts Vygotsky's dialectic approach to the development of emotions, which predicts the juxtaposition of two contradictory emotions to lead to the creation of a new emotion. One, however, could argue that the state of catharsis bears emotions similar to that of relief, which would help justify it as an emotional state. Nonetheless, this solution does not answer the second problem in such an understanding of catharsis.

Even if we agree to classify catharsis as an emotion, to say that catharsis is the result of the clash of two contrasting emotions would be an erroneous application of dialectics. In the dialectic scheme of thesis-antithesis-synthesis the newly synthesised element, whether it is the experienced emotion or the solution of the narrative in a work of literature, is created due to the clash of an antithetical pair of elements and is, thus, related to them. Therefore, each different pair of elements that act as a thesis and an antithesis must lead to the creation of a unique element of synthesis. Consequently, just as the two contrasting emotions that are incited in the recipient during the process of the aesthetic perception are unique to each individual and yet highly connected to the work of art that caused them, the new emotion that is formed through their juxtaposition must be equally unique and relative to the artwork. Viewing catharsis as a state common to all aesthetic experiences would fail to meet this requirement.

Vygotsky's theoretical understanding of psychology presupposes a different application of dialectics on the psychological mechanism of catharsis. In this light, the aesthetic experience must lead each individual to the development of an entirely new emotional state, which is highly relevant to the themes presented in the work of art. This new emotion, created through the clash of individual feelings, must bear a highly social dimension, as it is shared with the other recipients of the same artwork. This last characteristic justifies Vygotsky's own belief that art acts as a platform where individual emotions are transformed into social. In view of this, the sense of release that accompanies catharsis can only be viewed as a consequence of the process of artistic perception, while catharsis' true nature is located in the emotional development that takes place during one's exposure to art. This last statement

clarifies and completes Vygotsky's exposition of catharsis, as it appears in *The Psychology of Art*, and it reveals a profound level of social purposefulness in his understanding of the function of art.⁵²

This view of catharsis as a means for psychological growth, also reflects Vygotsky's later views on the topics of perception, emotion, imagination, and cognition, as well as on the impact of society on the development of an individual. Vygotsky dedicated the last years of his life to the extensive study of these notions. Unfortunately, he never returned to the topic of art to apply his findings and update his definition of catharsis. This task, however, can be undertaken by a future reader of Vygotsky, and such an attempt is presented in the following section.

Updating Catharsis through Vygotsky's Studies on Perception, Emotions, Imagination, and the Notion of Perezhivanie

The last three decades have seen an attempt from various scholars to overcome the separation of Vygotsky's work into phases, and integrate the total of his ideas, including those presented in *The Psychology of Art*, into one system of thought.⁵³ Though the vast majority of these studies focus on the topics of psychology and education, some have shed light on Vygotsky's thought as it manifested itself in his early works on art. Considering how early, in his scientific career, Vygotsky wrote *The Psychology of Art*, an attempt to read Vygotsky's approach to art through the lens of his later theories is highly revealing. In my attempt to elucidate the crucial notion of catharsis such a critical reading of Vygotsky's works against and through each other is necessary. What is more, and as I will demonstrate in this chapter, this combinative study stresses Vygotsky's view of art as a catalyst in the process of psychological development of society.⁵⁴ This conclusion can indeed be supported by a study that draws connections between Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art* with his later work on the concepts of emotion, and imagination, as well as the notion of perezhivanie as it relates to the psychology of art. Therefore, I dedicate this section to my attempt to update Vygotsky's notion of catharsis, using evidence from his aforementioned works.

52 In Part Two, I elaborate on the connection between Vygotsky's belief in the social purpose of art and similar views expressed by the Avant-garde artists.

53 (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991), (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994) and (Yasnitsky, 2018) are some excellent examples of such work.

54 A similar view has been expressed by the contemporary poet Olga Sedakova (2001).

The two periods of Vygotsky's writings that I bridge in this section, that of the early 1920s and that of the early 1930s, bear both similarities and differences. On the one hand, Vygotsky seemed to return in the early 1930s to a series of topics that he had distanced himself from during his work in the second half of the 1920 (Yasnitsky, 2012b). On the other hand, his approach to these very same topics differs significantly, as it bears the essence of his accumulated experience in psychological research. One of the most significant advances in Vygotsky's thought that took place around that time was his focus on the development of human mental functions. As Vygotsky moved away from Kornilov's reactology, he proceeded to integrate his dialectical perspective, "allied with the structural emphasis of Gestalt psychology" (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 396), into his understanding of human mental development, as he observed it through his work in special education. This focus led Vygotsky to believe in the ability of human nature to evolve through dialectic processes that take place between the individual's inner and outer worlds. Vygotsky applied this perspective to the different distinct psychological processes such as the development of consciousness and emotions, as well as the development of the human brain as a whole.⁵⁵ In the following sections, I will demonstrate how these beliefs, combined with Vygotsky's understanding of aesthetic psychology, show art, and specifically drama and literature, to bear a psychological mechanism for the development of the human mind.

Perception

The first topic, raised by Vygotsky in his later studies, which mirrors his investigations in the aesthetic experience, is that of perception. As in *The Psychology of Art*, in his more mature essays and lectures, Vygotsky argued against the study of perception as a distinct psychological function. Perception in Vygotsky's thought is tightly tied to the function of interpretation; it is, therefore, impossible to derive any meaningful conclusions without the study of the perceiver's psychological world as a whole, or without focusing on the impact of the perceived elements on the individual's psyche:

It has been shown experimentally that we cannot create conditions that will functionally separate our perception from meaningful

55 To understand the evolution of the brain structures and functions better, when working with his collaborator, Alexander Luria, Vygotsky focused his study on the physical or neural organisations of the mental processes; this led both, in 1931, to the decision to join the Medical Faculty of the Psychoneurological Institute in Kharkov as students. "At the time the brain was considered as a static structure, but Vygotsky came to believe that the brain is a flexible, dynamic system. Together [with Luria] they developed the new discipline of neuropsychology, of which Oliver Sacks is now one of the main proponents" (Van der Veer, 2014, p. 8).

interpretation of the perceived object. I now hold a notebook in front of myself. I do not perceive something white with four corners and then associate this perception with my knowledge of the object and its designation, that is, with my understanding that this is a notebook. The understanding of the thing, the name of the object, is given together with its perception. Studies have in fact shown that the perception of the object's distinct objective characteristics depends on the meaning or sense that accompanies the perception. (Vygotsky 1987a, p. 295)

This view that associates the process of perception with the meaning making processes of the mind—and, therefore, with other psychological processes of the perceiving individual—placed Vygotsky in agreement with some teachings of the school of Gestalt psychology. Though he was critical of many of the structuralist views on the nature of the human mind, Vygotsky stood in agreement with the Gestalt notion of the Gestalten: “mental life is not constructed from separate sensations of representations and their mutual association, but from separate integral formations, structures, and images that are called Gestalten” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 290). One could say that Vygotsky saw the human psyche as a Gestalten—a sum of distinct structures and processes that compose an indivisible whole.

Gestalt's structural holism suggested a fundamental connection between the organisation of an individual's mind and the perception of the world by that individual. Characteristic examples of the application of this theory are various experiments with the Rorschach inkblots test, which Vygotsky was not only aware of, but found truly illuminating in illustrating the connection between external images and the manifestation of internal emotion:

We know that different emotions always activate in us a certain definite flow of ideas. Our feeling strives to cast itself into the mould of certain images where it finds an expression and release. Therefore it is to be expected that the different images may prove to be powerful means for calling forth, exciting and relieving different feelings. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 284)

Nonetheless, though Vygotsky acknowledged the contributions of Gestalt psychology to the study of perception, he did not agree with the theory's approach to art; that is its view of aesthetic experience as an act of perception. Vygotsky repeatedly argued that a solution to the problem of art must explain the very essence of what makes art what it is. While, as he indicated in an article written in 1927, by focusing only on the perceptual processes that take place during an artistic experience, Gestalt psychology does not differentiate between an aesthetic and any other perceptual experience (Vygotsky, 1927), thus failing to provide a satisfactory explanation for the problem of art. Vygotsky's take on art followed his general aim to

create a psychological theory that unified all aspects of human psychology. In this unified theory, the study of perception was only inasmuch valid as it provided a window to the internal psychological processes of an individual. This attitude mirrors Vygotsky's stance towards the role of perception in art, as it appeared in *The Psychology of Art*, where the perceptual processes were only mentioned in relation to the emotional arousal that they could cause.

Emotions

In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky presented the arousal of emotion as an indispensable attribute of art. A few years later, in an article revisiting the connection between psychology and art scholarship, Vygotsky called for a clear distinction between artistic and non-artistic emotion (Vygotsky, 1928). Yet, the question of emotion in art—or any emotion, for that matter—is an admittedly difficult topic, and Vygotsky did not fully tackle it until relatively late in his career. It was in the early 1930s that he began working on a manuscript in which he attempted to form a theory of emotions, after engaging critically with the relevant popular theories of his time. Unfortunately, Vygotsky's untimely death did not allow him to complete his investigations in the concept of emotions, forcing him to leave the aforementioned manuscript incomplete.⁵⁶ Yet, it is believed that in Vygotsky's work, "there is a consistent theoretical legacy for understanding psychological phenomena" (Mesquita, 2012, p. 809). It is possible, therefore, to reconstruct his views on the notion of emotions—an essential task in my attempt to revise Vygotsky's definition of catharsis. Drawing from this legacy and the available information from the aforementioned manuscript, I will attempt to summarise Vygotsky's understanding of the concept of emotion, and compare it to his early views on the same topic, as they are depicted in *The Psychology of Art*.

Vygotsky developed his mature approach to emotion around three points of criticism towards the prevailing theories of his background. The first such point concerned the common practice to separate emotions from the rest of mental life. As with perception, Vygotsky viewed emotions as an indivisible part of the whole psychological world of an individual. Contrary to this, the main theory of emotions in his time (called the rudimentary theory of emotions) propagated the view that emotions had purely biological origins. Such theories viewed emotions as inseparable, in their primary form, from the instinctive reactions observed in some

⁵⁶ The manuscript was not published until years after his death, and an English translation is now included in *The Collected Works*, under the title *The Theory of Emotions: A Historical-Psychological Investigation* (Vygotsky, 1999a).

animal behaviour (Vygotsky 1987b), and examined the human emotional life isolated from the rest of the psychological functions. Unfortunately, according to Vygotsky, this practice led many to the absurd impression that the evolution of humans presupposes the dying out of their emotional life:

With respect to the issue of change in the strength of emotions from primal man to the present, we find the assumption of a direct continuation of an evolutionary process based on the premise that a step forward in the development of the human mind implies a step backward in the development of the emotions. (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 326)

By detaching emotions from the totality of the mental world of an individual, these theories, according to Vygotsky, failed to explain the significance of the emotional life. To these approaches he juxtaposed the findings of the emerging discipline of psychophysiology—that is the study of the physiology of psychological phenomena—which proved that emotions were part of the brain's functions, and, thus, tightly interconnected with all human mental functions (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 332).

Furthermore, Vygotsky argued that many of the established theories on emotion, once analysed to their core, seemed to conform to the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. As early as 1926, Vygotsky opposed these dualist systems, believing that they lacked a consistent and constructive worldview, and thus could not provide meaningful solutions to the various questions of psychology (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). This belief brought him into opposition to many of his contemporaries, including his superior at the Psychological Institute, Kornilov. Vygotsky found Kornilov's stance to fall into the same trap as those of other well-established theories of his time, such as those of Lange and James, the criticism of which makes up for the biggest part of Vygotsky's 1930s incomplete manuscript on emotions. The Lange-James theory was a notable attempt to describe the connections between the mental and physical manifestation of emotion. Rooted deeply in a dualist worldview, the theory suggested that the emotion is nothing but the mental experience of a physiological state. In Vygotsky's words:

James' classic formula [...] can be stated in the following manner: While we usually assume that we cry because we feel grief or that we shiver because we are frightened, we in fact feel grief because we cry and are frightened because we shiver. According to James one need only suppress the external manifestation of the emotion and it will disappear; one need only elicit an emotion's expression and the emotion itself will ensue. (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 327)

The greatest faults of this approach, according to Vygotsky, were that it “stripped the emotions from consciousness” (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 328) and reduced the whole

concept of emotion to an experience that is completely isolated from the individual's environment. Further, it presented emotion as a physical process that bears no potential for development, thus, failing to give any explanation for the vast differences between the emotional world of children and adults.

Contrary to many of his contemporaries, Vygotsky was a staunch supporter of a monistic worldview, considering the mind and body to be different sides of the same substance. In introducing his 1930s manuscript, he promised to propose an approach to the problem of emotion based on Spinoza's monistic philosophy. Unfortunately, as the document is incomplete, we will never know how the philosopher's work would be combined with Vygotsky's Marxist psychology. Nonetheless, it was Vygotsky's opposition to the Cartesian dualism that allowed him to approach emotion from a developmental point of view, leading him to conceive an understanding of the concept of emotion that subscribed to a dialectical worldview and focused on the development of humans and societies.

All in all, Vygotsky preferred to study psychological function from a 'genetic', developmental stance. Therefore, the third point of criticism on the approaches to emotion from his theoretical background concerned the theories' inadequacy in explaining the evolution of emotions in the course of a human life. Vygotsky's work in developmental psychology, or pedology, as it was then called, had led him to observe that a child's emotional range is significantly smaller than that of an adult. Under his cultural-historical view, Vygotsky believed that a human child is born with a limited capacity for differentiating emotion but acquires that skill through his or her interaction with others. This belief presupposes the ability of emotion to transform, through cultural processes, into more refined and differentiated versions, a process that signifies the maturity of an individual.

In his attempt to articulate his approach to emotion, Vygotsky paid tribute to Lewin's investigation of 'depth psychology':

Lewin demonstrated how one emotional state is transformed into another, how one emotional experience is substituted for another, and how an unresolved and uncompleted emotion may continue to exist in covert form. He also demonstrated how an affect enters into any structure with which it is connected. (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 336)

The teachings of Lewin's theory lie in agreement with the Freudian view of emotions. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Vygotsky's understanding of emotions during the composition of *The Psychology of Art* mirrored substantially that of Freud, who had shown both the significance of emotion for an individual's psychological balance and the emotion's ability to transform and develop (Vygotsky, 1971). Freud, however, according to Vygotsky, did not include the influence of

human interaction in the processes of emotional transformation, thus, ignoring the sociocultural dimension of an individual's mental life. Yet, in Vygotsky's view, emotion is integrally associated with the dynamics of human interactions with each other and with their cultures, as it is only through such interactions that the emotions acquire their meaning (Vygotsky, 1999a).

In sum, Vygotsky foresaw a theory that recognises emotion as a psychological function highly integrated into the total of mental functions of an individual, that is based on a monistic approach to the body-mind problem, and that can explain the developmental nature of emotion. Unfortunately, Vygotsky was not able to complete his attempt to create such a theory, nor do we have today a complete theory of this sort. All the issues that Vygotsky raised in his incomplete manuscript "are still among the most typical issues of emotional theory" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 356). Nonetheless, the writings that Vygotsky left us with are enough to stress the importance of emotion's ability to evolve, transform, and become refined as an individual matures and develops; a development that is directed through one's cultural interactions and signifies the growth of the total of mental functions of a person.

Imagination

In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky demonstrated how the activation of imagination and the development of fantasies act as a pathway for the transformation of emotion. In his subsequent studies on the functions of creativity and imagination in the child and the adolescent (Vygotsky, 1987c4, 1994), this belief was reinforced and the link between imagination and the higher mental functions was more intricately investigated. One of the most important characteristics of imagination, according to these investigations, is that it allows humans to think creatively. For Vygotsky, we can only reach the development of our higher mental processes through our ability to think in concepts with freedom and creativity, that is, through the use of fantasy. This does not only apply to the emotional dimension but also the intellectual (Vygotsky, 1994). Indeed, Vygotsky firmly believed that "imagination is a complex form of mental activity that is based on the unification of several functions in unique relationships" (Vygotsky 1987c, p. 348).

This belief was rather contrary to the general views of Vygotsky's time, which separated realistic and imaginative thought and attributed antithetical properties to each (Van der Veer, 1991). In this theoretical construct, supported by Piaget, among others, imagination was viewed as a psychological activity rooted in the unconscious, that serves no realistic purposes, rather than individual satisfaction

and “serves wishes that have nothing in common with man’s social reality” (Vygotsky 1987c, p. 344). Indeed, theorists tended to view imagination as a form of thinking that was based solely on images and symbols, and it was, thus, non-verbal, and non-communicable. In contrast to imagination, realistic thinking was believed to be a conscious form of thought that could be verbally communicated and, thus, linked the individual with their society (Vygotsky 1987c). Through his work, Vygotsky attempted to refute these beliefs and prove that there is no opposition between the two forms of thinking, and that imagination serves both the development of the emotion and the intellect.

When analysing the processes that take place during an artistic experience, Vygotsky had already stressed the connection between emotion and imagination. Writing on the role of fantasy in childhood, years later, he presented the same belief stating that “the movement of our feelings is closely connected with the activity of imagination” (Vygotsky 1987c, p. 347). In the same article, Vygotsky presented his belief in the imagination’s capacity to give rise to real emotions, even though the constructs of the imagination lack reality in themselves. Similarly, in an article presenting the outcomes of a study of the role of imagination in the adolescent psychology, Vygotsky suggested a commonality in the way that an adolescent finds a means to express his innermost feelings through fantasy with the way that an adult’s emotions are transformed when reading a literary work: “We, therefore, feel justified in saying that the creative images which the adolescent fantasy engenders, fulfil the same function for him as a work of literature does for an adult” (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 284). Both of these studies stress the importance of fantasy for the emotional development of humans.

The same studies also stress the importance of imagination for the development of the intellect. Vygotsky showed that the most significant feature of fantasy, and the characteristic that separates it from all other mental functions, is its ability to reorganise and reimagine the accumulated psychological material, thus allowing the individual to transform their existing impressions into new concepts. This characteristic gives imagination an objective social function:

Where creation of some sort of new concrete structure, a new picture of reality, of a creative embodiment of some sort of idea, becomes indispensable for the process of understanding or the process of practical activity, there we find fantasy coming to the fore as a basic function. It is with the help of fantasy that not just literature works, but all the scientific inventions and technical achievements are created. Fantasy is one of the manifestations of creative activity in man. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 285)

It would be wrong, according to Vygotsky, to suppose that these two

manifestations of imagination, the one related to the development of emotions and the other of intellectual ideas, are different; separating emotion and intellect would go against Vygotsky's fundamental belief that all mental functions exist in a state of complex interlacement with each other. Both emotion and intellect, therefore, are present in either imaginative or realistic thought. This intricate association of emotion and intellect points to the fact that when development of the one takes place, through the path of imagination, the other will also develop. The fantasies created during an aesthetic experience, or the daydreams experienced by an adolescent, serve emotional interest; that is, they are primarily guided by the emotion. However, the benefits that result from the imaginative thinking affect the intellectual as much as the emotional world of the individual.

Here, we are reminded of the 'intelligent emotions' of *The Psychology of Art*, and by integrating Vygotsky's theories on emotion and imagination, we can understand the significance of that term. This integration makes evident that art provides the individual not just with an outlet for the expression of latent emotion—as Freud believed—but with a guided pathway for the evolution of the emotional and intellectual world towards a higher state. Because of art's shared, social nature, this is also true for one's culture as a whole. Thus, our revised definition of Vygotskian catharsis includes a developmental leap of mental life in its totality, with a simultaneous effect for the individual and their culture. This characteristic is better understood in conjunction with Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie*.

Perezhivanie

Vygotsky firmly believed that the human mind and personality exists in a state of lifelong development, which results from the refinement of the various psychological functions and systems into higher forms (Levykh, 2003). His famous cultural-historical theory, created with the collaboration of Alexander Luria, traced the interplay between the individual and elements from their culture, that leads the former to such developmental leaps. During his last few years, in an attempt to shed better light on the psychological processes that take place during such developmental events, Vygotsky introduced the term 'perezhivanie'.⁵⁷ *Perezhivanie*, in the sense of its use by Vygotsky, is most accurately translated as meta-experience, and it refers to the immediate interpretation of an experience, as it is internalised and given meaning. *Perezhivanie*, though it occurs simultaneously with

57 The term eludes accurate translation; in the field of Vygotsky studies, therefore, it most commonly appears as the transliteration of the Russian word.

the lived experience, draws from a pool of cognitive and emotional memories from the past, as well as visions of the future, in order to process and frame the new experiences. With this term, therefore, Vygotsky described the link between the momentary, ephemeral experience and an individual's continual existence. He also accentuated the connection between the external circumstances that stimulate an experience and the individual's constitutional emotional and cognitive ground, through which that experience gains meaning. Another characteristic of the term *perezhivanie* is the word's emotional connotation in Russian. It is generally admitted that the term was borrowed from Stanislavski, who used it "in describing the centrality of affect and motivation to generate human will to 'act'" (Davis, 2015, p. 65). The introduction of the term in Vygotsky's work stressed the central role that the emotion plays during these events of internalisation of an experience, and henceforth, the centrality of affect in the entire constitutional construct of an individual.

Vygotsky's choice of the term reflects his association of emotional transformation and the process of general mental development and illuminates the manifestation of *perezhivanie* in artistic catharsis:

In art, *perezhivanie* could serve to promote the intelligent emotional process that Vygotsky sees in catharsis. A resonance between a viewer and an emotional theatrical performance, grounded in some sort of shared set of cultural and personal experiences, could produce deep reflection on prior experiences and heightened awareness of how they affect one's personality in a genetic sense, that is, in the role of cultural mediation on one's personality development. The kinds of emotions that are appropriate to express are learned rather than innate; they follow from a sense of cultural propriety that one appropriates through engagement with others whose own responses have been conditioned through their social experiences. (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 337)

In other words, one of the characteristics of art, for Vygotsky, is that it provides the individual with a constitutional background, that is culturally shared and socially accepted, through which the *perezhivanie* of future emotionally complex experiences will take place.

Art as cultural mediation or the social function of art

In line with the worldview of Marxist psychology, which sought to investigate the social aspect of all psychological phenomena, Vygotsky spent a great part of his work on the study of the cultural effect on the formation of an individual. The result of this study was the creation of his cultural-historical theory, which presented the

human interaction and the acquisition of language to play the central role in the process of mental development, from infancy until the end of one's life. This understanding of development is rooted in Vygotsky's genetic/developmental perspective. His theory suggests that humans are the product of a dialectic interaction between genetics and culture; we are all born with a primary, universal set of psychological functions that over the course of our lives, and through social learning, develop into higher mental functions. This development, according to Vygotsky, can only be achieved through cultural mediation, which acts like the building force that erects the construction that is an individual's mental life. The notion of cultural mediation implies that the nature of the mediation determines the direction of the psychological growth and the transformations that take place during the developmental process. During cultural mediation, "the use of artificial means acquired socially transforms psychological operations" (Mesquita, 2012, p. 811). This characteristic embodies the power of society in shaping, through culture, the psychology of its members.

Art, when regarded under the above spectrum, functions as such a culturally acquired medium for the psychological development of an individual and their society. In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky elaborated on the idea that art acts as a cultural agent that stimulates and releases emotions that could not be expressed elsewhere. Here, an additional and more multidimensional function of art is revealed: by transforming and structuring the emotional world of an individual, and consequently, of society, art develops and shapes emotion into a culturally appropriate form. This is how the effect of catharsis "involves the generalization from personal emotions to higher human truths that becomes available through a transaction with a work of art" (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 332). This transformation is possible due to art's ability to act on emotion, in the same way that language acts on the totality of psychology. The essential role of emotion in art focuses this development on the formation of higher emotions. In this sense, art offers the individual new names and contexts for what is felt, helping them, thus, to create new and more refined emotions. Art, therefore, acts as an agent of emotional development by providing a means to differentiate emotions, make them more elaborate, more evolved, and more appropriate for the individual's culture. What is more, in line with Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie*, art helps create a socially shared psychological terrain on which future individual emotions will be shaped.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Vygotsky viewed emotion as central to the processes involved

58 In his personal notebooks (Zavershneva, 2012), Vygotsky compared the effect of art to that of inoculation, hinting on the power of art to predict future emotional responses from the individual.

in the psychological development of individuals. It is, therefore, justifiable to infer that, by dealing with and stimulating heightened emotional activity, art elicits a developmental leap in the psychologies of its receivers. The nature of this development encompasses all aspects of the individuals' inner life and determines, to an extent, the future state of their society. In other words, though art does not directly incite its receivers to action, according to Vygotsky's theoretical framework, it organises their future behaviour within socially constructive norms. With this notion, Vygotsky was able to bridge in his psychology of art the emotional inner self with the social behaviour and the subjective psychology of an individual with the objective aspects found in an artwork.

This updated definition of the catharsis effect unveils the great significance of every artwork for the psychological maintenance and formation of humans and their society. It also highlights the ontological significance of Vygotsky's aesthetics. Vygotsky was convinced that art is a unique and indispensable part of the social human life, designed for a specific psychological purpose: to act as a means of cultural mediation, centring on emotional transformation. Bridging individual and social psychology, art, for Vygotsky, helps structure the emotional world of an individual, and consequently of society, into a culturally appropriate form, thus helping to create a socially shared psychological terrain on which future individual emotions are shaped. As such, art, for Vygotsky, acts as a catalyst for social change. This scheme paints Vygotsky's definition of art's function in a society.

To reach these conclusions, Vygotsky started from the analysis of literary texts; however, the resulting theory surpasses the confines of literature. Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art* was his attempt to create a general theory of the psychological impact of art as a whole and, though the book presented only analyses of literary forms, Vygotsky took every opportunity to generalise his deductions. Indeed, the theoretical nature of his observations, the focus on the psychological effect of art, and the definition of its social impact allow for Vygotsky's conclusions to be transferred among different artforms. Regarding theatre, though Vygotsky's writings do not engage with the specific matters of performativity, several of the questions raised by his aesthetics concern the reception of a dramatic text and a performance equally. These are: art's ability to lead the individual through a process of emotional transformation, by exposing them to a conflicting relationship between form and content, or expectation and reality; the socially developmental nature of this transformation; and, on a wider scale, art's ability to affect the society and promote change.

The relevance of Vygotsky's aesthetics to the study of performance is also supported by the fact that the aforementioned notions are central in the studies of several contemporary theatre scholars. Vygotsky's arguments regarding art's ability to stimulate the individual's psychological development towards the benefit of both themselves and their society have led several educational scholars to argue for the enormous value of theatre in education (Lima, 1995). Yet, there are other, unexplored potential connections between Vygotsky's understanding of the effect of art on the individual and the communal psychology and contemporary investigations on questions regarding theatre's function. Indeed, the ability of theatre to affect social change is discussed widely in the scholarship of theatre throughout history and still features in today's discourse. Jacques Rancière has dedicated much of his work to demonstrating how art enables societal emancipation. He has also argued about the transformative effect of theatre on its audience, a position that challenges the view of a passive spectator as does Vygotsky's definition of the psychological effect of art (see Rancière, 2011). Lutterbie (in Kemp & McConachie, 2018) has built on Rancière's understanding of the political effect of theatre by combining it with the concept of image schemas, borrowed from cognitive science. In his chapter, Lutterbie has demonstrated the cognitive effect of the tension that lies between the perception and the expectation of an audience member, which leads to a type of mental re-calibration—a process that appears highly similar to Vygotsky's conception. Another concept from the contemporary study of theatre that corresponds to Vygotsky's conclusions is Hans-Thies Lehmann's (2006) notion of the aesthetics of risk, according to which theatre serves a type of emotional training—a means of development of emotional endurance and affective agility.

These few examples serve to illustrate the variety of conversations that Vygotsky's aesthetics can enter once clearly defined and placed in their right context. They also show the degree to which this project differs from previous readings of Vygotsky's early works in its task to reconstruct Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology with emphasis to the aesthetics. Yet, before we can form a holistic view of Vygotsky's aesthetics—and, thus, begin to place him in deeper conversations with contemporary theories—we require to follow one more step: to read Vygotsky's early texts in dialogue with the theories of his own time. Though, as I will soon argue, Vygotsky surpassed his time with his specific perspective, the development of his thought relied heavily on the work of his contemporaries. The following three chapters will explore these connections, shedding more light on the nuances of Vygotsky's own writings.

PART TWO: Vygotsky and the Russian Modernist Theatre

Introduction

It is hard to imagine the role that art will play in this remolding of man. We do not know which existing but dormant forces in our organisms it will draw upon to form the new man. There is no question, however, that art will have a decisive voice in this process. Without new art there can be no new man. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 259)

With these words, Vygotsky concluded his *Psychology of Art*, and entered the multitude of discussions on the role that art—particularly theatre—was to play in the social transformation foreseen by Modernity, as well as the nature and the characteristics of these emerging forms of theatre. Vygotsky's theory of *The Psychology of Art*, together with the totality of his views on the nature and function of theatre, adhered to the general demand for art to assume a leading role in the cultural evolution of Russia. Vygotsky was very well aware of the theories that accompanied the artistic and cultural life of his time and had followed closely the theatrical events of every city he inhabited. Therefore, and as this section will demonstrate, his ideas were tightly interwoven with the available theoretical framework of his time and his work reflected to a great degree the advances in the fields of theatrical and literary criticism that characterised the period of Russian Modernism.

The following chapters are dedicated to mapping the connections between Vygotsky's perspective on theatre and the various ideas that served as the moving force for the theatrical advances of the time, comparing his understanding of the social function of theatre to equivalent beliefs that emerged in Russia during the first three decades of the 20th century. In this manner, this part of the thesis situates Vygotsky's aesthetics, as they derive from the conclusions of Part One, among the Modernists' investigations of theatre's effect on its audiences. The juxtaposition of ideas, presented here, illuminates issues such as theatre's establishment as a workshop for the rise of a new culture and the renegotiation of the relationships between art and spirituality, aesthetics and politics, and between theatre and psychology. It also highlights Vygotsky's aesthetics as a uniquely combinative lens into the transitions of Modernist theatre—and its perceived social role—from the pre to the post-Revolutionary era. Read in the context of Russian Modernism, Vygotsky's belief in the theatre's ability to mediate cultural growth appears as a dynamic answer to the problem of the theatrical 'crisis' that arose at the time.

The Crisis of the Russian Modernist Theatre

The notion of crisis became a common denominator to all theoretical writing regarding theatre that appeared in the early 20th century, with all writers agreeing in its severity but disagreeing on its nature (Clayton, 1993). The theatrical repertory, the popular staging styles, the contemporary audiences were all in turn blamed for the theatrical crisis. The truth, however, is that the crisis belonged to the Russian society of the first decades of the 20th century, and the Russian Modernist theatre had to reflect this state (Steinberg, 2008). The Russian artists and critics of the time upheld with great urgency the demand for the transformation of theatre, a transformation that would renew the art form under the light of the tremendous changes taking place in the few years before and after the Revolution. Common to the voices of practitioners and critics alike was the provocation for theatre to grasp the essence of the sociological transformations and assume the role of a guide towards the dawning era of humanity, however it was imagined in each case.

The centrality of theatre—among other art forms—in this endeavour derived from its specific characteristics. On the one hand, theatre became a space where many of the other art forms merge: theatre attracted Avant-garde artists from a vast range of disciplines who turned to the open podiums of theatre in order to declare their manifestos publicly (Kolocotroni, Goldman, & Taxidou, 1998). During those years, the theatrical stages became the meeting point of the poets, the musicians, and the visual artists, most of whom sought the exposure of the theatre and found in it vital means of expression. On the other hand, theatre—more than any other art form—functioned as a social art. Theatre demanded that the experimentations on the artistic technique, which characterised all arts during Modernism, are performed publicly, through actions that had an immediate effect on social life. Thus, theatre appeared capable of bridging the distance between the aesthetic and the political. Any form of artistic revolution had the potential of being translated into a social revolution and vice versa. As a result, theatre's innate social nature, which characterised both its creative process and its reception, attracted the interest of the political powers who utilised it for purposes of mass education, propaganda, and even experimentation regarding the life under the new social circumstances:

Many Bolsheviks supporters saw the theater as an intense microcosm within which new possibilities could be designed, examined and promulgated. The theater could be the laboratory for social experimentation, as well as the factory for the production of the

new man. No wonder the revolution brought in its wake a veritable 'theater epidemic'. (Leach, 2003, p. 76)

Under these circumstances, theatre assumed a dominant role in the cultural zymoses in the early 20th century Russia and its future became a crucial topic in the conversations for the development of art amid a changing world and the central platform for the Modernist and the Avant-garde experimentations. This phenomenon mirrored a broader demand for theatre to assume a central role in the formation of society, which was rooted in the ideas of Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche and characterised European Modernism:

Within the project of Modernity theatre acquires a privileged position. Its synaesthetic qualities, its religious undertone, its forging of communal identities make it both the 'grand metaphor' for the concerns of the period and the perfect paradigm for the fusion of aesthetics, philosophy and politics. (Taxidou, 1998, p. 23)

In Russia, this demand changed its nature following the sociopolitical transformation of the country. Thus, in the years before the Revolution, the Russian voices advocating a theatrical reform—most of which belonged to the movement of Symbolism—expressed the vision of a theatre as a spiritual temple able to unify the individuals of the society by addressing the innermost, mystical, or psychological dimensions of their soul. In contrast, with the dawn of the Revolution, the theatrical reformers of the Avant-garde urged for a theatre that highlights the life of the proletarian class and speaks to the masses of their shared modernised future. In both cases, however, theatre came to symbolise the bridge between the individual and the collective within a changing world. What is more, theatre was seen as a capable agent of cultural means for the creation of a new society and the forging of a new social human being. Thus, the notion of social function dominated the theatrical criticism and the Russian Modernist artists saw themselves and their work in theatre as an indispensable part in the grander scheme of social change.

Under these conditions, the theatrical artists of the period assumed an active role in determining the function and the purpose of their work. The theoretical questions of theatre's effect on its audience and the nature of the theatrical means that could achieve such effects became of utmost importance and led to the emergence of notable theories of theatrical reception and methods of acting pedagogy while stressing the rising role of the director. The field of psychology—going through its own internal transformations from a psychoanalytic to a scientific/experimental methodology—was often referenced in the artistic and theoretical attempts to answer the nascent questions on the reception and creation of theatre and the determination of its social function.

In this context, and as the following chapters will highlight, Vygotsky's work acquires a crucial status, as his writings reflect not only the popular Modernist vision of theatre as the catalyst for social change but also the transitions from the pre-Revolutionary to the post-1917 vision of theatre's social function. Not only was Vygotsky a strong upholder of the idea that art's primary function is that of promoting cultural and sociological evolution,⁵⁹ but his own personal career presented the characteristic transition from an idealistic philosophical position to an objectivist standpoint. What is more, Vygotsky's understanding of the social psychological effect of theatre, as it derives from his aesthetics in their totality, retained elements from both perspectives becoming, thus, a bridge between the pre and the post-Revolutionary visions of theatre's crucial role in society. All the while, his unique and relatively impartial perspective posed—as I will elaborate in Chapter Six—an effective reply to the demands for a socially responsible theatre.

59 "Art is the organization of our future behavior. It is a requirement that may never be fulfilled but that forces us to strive beyond our life toward all that lies beyond it" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 253)

Chapter Four: Bridging the Inner with the Outer: Spirituality, Psychology, and Theatre

Theatre and Spirituality

In the early years of Russian Modernism—roughly around the 1890s and 1900s—the demand for a new, socially purposeful theatre arose as a response to what was felt to be a spiritual crisis. Russian Modernists of the time developed the vision of a theatre that would replace the religious experiences provided in the past by the Church and act as a space where actors and audience would merge in spiritual communion. This desire was utterly expressed in the demands for theatrical transformation made by the Russian dramatists and theatre makers in the first few years of the 20th century. Inspired by the ancient Greek, the medieval and the Japanese theatre, the Russian Modernists advocated a theatre grounded in ritual and the folk tradition (Clayton, 1993). This new theatre would act as the centre of the cultural and spiritual life of the society and would help raise the foundations of a new cultural epoch, devoid of the spiritual frustration of the past.

These emerging visions were inherited from Wagner's work and echoed his notion of the total art [Gesamtkunstwerk]. Indeed, Wagner's ideas concerning the rupture with the culture of the past, the need for the creation of a new holistic model of art and his proposition for an artform that would respond to the spiritual needs of the individual and the society attracted many Russian artists and theorists of the time—among them Viacheslav Ivanov, who became the greatest advocate of Wagner's ideas in Russia, but also and Bely, but also Evreinov, Stanislavsky, and Michael Chekhov. Since the introduction of his theoretical texts in the beginning of the 1890s, Wagner's operas as well as his theoretical views on the theatrical art, had become increasingly more and more famous, until the idea that Russians can understand and appreciate Wagner better than any other nation began to appear in various publications, in the early 1910s.⁶⁰ The need for Russian theatre to fulfil a spiritual mission echoed the influence of yet another great thinker who played a central role in the development of ideas during Modernism. Nietzsche, and his two

60 This notion was based on a developing belief that Russia's isolation and tradition had led Russian thought close to the mythical and spiritual elements that are so central in Wagner's world (Bartlett, 1995). In this context, Wagner would be compared with the great Russian authors like Dostoevsky, "by the fact that their creators (both of whom interestingly enough have been named as precursors of Freud) are far more interested in the psychology of their characters, and in the ideas they represent, than in their surroundings" (Bartlett, 1995, p. 51), and Tolstoy, on the ground of their shared belief that art has a high purpose for the common good, and their common tendency to create on a large scale.

major works *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* were quickly placed in the context of the search for a lost spirituality in the times of social transformation. It was during that time that Nicholas Fedorovich Fedorov, a great Russian thinker of the 19th century, created Supramoralism—a philosophy that aimed to unite society in a common task that bridges cultural, scientific and technological development with religion (Zakydalsky in Rosenthal, 1986).⁶¹

It was this establishment of a sacred task that brought Nietzsche deep into the development of Russian thought and connected him with the religious and spiritual quests that the intelligentsia of the time had submitted itself to (Mihajlov in Rosenthal, 1986). Nonetheless, it was the nature of this task that provoked a series of criticisms against Nietzsche, which often came from the same philosophers that helped popularise his works. Fedorov characteristically, perceived Nietzsche as a tragedian, removed from the action of the play, and placed his moral criticism on this distance between Nietzsche's thought and the common life. Comparing life to a play, Fedorov read Nietzsche's Superman as "a tragic hero who, faced with universal destruction, strikes a beautiful pose" and he criticized Nietzsche for ascribing "to an individual what has been created by many men" (Zakydalsky in Rosenthal, 1986, p. 120-1).

In the disputes between Fedorov and Nietzsche, one finds the manifestation of the clash between the social and the individual nature of morality; Russian thinkers of the time seemed to seek relief from their spiritual anguish in a collective, rather than personal, moral purpose. Therefore, the need to rediscover spirituality was not to be fulfilled by the individual's engagement with religion but through the communion of the socially performed ritual. This explains why Russian Modernists sought the relief from spiritual frustration, in the engagement with cultural life—the products of which act as the heart of the community, bringing its members closer to their shared humanity. Thus, thinkers of the time envisioned a new culture, that would act as the building blocks of a new spiritually sound community.

Vygotsky was born into this transitional period of metaphysical search and from an early age encountered the problem of lost spirituality. His enthusiastic engagement with the Jewish cultural tradition and the problem of the Jewish identity in Imperial Russia, during his early youth, hint to his participation in the general Modernist movement that sought the reinstatement of spirituality.⁶² A series of

61 Though Fedorov severely criticised Nietzsche, both thinkers developed a philosophy that stretched beyond good and evil and appraised man's capacity to create culture and science.

62 In his book *Vygotsky: An Intellectual Biography*, Anton Yasnitsky offers a comprehensive account of Vygotsky's early interests. (Yasnitsky, 2018)

unpublished notes, as well as regularly published articles composed by Vygotsky between 1912 and 1917 demonstrate with clarity the author's preoccupation with the debates of the Jewish intellectuals of the time concerning the cultural crisis that characterised Russia's Jewry. The answers to the questions of Jewish identity, suggested in these manuscripts, lay in accordance with the zeitgeist of Vygotsky's time: he audibly advocated the importance of spiritual awareness in a time of cultural and historical change.⁶³ This worldview affected not only how Vygotsky saw the Jewish question but also how he read literature.

Indeed, in his essay on Hamlet, Vygotsky appears fascinated by the play's mystical dimension. Vygotsky read in the Shakespearean tragedy a world governed by powerful metaphysical forces that lie beyond human control. In *Hamlet*, he saw a highly spiritual world in which the protagonist struggles to find his place amid the fight between light and darkness. Hamlet, as he appears in Vygotsky's essay, undertakes the messianic task to submit himself to his destruction so that the tragedy fulfils its purpose. This image echoes Nietzsche's vision of tragedy as the struggle of one man against the world's spiritual darkness (Senelick, 1981). Indeed, Vygotsky's interpretation of Hamlet highlighted the individual struggle of the single hero against a world of uncertain spirituality. However, the cathartic effect of the tragedy, according to his beliefs, did not impact the individual alone but society as a whole. Vygotsky believed that through their contact with the myth, the reader experiences a connection with a higher reality, "a mystical reality" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 348), where the author and the readers meet in their shared humanity. Under this light, Vygotsky's conviction of the social nature of catharsis appears, indeed, rooted in the Russian Modernists' prioritisation of communal versus individual spiritual experience. All the while, his understanding of theatrical catharsis as a process of social bonding and a catalyst for social evolution mirrors the gravitation of artists and critics of the time towards the spiritual catharsis offered by tragedy.

Theatre's capacity to offer such spiritually bonding experiences to the community made it appear, in the eyes of the Russian Modernists, as the optimum means for the sustenance of collective spiritualism and the cornerstone of the envisioned new society. Of course, the centrality of theatre in the quest for a new spiritually sound society was not a solely Russian phenomenon. The search for a theatre that can offer the audience the experience of a collective catharsis led to the birth of the institution of the theatrical festivals, that took place in many European countries during the last two decades of the 19th century and continued to grow until

63 For a comprehensive examination of the effect of Vygotsky's Jewish identity on his work see (Kotik-Friedgut, 2008, p. 23).

the start of the Second World War. Based on the civic festivals of classical Athens and on Wagner's 1876 opera festival in the German town of Bayreuth, theatrical events in Syracuse, Italy (1914), in Delphi, Greece (1927), and in other Mediterranean countries utilised ancient Greek theatres to revive and stage Greek dramas. Their conception was profoundly influenced by Richard Wagner's ideas of the total artform and the universality of theatre, developed earlier in the 19th century (Michelakis, 2010). The festivals embraced the mythical content and the stylistic characteristics of Greek tragedy, searching in it the ideal theatrical qualities that would lead the audience to spiritual communion.

In Russia, the glorification of the open theatres, group dances, and choruses, all characteristics of the Greek tragedy, paired with ideas on the merging of actors and audience in collective improvisations characterised the writings of Vyacheslav Ivanov. Ivanov fiercely advocated the creation of a theatre-temple, a space where the theatrical art would serve the truth and the good, believing that theatre could absolutely replace the Church in its role of spiritual guidance (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988).⁶⁴ In his 1904 monogram, "The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God" (Ivanov, 1904), Ivanov stipulated his ideas on theatre as a collective foundation and the practice of staging tragedy as a new form of religious experience. In his subsequent essays, he developed his vision of theatre, characterised by the synthesis of artforms—with music playing an essential role—the unification of poet and audience, and religious mysticism. Ivanov's call for a theatre as the central spiritual institution of society also came with specific directions for the artists. He urged them to base the development of new mass performances, based on the ancient prototypes of theatre and religious rituals, the Greek tragedy, and the medieval mystery play (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 9). Through these practices, the ancient or medieval man had the chance to bridge their inner world with the outer one, elevating their individual pathos to a shared spiritual plane. Thus, in these artforms, Ivanov found the universality that his collective spiritualism demanded.

The symbol as a gateway to the divine

Such meeting of the inner emotional world with the objective external reality through the aesthetic experience in theatre, as advocated by Ivanov, became a topic of great importance in the Symbolist theorising of art. The Russian Symbolists, who

⁶⁴ The notion of the theatre as a temple for the soul was not new to the Russian theorists. French author Edouard Schuré's writings, and most notably his essay "Theatre of the Soul", were some characteristic texts that became famous in Russia in the pre-Revolutionary years.

engaged deeply with the problem of the crisis in theatre and devoted significant effort to the theoretical construction of their ideal theatre, focused much of their attention on the function of the symbol, as a bridge between the internal and external worlds. The Symbolists saw an array of such symbols in the ancient and folk myths that have inspired the dramatic writers since antiquity. They believed that through the reception of the eternal and universal symbols carried by these myths, the internal, subjective representations of each individual are matched with their objective, socially shared analogue—a process that defined, for them, the function of theatre (Kalbouss in Rosenthal, 1986).

The importance that some Symbolists placed on the function of myth in theatre informs their idealisation of the ancient and medieval theatrical art, as well as the folk theatrical tradition—a view that aligns with the writings of Nietzsche and Wagner. Indeed, the Symbolists' philosophical ideas, which inspired many Modernist artists, lay tightly entangled with Nietzsche's views on the Dionysian dimension of life. Ivanov, for instance, who was "convinced that a Dionysian principle governs life in general" (Bristol, 1986, pp. 150-1), embraced Nietzsche's interpretation of Dionysus as an agent of spiritual freedom. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, along with Wagner's theoretical works, would become one of the primary philosophical sources for the Symbolists' theories. Nietzsche's understanding of the origins of tragedy, and the significance that he placed on the myths, the artistic symbols, the masks, and the application of artistic synaesthesia by the poet, all corresponded with the Symbolist views. Similarly, Wagner's use of the mythical inspired the expression of the symbol, as the Symbolists envisioned it (Bartlett, 1995).

These influences would become most prevalent in the development of Modernist Russian drama. In accordance with elements from Wagner's and Nietzsche's philosophical approaches, Russian dramatists saw in the theatre the potential of connecting with higher truths about the world. The symbols that are embedded in the drama and that are erected on the stage were believed to serve as the connecting point between the individual's inner life and the outer, spiritual reality, thus merging aesthetics, philosophy, and spirituality. Lunacharsky's words illustrate this belief:

When an artist of colossal faculty grasps within the symbols life in its entirety, when he pursues to formulate within his quivering images the ebb and flow of this whole ocean, rather than depict the properties of only one drop of living elements, then he is spontaneously lifted first

to the sphere of philosophy, then to the sphere of religion.⁶⁵
(Lunacharsky, 1908, p. 11)

By combining the spiritual effects of myth with the aesthetic potency of the symbols, theatre became the ideal terrain for the Dionysian rituals envisioned by the early Russian Modernists.

Spiritualism and physicality

In addition, theatre offered yet another significant element. The actor's physical presence on stage allowed for an exceptional level of immediacy between the audience and the work of art. Therefore, the actor's body became the field on which the spiritual, philosophical, and aesthetic questions were explored. During this period of Russian Modernism, several acting, dance, and movement practices were developed or popularised as the Modernists sought to cultivate a sense of 'higher sensitivity' and approach spirituality through the subjective experience of movement (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017). Under this light, physical engagement became central in the Modernist explorations; intellectuals and artists alike would practice dance, eurythmics, or gymnastics as a part of their daily life. The methods that proved most influential among the Russians were Steiner's Anthroposophy, Dalcroze's eurythmics,⁶⁶ Delsarte's approach—popularised by Prince Sergei Volkonsky,⁶⁷ as well as the work of Isadora Duncan⁶⁸ (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017). Common to all these practices were the promise of reconnecting with nature and the cosmos on a deep spiritual level through the cultivation of kinaesthesia.

Music, rhythm, and movement were believed to awaken the human consciousness to that part of reality that remained unreachable during daily life. Characteristically, the Swiss composer and music educator, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, whose system of eurythmics gained much popularity in Russia, based his work on the belief that music and dance can affect every aspect of the spiritual life of an individual. Through those, "he dreamed of educating a 'new race' of people with unbounded consciousness of their possibilities" (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017, p. 109). A similar belief led George Gurdjieff to create 'the Work', or 'the Method', a system of

65 This excerpt was translated by myself.

66 Dalcroze describes his system in (Habron & Van Der Merwe, 2017) and (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1913).

67 For specific information on the reception of Delsarte, in Russia, see (Taylor & Whyman, 2004).

68 An understanding of the effect of Duncan's work in the context of the Modernist experimentations is provided in (Taxidou, 2016) and (Taxidou, 2017).

movement that promised to awaken the ones that practice it to a higher level of consciousness. Gurdjieff combined in his system—which he taught mainly at the Institute of Harmonic Development, in Tbilisi, Georgia—several Eastern physical spiritual practices. A few years later the same Eastern techniques would inspire the theatre artists that sought high theatricality and would be employed in the creation of movement methods for actors that were devoid of any trace of spiritualism. However, in the years before the Revolution, it was the merging of spiritual and artistic life that interested the theatre makers.

Another element imported from the East was that of monasticism or asceticism. The belief that theatre can act as the centre and the catalyst of the spiritual life of society led some Russian artists of early Modernism to envision an order of actors-monks, who would dedicate their lives to the social-spiritual purpose of their trade. Characteristic was Stanislavsky's dream to create a studio, located in the countryside, where the actors would live and work in communion. Though he never succeeded in fully realising his vision, Stanislavsky imagined this artistic community with vivid colours: "Its members were to be men and women of broad and uplifted views, of wide horizons and ideas, who knew the soul of man and aimed at noble artistic ideals, who could worship in the theater as in a temple" (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 537). This example illustrates how widely the beliefs about the spiritual mission of theatre were spread and the extent to which the theatre makers were involved (or were willing to get involved) in the theatre's reformation into a theatre-temple.

All the above theatrical practices portray the hopes of the Modernist artists, both in Europe and Russia, for the creation of a total work of art, in the Wagnerian sense, through the opportunities offered by the theatre. All in all, the fantasy of a collective, mystical theatre, shared by many of the Modernists at the time, described theatre as a space where the individual and the social dimensions of a person meet, where their 'inner' world interacts with the 'outer', and where such an interaction leads to the spiritual elevation of the whole society. Relieved of its mystical dimension, the above definition of the function of theatre concurs with Vygotsky's views, as presented in *The Psychology of Art*. Firstly, Vygotsky, as with his whole epoch, emphasised the social dimension of theatre. "Art is the social within us, and even if its action is performed by a single individual, it does not mean that its essence is individual" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 249). What is more, Vygotsky placed within this social dimension of theatre its very purpose. His understanding of this purpose as elevating and developmental on a level that embraces the whole society echoes the Modernists vision of a theatre that helps all participants to reach a higher spiritual, communal plane.

Therefore, Vygotsky's connection with the early Modernist views of a theatre-temple surpasses his affinity of the mystical in *Hamlet* and reaches the heart of his aesthetic theory.

Nonetheless, by the time he formulated this theory, Vygotsky, as with most artists and theorists had eliminated all metaphysical vocabulary from his investigations. In his book, the spiritual and mystical was replaced with the psychological—and more specifically, emotional—although the scheme remained the same. Theatre in Vygotsky's psychological understanding provides a platform that stages an encounter between the inner psychological phenomena of an individual person and the outer world. Within the social context of this meeting, a transformation of the inner world of the spectator takes place, during which the individual emotional world develops to a higher and more socially congruent state. This description stands in line with another dimension of the early Modernist theatrical activity in Russia: the view of theatre as a window to the human soul, as well as the theoretical advances that led to this belief, among which, psychoanalysis.

Theatre as a Window to the Soul

Russian Modernists highlighted the revelation of the inner, psychological human truth and favoured theatre and literature for their ability to serve as a vehicle for the expression of the most deep-seated processes of the mind. Wagner's in-depth psychological characterisations were undoubtedly some of the predecessors of this trend, which matured in the works of the writers and theatre makers of the turn of the century. Theatrical Naturalism, the monodrama, as well as all literary works that present a deep and extensive psychological profiling of their characters fall under the same umbrella of the developing interest for the inner life of humans and its impression on paper and on stage. The voices that pursued this interest had initially been indistinguishable from those that sought ritual and spirituality in theatre. Yet, the 20th century created new demands for analytic or scientific methodisation of knowledge, primarily influenced by the spreading of psychoanalysis. In this context, the metaphysical was redefined as psychological, and the concept of objectivity entered the discussions on philosophy and aesthetics.

Psychoanalysis and literature

The end of the 19th century, in Russia, saw an increased interest in the

complexity of human behaviour and the undecipherable nature of the human soul. At the time, the unconscious was regarded as a dark force, hidden deep within the human soul, capable of jeopardising the behavioural stability of the religious and civilised human. "Within this 'dark kingdom,' animal instincts and drives of awesome power were presumed to reside" (Miller, 1998, p. 21), powers that, under specific circumstances, threatened to break through the forces of reason. Towards the end of the 19th century, the study of this 'dark kingdom' began to pass from the fields of theology and philosophy to the empirical studies of the fairly new profession of psychiatry (Miller, 1998, p. 20). Along with the experimental psychologists, psychiatrists strived to prove that the behavioural deviations of the 'insane' were based on the biological degenerations of their brain. With this passage, the mental disorders began to be accepted as forms of brain disease, gradually eradicating the notion of the unconsciousness. The establishment of psychoanalysis came as a reaction to this reductionist explanation of mental illness and reinstated the unconscious as part of the human spiritual dimension. In contrast to the past, however, and under the light of psychoanalysis, the human spirit was no longer an illegible, metaphysical part of the human being, subject of the fields of theology and philosophy. Freud's work gave his followers the opportunity to observe and analyse the human soul, begin to develop an understanding of the laws that govern it and attempt to heal its traumas through words. By 1912, the unconscious had obtained a very different image; for some, even "having a potentially positive influence on individual acts" (Miller, 1998, p. 22).

The reception of psychoanalysis in Russia both influenced and was influenced by the literature of the time. The rich psychological characterisation of Russian novels gave a significant opportunity to the psychoanalysts to apply and test their theories. Around 1910, Nikolai Osipov, a Russian psychiatrist and a strong supporter of Freud's work, was the first to engage in reading literature through a psychoanalytic lens. In a paper titled "Psychotherapy in the Literary Works of L. N. Tolstoy", Osipov analysed and diagnosed two of the Tolstoy's characters and criticised the responses of the author's fictional physicians to their struggles. He concluded that Tolstoy's works, with their realistic representation of untreated psychological crises, stressed the need for psychotherapeutic care (Miller, 1998, p. 37).

Osipov's practice became popular among the Russian psychoanalysts. In 1911, Tatiana Rosenthal, another Russian psychiatrist and a member of the psychoanalytic community, published a paper titled "The Dangerous Age of Karen Michaelis in Light of Psychoanalysis", where she placed under analysis one of the

characters of Michaelis' novel *The Dangerous Age*. The character's biography, her early age memories, and her confessions in her diary were all employed by Rosenthal in her attempt to diagnose the fictional woman and present her story as a case study. In 1920, building on her previous work, Rosenthal engaged with Dostoevsky's novellas being "particularly interested in the connection between creativity and psychopathology" (Miller, 1998, p. 55). She thus attempted to connect Dostoevsky's personal history to his character's expressions of their unconsciousness, drawing various conclusions on the bridges between the writer's psychological suffering and his artistic work.

Overall, the establishment of psychoanalysis and the introduction of Freud's early works in the first years of the 20th century had the outright effect of turning the attention from the metaphysical spirit to the language spoken by the human psyche. For the first time in history, the individual's inner world could be observed, analysed and studied and the artists and artistic critics soon found that the understanding of the psychological processes of humans was worth their attention. Many art critics of the time approached the analysis of works of literature through the application of notions that either emerged from or influenced the reception of Freud's work. Characteristically, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, a Russian novelist, poet, religious thinker, and literary critic, regarded as a cofounder of the Symbolist movement, is said to have influenced and inspired Freud with his analysis of Dostoevsky (Rice, 1993, pp. 127-8).

In his book, Vygotsky would come to heavily criticise the psychological analysis of fictional characters, on the premise that such a practice was fruitless for both fields, psychoanalysis and literary criticism. Vygotsky stressed the fact that fictional characters are nothing more but a part of the psychological construct of the literary text, formed by the artist to facilitate the artistic reception by the reader. Thus, regarding these artistic inventions as real humans is misleading at the least. Nonetheless, Vygotsky's understanding of the nature and function of theatre was strongly influenced both by Freud's theories and by Russian literature, which was rich in psychological depictions.⁶⁹ The belief that art can reflect, in its own unique way, the innermost world of a human being—or, at least, incite the spectator's innermost world—became the cornerstone of Vygotsky's theory: "Art", for Vygotsky, "is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life." (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 249).

69 Characteristic is Vygotsky's unfinished and unpublished essay on the portrayal of Jews in Dostoevsky's texts (Feigenberg, 2000), where he noted the failure of Russian literature to express the "mystery of the Jewish spirit, the Jewish psychology" (Vygotsky in Feigenberg, 2000, p. 78).

The monodrama

Vygotsky adhered to the conviction that a spectator, when experiencing a drama, identifies with the protagonist and experiences their journey from the safety of his seat. This idea was supported initially by Freud, who believed in the necessity of the audience member to identify with the main character while remaining aware of the illusionary nature of the artform:

Accordingly, his enjoyment is based on an illusion; that is to say, his suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on the stage, and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security. In these circumstances he can allow himself to enjoy being a 'great man', to give way without a qualm to such suppressed impulses as a craving for freedom in religious, political, social and sexual matters, and to 'blow off steam' in every direction in the various grand scenes that form part of the life represented on the stage. (Freud, 1906, p. 306)

This view endorsed the genre of monodrama, which became increasingly popular during the first two decades of the 20th century. monodramatic texts aimed at strengthening the experience of identification between the spectator and the protagonist, thus allowing the audience a heightened experience of the hero's journey. To achieve this, monodrama, as a genre, projected the protagonist's inner world outwards, onto all the elements of the stage, including the other characters. The result was a dramatic world staged entirely through the eyes of the main character. In some cases, the protagonist's psyche would be fragmented and projected outwardly onto different elements in order to highlight its internal conflicts (Smith, 2010, p. 207). The most famous of such experiments was, perhaps, Nicolai Evreinov's 1912 monodrama *Theatre of the Soul* [*V kulisah dushi*]. The play, containing a direct reference to Freud in its prologue, demonstrates the extent to which the contemporary literature on psychoanalysis had influenced theatre: in the drama, the soul of the protagonist is divided into three parts—the rational, the emotional, and the unconscious—each to be performed by a different actor. This example also stresses how Russian Modernist theatre engaged with the exploration of the inner, unconscious terrain of humans, thus transforming theatre into a laboratory for the popular theories of psychology (Etkind, 1994).

The symbol as a gateway to the shared psychological truth

The inner psychological world gained a centre stage position in Stanislavsky's work, who based his acting method and his vision of theatre as a whole on the internal processes of the character. In his view, effective artistic inspiration could only come from the depths of one's soul, from "the realm of our

inaccessible superconsciousness” which is, “the storehouse of our most important spiritual material” (Stanislavski, 2014b, p. 68). Stanislavsky’s ‘Spiritual Naturalism’ [Dushevnyj Naturalizm] stressed his interest in the inner psychological truth portrayed in theatre, in contrast to the common practice of focusing the attention on the precise physical portrayal of the play’s external world, which characterised the Naturalistic productions of the time. What is more, his distinct approach to Naturalism established the belief that the nature of the psychological world of any given character is recognisable and shared, to a degree, by all human beings. The emphasis that Stanislavsky placed on the expression of the inner experience of his characters brought him also close to the Symbolist notion of the internalisation of the symbol (Senelick, 1981, p. xlvi). Just as with the symbol in the Symbolist theories, the sincere portrayal on the stage of the deeper psychological processes in Stanislavsky’s theatre, would unite the actor and the audience under their common nature.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the works of Anton Chekhov, which helped popularise Stanislavsky’s theatrical style, were often associated by their contemporaries with the movement of Symbolism. Stanislavsky himself, though he did not draw a direct link between Chekhov and the Symbolists, read in the playwright’s work some Symbolist values, such as the ability of the artwork to rise above the mundane towards the plane of eternity:

Every day cares, politics, economics, the larger part of general social interest—these make the kitchen of life. Art lives higher, observing from the height of its birdlike flights all that takes place beneath it. It makes concrete and synthesizes all that it sees. There are plays written on the simplest of themes, which in themselves are not interesting. But they are permeated by the eternal, and he who feels this quality in them perceives that they are written for all time. Chekhov is a writer of such plays. (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 347)

The notion of the eternal in theatre, as it derives from Stanislavsky’s works, and as it is described by Vygotsky (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 487), is devoid of the highly metaphysical dimension that early Symbolism bestowed on it and finds its definition in the realm of human psychology. In this capacity, it approaches Andrei Bely’s understanding of the symbol: Bely viewed the artistic symbol as the point of convergence of the world of phenomena and the world of noumena (Fink, 1999). In his philosophical outlook, Bely strived to bridge these two worlds separated by the Kantian division of human thinking into intellect, which is capable of apprehending the world of phenomena, and intuition, designed to interact with the noumenal world. In his view, art, with its symbolic richness and its appeal to human emotion, can form such a bridge—a place where one “instant of life taken by itself as it is deeply

probed becomes a doorway to infinity” (Bely in Senelick, 1981, p. 89). Yet, for Bely, this infinity, as with the total of the noumenal world, does not refer to a divine, spiritual dimension, but to the vastness of the human psyche. It was through this aspect of Bely’s outlook, that Russian Symbolism advanced to a phase where it was free to indulge in subjectivism, individualism, and the idealism of the human spiritual world, devoid of the religious metaphysics of its early stages.

Such interest in the non-rationalistic, yet non-spiritual aspect of the human psyche, paved the way for the positive reception of Henri Bergson’s philosophy in Russia, during the beginning of the 20th century. Though Bergson’s work had an immediate connection with the artistic advancements that took place in Modernist Russia, his philosophy reflected more general trends of thought of the time; namely, the rising opposition to neo-Kantian critical rationality in philosophy in juxtaposition with the development of quantum physics in science, which challenged the traditional models of scientific knowledge (Fink, 1999). A central element of Bergson’s philosophical system was the introduction of intuition as a means of achieving knowledge. Bergson believed that it is only through intuition that we can gain an understanding of ourselves and capture the essential qualities of external objects, developing, thus, an understanding of the world around us. This highlighting of the inner meaning of things along with the denial of the intellectualism and scientific abstraction of the 19th century, brought Bergson very close to the beliefs of the Symbolists and the Russian vision of art and of knowledge as a whole.

Subjective versus objective interpretation

Indeed, the integral role of intuition and the significance of subjective experience are themes found in Russian Modernist theories on both artistic creation and aesthetic experience. The core of Stanislavsky’s system was developed around the need for the actor to interpret any given text by accessing his own subjective emotional inner self. Stanislavsky named this reliance on an intuitive approach to art “the line of intuition of feelings” (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 346), and he considered it the best and only accurate artistic, creative method. Bely’s view of the symbol as a gateway to the inner spiritual life of man aligned him also with Meyerhold’s experimentations on Symbolism and the grotesque: Meyerhold genuinely believed in the power of the symbol, and he strived to develop a theatrical style that would bring forth the symbolic aspect of each drama. In doing so, he founded his productions on his subjective interpretation of the texts at hand. His autonomy and independence as a director, though criticised negatively by some, abided by the Symbolist credo that demanded a free subjective interpretation of art.

Vygotsky's early views on the processes of artistic reception, as they are presented in his essay on *Hamlet*, are in line with this demand. Admittedly, this 'reader's critique', was inspired directly by Vygotsky's teacher at the Shaniavsky University, Iulii Aikhenval'd. The famous literary critic opposed all attempts to understand art through rational and analytic pathways, believing that the essence of a literary work can be only grasped by the human intuition. His Impressionistic critiques, therefore, aimed at preserving the irrational, mysterious aspect of the artworks at hand, focusing on his subjective, internal response to them. However, his approach dictated some rules—namely, the focus solely on the play under analysis, the originality and authenticity of the approach, and the avoidance of any rationalisation of the drama's impression. Following his teacher's beliefs, Vygotsky argued for the validity of the reader's subjective interpretation of a work of literature. In his essay on *Hamlet*, Vygotsky stated that the artwork is realised only when received by a reader—when the reader's inner world is affected by it (Vygotsky, 1986). In fact, it is the reader, according to young Vygotsky, that shapes the text: "he creates it; he acts as its new author; he approaches it not from without, but from within; always under its spell, within its sphere" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 340).

In Aikhenval'd's case, the focus on the reader's role in the reception of a text, led him to view literature as superior to theatre, suggesting that the ideal reception of a play happens when the play is read by an individual reader and not when it is witnessed in the form of a production. In his article titled "Negation of the Theatre" [Otritsanie Teatra],⁷⁰ Aikhenval'd stated:

In his solitude, the ideal reader, the ideally literate person, will himself understand and value in a play everything that the stage will later be desirous of disclosing. Alone with the book, the author's silent confidant, he will discover all its treasures, will drink down the precious wine wherein the soul of its pages sparkles and effervesces. (Aikhenval'd in Sobkin, 2016, pp. 3-4)

In line with his teacher's guidelines, Vygotsky based his analysis of *Hamlet* solely on his reception of the tragedy's text, with no reference to its performative potential. In his subsequent writings, Vygotsky appears well aware of the particularities and the significance of the theatrical art, separating himself from his former teacher and in an article written at the dawn of the Revolution Vygotsky would severely attack Aikhenval'd's beliefs on the superiority of the text (Vygotsky, 2015).⁷¹ The focus on the effects of the artwork on its receiver's psychological world, however, would characterise his most substantial work on the psychology of art.

70 The article was published in 1913 as part of a collection titled Debating the Theater [V sporakh o teatre].

Another element in Vygotsky's work that differentiated him from his teacher was that he never believed that the reader's interpretation of a work of literature—or the artwork's effect on the reader's inner world—was entirely based on arbitrary subjective impressions; quite the contrary. In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky eventually expressed his dissatisfaction with the Impressionistic and Symbolistic beliefs regarding the dependence of the content of a work of art on the receiver's subjective understanding. In his manuscript, Vygotsky approached the problem of art from the point of view of a psychologist—a stance that demanded a degree of objectivity. Nonetheless, the request for an objective anchor in the reception of a literary or dramatic work is traced as far back as his very first analysis of *Hamlet*. Although at this early stage of his work—that is, before he had begun to develop the scientific aspect of his approach—Vygotsky seemed to favour the idea of a subjective interpretation of the content, he hinted towards the existence of an objective, commonly experienced truth within each artwork. The content of the work of art—or the myth of the tragedy, as he called it in the case of *Hamlet*—acted for Vygotsky as a conventional, objective anchor for each individual, subjective reception. In his first essay on *Hamlet*, Vygotsky gave this anchor a metaphysical, spiritual tone; in his second approach to the tragedy, the anchor was located in the common psychology of humans.

This development in Vygotsky's views reflects the general resolution of his time to move away from the spiritualism of the early Symbolism and turn the attention to the more verifiable and analysable terrain of human psychology. The need for an objective backbone in the scheme of artistic creation and reception would lead Vygotsky to formulate his objective-analytic approach to the study of art, as it is described in *The Psychology of Art*. In this much more mature work, Vygotsky retained his opposition to any attempts on deciphering the content of a work of literature, but he expanded his outlook on the integral elements of art including, this time, the form. Having overcome the vagueness of the spiritual lens found in his essay on *Hamlet*, the young scientist, Vygotsky, stipulated that the effect of art on its receiver is determined equally by the content of it and the form that this content is given by the artist. What is more, he emphasised that for art to have its desired effect on its receiver, the content must be transformed by the artistic form.

71 With the coming of the Revolution, Vygotsky appeared notably excited with the potential role of the theatre as a spectacle. He, thus, urged theatre makers to come out of the isolation of the individual reading room, out of the narrow terrain offered by conventional theatres, and flood the streets and the public squares (Vygotsky, 2015).

Nonetheless, this gradual shift towards scientific thought, which characterised Vygotsky's career at the time, did not come at the expense of his previous ideas; on the contrary, Vygotsky's methodology recognised both subjective and objective aspects of the psychological processes of literary and dramatic reception. His refined methodology demanded the focus on a problem that could be analysed and studied, and, for Vygotsky, this became the problem of the dynamic relationship between the artistic form (objectively observed) and the content (subjectively perceived). A similar attempt to bridge the scientific with the metaphysical is observed at large in the Russian Modernist philosophical thought. The positive reception of Bergson's theory of knowledge is a characteristic example of this trend. According to Bergson, any information obtained by the process of intuitive perception needs to be processed and conceptualised through the intellect, for it to achieve the status of knowledge. Thus, the Bergsonian perspective transformed the notion of intuition from an "escape into a higher, purer realm of being" (Fink, 1999, p. 24) to a tool for obtaining a clear, even pragmatic view of reality.

It is in this last notion that we find the essence of Bergsonian thought, as it impacted Modernist Russia. While, following the First World War, the rest of Europe was moving away from philosophical standpoints that propagated intuition and irrationality—among which was Bergson's theories—in Russia, these same notions survived through the 20s, without losing their popularity (Fink, 1999). The reason being that such theories not only corresponded to the Russians' tendencies towards spirituality and intuitiveness, but, most importantly, because they were able to once again bridge the gap between the inner, metaphysical experience of the world and the scientific reasoning—a demand that seemed to characterise Russian thought and that had a considerable effect on the artistic activity of the time.

It was mainly along these lines that aesthetics and philosophy embraced each other. Many of the prevailing ideas, styles, and methodologies responded to the need of the Russian artists and theorists to re-define the metaphysical, spiritual goals of the individual and the human society, to bridge the inner world of experiences with an outer, objective world, and to allow a functioning relationship between scientific method and an irrational mode of existence. The example of Delsarte's reception in Russia illustrates the ways these debates manifested themselves in dance and theatre. Delsarte based his approach on a systematic observation of human behaviour in everyday and artistic contexts—a fact that had led him to believe that he had developed a science of physical expression. All the while, his method aimed to incorporate the physical, psychological and spiritual

dimensions of humans into a philosophy of Being. This combination of scientific methods of observation with philosophical beliefs had a great appeal among Russian Modernists (Taylor & Whyman, 2004, p. 100).

In all cases, from the psychoanalytic approach to art, to the later Symbolistic ideas, and to theatrical practices, such as that of Delsarte, art was believed to serve as the vehicle to a deeper psychological truth, shared by all people. In this context, the artist was seen as “the spokesman of his people through a shared, unconscious will” (Bristol, 1986, p. 152). For this reason, the observation, analysis, and systematisation of ways in which this shared unconscious manifests itself in the arts, became a crucial topic in the field of aesthetics—a topic that went hand-in-hand with the general philosophical demand for bridging the intuition and the spiritual with the scientific, and the pressing political demand to forge a strong connection between the individual and the community.

Though Vygotsky’s theory on the psychology of art does not speak directly of a shared unconscious—or any other metaphysical element for that matter—it implies that the artist, through their own humanity, has access to a spiritual truth shared by the members of his or her society. Art, according to Vygotsky provides the individual with access to “large spiritual meanings” which are “born under special sociocultural conditions that lie beyond the bounds of ordinary, everyday practice” (Sobkin, 2016a, 48).⁷² This truth, in Vygotsky’s work, is placed within the social psychology of each individual and is thus subject to scientific study. This last remark demonstrates how the idealistic viewpoint of Vygotsky’s early youth survived in his approach to the problem of art, even after he joined the ranks of psychology, and illustrates the link between Vygotsky’s thought and the general concerns of his time.

This period, dedicated to the search for a bridge between a fascination with the human inner experience and the methodological guidelines of science, produced literature and drama that paid remarkable attention on the psychological depth of its characters. However, the movements that prevailed at the time had to come to a halt, with the establishment of the Bolshevik reign. The Revolutionaries had neither the time nor the space to ‘look into themselves’; they were pushing for change that seemed not to come fast enough—a movement that was not willing to be put under the slow-working scope of psychoanalysis or psychological characterisation. Vygotsky, who ardently joined in the Revolutionary enthusiasm, also aligned himself with the voices that dismissed the literature and theatre of this era with strong accusations:

72 Sobkin (2016a) notes that our understanding of such ‘large meanings’ remains to this day an understudied topic in contemporary psychology.

The recent success of Naturalistic theatre (that, which Stanislavsky called “Spiritual Naturalism”) led to the hopeless dead end of a psychological experiment, where all art ends. This revealed with unquestionable clarity the ideological bankruptcy and the artistic failure of the decadent, the so-called conventional, or Symbolistic theatre, which, for the sake of literature, corrupted the very nature of theatricality. This picture of the collapse of the substantial theatre is complemented by an ungoverned impressionism, that tries to manipulate the sensitivity of the viewer employing all kinds of means: by diffusing the dramatic action in “atmosphere”, by relying on the mimicry of the glorious old traditions, all of which appears on the Realistic scene with no creativity. (Vygotzky, 2015, p. 86)⁷³

The October Revolution marked the beginning of a new era for the arts and their criticism, where theatre’s role would have a more vital role to play. If Modernist theatre, in Russia, was “a theatre substituting religion, aesthetics and finally politics”, (Taxidou, 1998, p. 41) then the passage into the post-Revolutionary era signified the dominance of the political over the other two. The effect of the Revolution on theatre, and vice versa, and Vygotzky’s place in the discussions that emerged are discussed in the following chapter.

73 All excerpts from this article are translated by myself.

Chapter Five: Theatre and the Revolution: The Purpose of Theatre in the New Social Era

Theatre and the Revolution

The dawn of the Revolution provoked a new pressing demand: the remodelling of the society under the new sociopolitical reality. Responding to the excitement about this new task, theatre offered itself as an amplifier for the political messages of the Revolution and as a laboratory for the formation of the new human being. Theatre, in this regard, became a platform on which the political and the aesthetic would merge in the common objective of shaping a new, Revolutionary culture and society. This was the context under which Vygotsky wrote the majority of his texts on art and theatre. The importance that he placed on the role of theatre in the shaping of the new culture reflected the popular views of his time that saw in theatre the main driving force for the Revolution.

Indeed, during the transitioning years of the Civil War, which followed the October Revolution, theatrical life became impressively vigorous and rich. A vast number of new studios and theatrical companies, both professional and amateur “sprang up everywhere like mushrooms after rain” (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 44).⁷⁴ Theatre became paramount in the Russian people’s lives, and its practitioners responded to the challenges brought by the massive sociocultural changes with vigour and pride. Stanislavsky’s words, during a speech he delivered at the opening of his first Studio, a few years before the Revolution, capture the sense of responsibility shared by theatre artists towards society:

At the present time when social forces are stirring in our country the theatre cannot and must not devote itself to art and art alone. It must respond to the moods of society, elucidate them to the public, and act as its teacher. And not forgetting its lofty social calling, the ‘young’ theatre must strive at the same time to achieve its principal aim—the rejuvenation of dramatic art with new forms and techniques of staging. (Stanislavsky in Braun, 1979, p. 38)

Following the Revolution, the same spirit of excitement and responsibility led some artists, among whom Meyerhold, to declare their art devoted to the Revolution and place it under the service of the plans of the Bolshevik Party.⁷⁵

74 Characteristic is the increase of theatres from 240 to over 6,000 during the years 1914 to 1920 (Symons, 1971).

75 Very soon after the Revolution, all theatres were transferred to state control, and many of their artists were invited by the Bolsheviks to discuss the reform of the arts. Of all the invited artists only five responded, among them was Meyerhold (Braun, 1979).

The reason for theatre's dramatic increase in popularity lies in the changes that took place in the consistency of its audience. The new political era made theatrical events available to the working class, and theatres started flooding with the large numbers of people that were previously unreachable by any other means due to the widespread illiteracy. These new audiences responded with eagerness to the newly gained opportunity and appeared fascinated with the theatrical experience:

For some time after the revolution, the public in the theater was mixed; it was poor and rich, intelligent and nonintelligent—teachers, students, coachmen, janitors, clerks, street cleaners, chauffeurs, conductors, workmen, domestics, soldiers. Nevertheless, our performances took place accompanied by the strained attention of the spectators and a gravelike silence in the overfilled auditorium. (Stanislavsky, 1945, pp. 550-1)

The representative nature of theatre, with its vivid imagery and its direct speech, made it highly accessible to people, regardless of their cultural and economic background. In this context, theatre acted as a bridge between the Russian intelligentsia and the working class, and most importantly, between the intellectual and cultural heritage of the past and the emerging present.

It was not long before the political leaders began to realise that the members of their new audience came to the theatre to learn. In this light, they took actions to support and enhance theatre's pedagogical purpose. The Soviet Peoples Commissar of Education characteristically, enforced policies that facilitated theatre's accessibility to the masses, such as subsidising tickets and offering free performances to the lower classes (Clark, 1995). Under the involvement of the government, theatre was established as a valuable medium of mass education and its practitioners saw their profession raised to the status of public service. This scheme echoed the pre-Revolutionary demands for a theatre-temple, or for a theatre that offers the means to approach a deeper truth about humanity. Stanislavsky, characteristically, had demanded that his actors educate and cultivate themselves and that they lead a disciplined and noble life both on and off stage, believing that each and every actor is "a teacher of beauty and truth" (Stanislavsky, 1968, p. 27) and "a public servant destined to carry out into the world a message that is fine, elevating and noble" (Stanislavski, 2014a, p. 217). This nobility, invoked by Stanislavsky, was replaced in the post-Revolutionary years by the demand for a stand in relation to the social and political connotations of the rising epoch.⁷⁶

All these events led theatre to be selected to lead the cultural revolution of

the first decades of the 20th century, and its practitioners engaged in passionate arguments on the ways in which their art could fulfil its purpose. On that account, the majority of artists engaged in a series of zealous theatrical experimentations: within two decades, the Russian theatre took on an impressive number of forms, “from street theatre to studio theatre, from clamorous Futurism with its global pretensions to the quiet intimacy of domestic drama, from the overtly propagandistic to the subtly psychological, from abstract allegory to the most concrete reality of everyday life” (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 8). The wide range of forms and topics that characterised the Avant-garde period led to many different categorisations of theatres and artists. The common denominator in all, however, was the sincere belief in the centrality of culture in the dawning society and the pivotal role that theatre was to play in its formation.

In their effort to understand how theatre was to fulfil such a role, theatre artists and critics employed various means of investigation and experimentation. In their ventures, a series of questions regarding acting techniques, the relationship between body and mind, and the effect of theatre on its audience became of paramount importance (Kolocotroni, Goldman, & Taxidou, 1998). Following the general Modernist trend of bridging philosophy and science, the theatre makers used various scientific (and pseudoscientific) theories in order to explain, develop or support their various beliefs (Braun, 1979). In this sense, theatre artists often regarded their work as scientific experimentation on aesthetics, under the constant influence of the sociopolitical reality. This period of free experimentation would last for no more than a decade, as it was destined to cease with the gradual establishment of the Socialist Realist cannons from 1927 onwards (Clark, 1995). However, the vigour with which these artists engaged with the development of new theatrical styles and methods of acting led to the creation of an impressive variety of theatres and approaches to theatre-making.

Vygotsky had made his own fervent contribution to the ongoing discussions on the form that the new theatre would take after the Revolution. In 1919, a collection with the title *Poems and Prose of the Russian Revolution [Stikhi i Proza o Russkoi Revoliutsii]* featured Vygotsky’s article, titled “Theatre and Revolution” (Vygotsky, 2015).⁷⁷ This article, written rather early in the timeline of the debates on

76 The politicisation of theatre was a common demand of the time with Meyerhold arguing characteristically that “it is utter nonsense to speak of an apolitical attitude. No man (no actor) has ever been apolitical, a-social; man is always a product of the forces of his environment” (Meyerhold in Braun, 1998, p. 168).

77 The collection was issued in Kiev, in 1919 and included works from diverse writers, among which Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely, Maxim Gorky, and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

the post-Revolutionary theatre, depicted Vygotsky's excitement about the Revolution along with his belief in the power of theatre to drive the societal changes demanded by the new era. In the article, Vygotsky appeared passionate about the potential of theatre to drive the Revolution and displeased with the contemporary state of affairs between the theatre and the sociopolitical situation. To stress the theatre's lack of engagement with the October Revolution, Vygotsky compared the French theatre at the dawn of the French Revolution to its Russian counterpart. In France, Vygotsky noted, theatre served as a powerful voice for the spreading of Revolutionary ideas and helped inspire the essence of it. In contrast:

Not only did the Russian theatre offer nothing in this sense: in its creative aspirations it failed to reveal even the faintest hint of a feeling of that fatal, great, and terrible thing that was coming, that was already on the way, that was knocking at the door, and that which very soon escaped the limits of politics and engulfed all areas of the human life and the spirit's creativity. (Vygotsky, 2015, p. 86)

In the spirit of enthusiasm with the new potential of theatre, Vygotsky criticised the tendency of Russian artists to indulge in questions of aesthetic and artistic experimentation, overlooking the possibilities for social transformation that the theatre could achieve. Agreeing with the popular, among the Revolutionaries, belief that theatre was in a state of a crisis, Vygotsky rejected the aestheticism that characterised the theatre of the past, dismissing several artistic innovations, which failed to address the crisis of theatre. He also urged for a Revolutionary modernisation of theatre indicating the correlation between artistic/cultural and social Revolution. 1919, the year that Vygotsky wrote this article, had not yet witnessed the enormous effect that the Revolution would eventually have on both the content and the form of the theatrical productions. In it, however, Vygotsky made some predictions on the future of theatre; he envisioned a theatre, free of censorship and taboos, able to carry the proclamation of a political stance, a theatre that would abandon the traditional indoors stage and manifest itself on the public squares, embracing the very essence of its new audiences.

Staying true to his unique perspective that focused his studies on theatre's effect on its audience, Vygotsky attempted to illuminate the sociocultural background of the public groups that were becoming the new audience and mapped the ways in which the introduction of new societal groups would influence the development of theatre on the level of the repertoire. What is more, he aimed to examine how the changes in the sociocultural nature of the audience would influence the construction of new theatrical forms, placing in the composition of this new audience his highest hopes for the transformation of theatre. In the centre of

Vygotsky's article, and in his general approach to art as it developed in the following years, lies the belief that theatre holds transformative powers for the individual and his or her society. At a time when a fundamental societal change was commended and celebrated, Vygotsky's vision joined a multitude of voices that sought a theatre able to shape the new society and the new human being.

Theatre for the 'New Human Being'

The turmoil of Modernism challenged every facet of human life: people's relationship to their private life and the society, their political role in the world, and their connection with their spiritual dimension. The transformations occurring on all these levels, led to the emergence of the vision of a new human being, socially evolved and more advanced than the human of the past. This notion was deeply rooted in the Nietzschean concept of the Superman; however, with the coming of the October Revolution in Russia, the vision of the new human being was immediately connected to Marxist ideology. In the Bolshevik belief system, the new sociopolitical and economic era that started with the onset of the Revolution pointed towards the rise of a novel society, comprising modernised individuals—equal, educated, working and politically active.

The notion of a new human being, a socialist counterpart to the Nietzschean Superman, had become a central topic in the artistic investigations of many of the Avant-garde artists. In literature, the new human appeared as the 'positive hero'—the protagonist of each story who would embody the Bolshevik virtue and inspire the readers to act as an agent of social progress (Clark, 1985). Though the use of a hero that acts as a behavioural model for the society was not new to Russian literature, the coming of the Revolution seemed to replace "the static revolutionary martyr" that characterised the novel of the 19th century, with "a dynamic man of action" (Clark, 1985, p. 68).

In theatre, the Russian Futurist poets, among which were Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, envisaged a grandiose theatrical spectacle, in which strong dramatic personae would dominate over the past figures of power. The technological advances brought by the industrial revolution served as an essential point of inspiration for these artists. The Futurists' adoration for technology, however, is better understood in the context of the supremacy of the new futurist human.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Futurism, in Russia, presented some distinct differences with its European counterpart. In contrast to the Futurists in Europe, Russian Futurists turned against the World War and sided politically with the prevailing party of the Bolsheviks (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988).

Indeed, the human development in the socialist future was closely associated with the progress in the field of technology. Mechanisation appeared as the answer to the problem of bridging the educated classes of the city with the illiterate population living in rural Russia. Technology, in this light, was embraced as a medium of enlightenment and modernisation (Clark, 1985, p. 96).⁷⁹

The vision of an industrial utopia grew larger during the Five-Year Plan of Stalin, who aimed at unifying all industrial activity under one, scientifically designed, national model of industrialisation. The whole society, in this context, was envisioned as a large machine, the tuning of which lay in the hands of the government. In this vision, the new human being lost their autonomy and dynamism, with their role being gradually reduced to that of a gear. The aesthetic counterpart of these developments was the establishment of the Socialist Realist canon, which transformed the early Soviet 'man of action' to a 'little man', who submitted himself wholly to the needs of the society. Adhering to the general ethos that characterised Stalin's rule—one of extreme egalitarianism—this hero was subjected to de-individualisation to such a degree, that "he could be transplanted wholesale from book to book, regardless of the subject matter" (Clark, 1985, p. 47).⁸⁰

Nonetheless, in the transitional years between the Revolution and the beginning of Stalin's reign, the vision of the new human being spoke of physical and intellectual independence, freedom from the vague mysticism of the past, faith in the future, and the power to reconstruct society. The Revolutionary human was above all social, but their role did not resemble that of a gear in a machine; on the contrary, they were the creator of the machine. By mastering the knowledge of nature and of their own biology, the new humans were expected to transcend their limits and rise beyond the barriers of the past, and together rebuild their society. In Trotsky's words:

Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman. (Trotsky, 2005, p. 207)

79 Although fear of the technological age was often present among the intelligentsia that was not associated with the Bolsheviks, among most members of the Party and the artists associated with it, enthusiasm and hope for a mechanised society prevailed (Fitzpatrick, 2002).

80 The reaction to the 'little man' of early Socialist Realism brought forth new changes to the form that the new human of Russian Modernism would take; fantastic characters that posed as superheroes started appearing in literature, challenging the model of a level, well-regulated society. The image of the new human which evolved from the sociopolitical turmoil of the Russian Modernism changed once more, and it continued changing along with the development of the Soviet society (Clarke, 1985).

These changes in the very nature of humans were enabled on one level by the development of technology. However, technology alone was not sufficient in affecting such profound socio-psychological developments. It was culture, in general, and theatre, more specifically, that adopted that role. Indeed, politicians, artists, and theorists looked onto theatre as a vehicle that can communicate immediately and effectively the new historical circumstances and inspire the Revolutionary change within the souls of the individuals and the heart of the society alike. Trotsky, thus, argued about art's Revolutionary purpose and stressed its potential for inflicting change in human nature (Trotsky, 2005). His voice joined a multitude of approaches that denounced the theatre of mere entertainment and passive observation, and that advocated for a theatre of social purpose, dedicated to the creation of the new human being.

Vygotsky found in Trotsky a visionary of the new socialist reality, whose ideas on the role of art in the formation of the new human were worth spreading and developing. Indeed, in his scholarly work, Vygotsky would often use lengthy quotes from the Marxist Revolutionary to support his own prophetic views on how art could shape the new human being.⁸¹ Trotsky's belief in the profoundly transformative potential of art echoed with clarity in Vygotsky's conviction that "without new art there can be no new man" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 259). In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky stipulated that the evolution of the modern human would be caused by an inner, psychological growth that would take place on a broad social scale. Such a process, according to Vygotsky, would be guided and supported by art, "the supreme center of biological and social individual processes in society" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 259).

Vygotsky was convinced that art is not merely a derivative of life—biological, psychological, cultural—in any given society, but a discipline that stimulates, and facilitates the processes of social evolution. This belief remained in the heart of Vygotsky's thought from his early youth until his death. Indeed, he advocated theatre's ability to drive the social revolution in most of his texts that deal with art, starting as early as 1919, with the article he composed shortly after the October Revolution took place. In *The Psychology of Art*, he argued about the importance of art in bridging the individual psychological processes of people with the development of their society as a whole, declaring art as the essential component in the formation of the new Revolutionary society. In his later work in the field of psychology, this belief manifested itself in the development of his cultural-historical

81 Some publications of *The Psychology of Art*, including the English translation, appear to have omitted such references.

perspective. In all cases, culture was established as a mediator of individual and social development toward a higher plane of being.

The vision of such a development, the hope for the dawning of a new era, and the placing of the reins of the future in the hands of the arts—and, more importantly, theatre—all demonstrate the immense influence that the intellectual and artistic activity of the time had on the development of Vygotsky's thought. The Revolutionary thought as a whole, that sought the creation of a new human being and a new society, and the convictions of the artistic community, more specifically, who devoted their work to the fulfilment of art's social purpose, appear to have instilled in Vygotsky the mind-frame that characterised both his outlook on art and his mature work in the field of psychology.

The 'New' and the 'Old' Theatre

A common denominator between Vygotsky and the artists and the theorists, who appealed to the theatre to lead the social revolution, was the demand for the creation of new theatrical forms. In his 1919 article, and in his effort to point towards the form that the new, post-Revolutionary theatre would take, Vygotsky made a timely prediction. He envisioned a new type of theatre springing from the Revolution: a theatre that would liberate itself from the plays of the past—written for the stage and the concert hall—and that would establish itself in the open public spaces, the city squares and the streets (Vygotsky, 2015). With this prediction, Vygotsky addressed some major issues that arose with the sociopolitical changes brought forth by the Revolution and that engaged a significant number of theatre artists of the time: the newly formed notion of the masses, the relationship of the individual with the new social state, the importance of political engagement, and theatre's role in reflecting and facilitating these changes.

The questions concerning theatre's role as a bridge between the individual and the society, in Russia, dated back to the notion of theatre-temple envisioned by some Symbolists. With the coming of the Revolution, however, these questions acquired a political significance and led to the creation of mass culture and to attempts to create a theatre that would stress man's social nature. In this vision, the theatre of the past, that investigated humans' relationship to the divine, or to themselves, would be replaced by an artform which explored human's social function (Kolocotroni, Goldman & Taxidou, 1998). Vyacheslav Ivanov's vision of the theatrical festivals, expressed soon after the events of 1917, were characteristic of this trend. Ivanov, saw in the dawning cultural era an ideal opportunity for his visions

of a collective, synthesising theatre to replace the existing isolated art and promoted the organisation of theatrical events that supported the active participation of the audience. He also advocated the staging of traditional plays on large, outdoor, circular arenas, employing the narrative powers of music, architecture, and choreography (Bartlett, 1995). It was not long before such ideas, previously connected to a Wagnerian perspective, found fertile ground among the Russian artists and even the government representatives. The first Soviet People's Commissar of Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, for example, openly supported the productions of Wagnerian operas, considering Wagner to be an ideal Revolutionary artist—mainly, because of the latter's socialist visions in *Art and Revolution* (Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Following the Revolution, Wagner's populist ideas became a source of inspiration for many of the directors working in theatre, among which were Stanislavsky, Tairov, Meyerhold, and Vakhtangov (Bartlett, 1995).⁸² Yet, the most impressive realisations of the fantasies for a collective theatre in post-Revolutionary Russia was that of the mass festivals—or mass pageants—that became a popular trend during the early Bolshevik years, and bore the characteristics of the mass performances envisioned by Vygotsky.⁸³ Hundreds or even thousands of people participated in these large-scale spectacles, among which were workers, soldiers, and sailors, in some instances, serving simultaneously as actors and spectators. These massive events presenting a synthesis of arts “on a scale Wagner could never have dreamt of” (Bartlett, 1995, p. 233), were closely related to the Revolution, often drawing their thematics directly from the historical/political scene. Many of the spectacles re-enacted historical events that took place during the 1917 Revolution; others were structured to resemble parades and demonstrations, exhibiting placards with messages against the former masters of the world; some even staged mock trials which publicised the current political events (Wood, 2002). In all cases, the boundaries between the audience and the stage were broken, and the result was reminiscent of Ivanov's vision of communal ecstasy. In this case, though, it was the symbols of the Revolution and not the Dionysian symbols that served as the uniting point.

These developments heightened the social function of theatre and its potential to become a leading artform in a society where mass culture does not

82 Characteristic was Stanislavsky's belief that the collectivity in the creation and the reception of the theatre acts as one of the most potent powers of the artform (Stanislavsky, 1945).

83 These participatory political events were supported or even created by the Bolshevik government, while some of the most prominent artists of the time, were involved in their realisation—among them, Eisenstein and Evreinov.

downgrade art, but it gives it a special meaning (Geldern, 1998). The mass festivals combined a twofold significance: they became a common point of reference for the diverse audience, and they advanced the citizens' political engagement. The mass festivals responded with high efficiency to the need to reach the millions of illiterate spectators of the working class, which had become the target audience of the post-Revolutionary theatre. In that context, theatre's power as a political advisor became apparent, and was, thus, embraced by many of the Bolshevik leaders, who recognised its potential for education and propaganda (Clark, 1995). All the while, Avant-garde artists, and especially theatre directors, engaged in the excitement revolving around the mass gatherings and continued to mount theatrical productions in styles that emerged, in one way or another, from the Revolution, and blurred the lines between the aesthetic and the political.

The body that took the initiative for and orchestrated the vast majority of the mass pageants, and that urged most intensely for the creation of a Revolutionary theatre, was the artistic and cultural enlightenment organisation named Proletkult. Abbreviated from the words Proletarskaya Kultura (Proletarian Culture), Proletkult was formed in the period between the February and the October Revolutions and became a dominant organisation that included up to 400,000 members. Through the vigorous publication of journals and the active participation in the cultural life of their era, the leaders of the Proletkult promoted their ideas on the formation of a new theatre, fitting for a Communist society. These ideas defended the mass festivals, seeing in them the ideal prototype for the theatre of the future. The new theatre, for the Proletkult, would have wholly broken its ties to the past, and everything that represents it, including all classic literature, and the widespread theatrical practices of the indoor theatres (Fitzpatrick, 2002).

The will to gain as much distance as possible from the artistic past led many from the Proletkult to reject the total of the dramatic literature of the past and, as a result, to disregard the work of some of the major theatres of the country, which continued, after the Revolution to stage classic texts. In the heart of this disagreement concerning the relevance of the Russian literary heritage to the cultural advances of the time, which arose between the members of the Proletkult and the supporters of the academic theatres, lay an essential question: whether theatre should portray life, and to what degree. In their search for the purpose of art in the new social epoch, several Avant-garde artists demanded that art, and especially theatre, derives from the sociopolitical reality and portrays life as it was forming in this new era. This demand was tightly associated with excitement about theatre's role in the Revolution, and the efforts of many of the Avant-garde artists

demonstrated the quest for the discovery of a genuinely Revolutionary theatre.

Russian dramaturgs from the movements of Futurism, Expressionism, Constructivism, and eventually, Socialist Realism would draw their inspiration from the symbols of the Revolution and would create works that idealised and symbolised their newly found sociopolitical reality. Theatrical Futurism thrived through a dramaturgy that focused on villainising the men of power and idealising the struggles and the achievements of the common person. Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* depicted a biblical flood that 'cleansed' the Earth off its past, allowing only two small groups of people to survive: the 'Clean', representing the bourgeoisie, and the 'Unclean', who stood for the proletariat. A struggle between the two groups leads the Unclean to triumph and reclaim Earth. Less victorious but equally revolutionary are the peasants in Vasily Kamensky's "both folkloric and Futurist" drama, *Stenka Razin* (Leach, 2018, p. 58). The play resurrected the homonymous historical figure who, in 1670, led an uprising against the tsarist officialdom. The thematic closeness of two plays with the Revolution deemed them "the Revolution's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*" (Leach, 2018, p. 56).

Similarly, Russian theatrical Expressionism, in contrast to its European counterpart, glorified technology and depicted the crowds as strong masses standing in the way of a solitary hero, where the masses appeared as dynamic and victorious and the hero as a naïve idealist. Aleksei Tolstoi's *Mutiny of the Machines*, a free adaptation of Karel Čapek's *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, sided with the revolting androids, connecting their fight against their proprietors with the Revolutionary vision (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). The same shift towards the idealisation of the power of the masses was evident in the staging of German Expressionistic dramas. Characteristic is Meyerhold's staging of Ernst Toller's *Masse Mensch* that gave importance to the voices of the large crowds, which replaced the faceless masses of Toller's text. Placed within a highly industrial set, the crowd presented their case with urgency and a "sober morality" which contrasted with the "hypocritical morality" of the individual heroine (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 101).⁸⁴

The need to develop a new type of Revolutionary drama that would reflect the contemporary sociological status had its roots in the years before the Revolution. Indeed, the trend among many Avant-garde artists of turning against theatre's reliance on 'bourgeois literature' and distancing themselves from the 'high' art of the past was a characteristic of all of Russian Modernism. This gave rise, from

⁸⁴ European Expressionistic plays were turned upside down on the Russian stages and the dramas where in reality produced as Constructivist (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988).

as early as 1910, to “an antipathy among Russian theatrical innovators to all ‘literature’, including the classics—in fact against the written word in general” (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 10). This view sprang from a general sense, present throughout Modernism, that the dramatic literature of the past failed to keep up with the rapid developments of the time. The worlds and heroes depicted in those works did not resemble in any manner the everyday life in the pre or post-Revolutionary Russia; a fact that, according to many artists, made them foreign or even threatening, to the evolving social reality. This belief was responsible for some of the artistic experimentations of the Russian Avant-garde and, surviving well past the 1917 landmark it caused the birth of the artistic movement of Socialist Realism in the 1930s. The common denominators between these diverse dramaturgical eras were the demand for art to derive from and serve everyday life and the belief that ‘bourgeois literature’ is toxic for the state of the new society.

In contrast to these artists’ belief that a genuinely Revolutionary work of art must portray the socialist reality of the time, stood the conviction that art can or needs to distance itself from life. Artists and theoreticians of the latter opinion suggested that Revolutionary is the drama which inspires feelings of solidarity among the working men and empowers the proletariat regardless of its content in Revolutionary symbols. Both Vygotsky and Trotsky shared this view; Trotsky dismissed the ideas that regarded “only that art as new and Revolutionary that speaks of the worker” and “that the poets should describe inevitably a factory chimney, or the uprising against capital” (Trotsky, 2005, p. 144). Meanwhile, the vision of a drama that would serve its Revolutionary purpose without needing to resort to the propagation of the Revolution was supported by Stanislavsky who adhered to the foundational belief of the academic theatres that the essential goal of the theatrical art was to uplift the human spirit—that is, to provide the audience with a terrain on which an internal transformation will take place:

The time will come, and very soon, when a great play, a work of genius, will be written. It will, of course, be revolutionary. No great work can be anything else. But this will not be a revolutionary play in the sense that one will parade around with red flags. The revolution will come from something inside. We shall see on the stage the metamorphosis of the soul of the world, the inner struggle with a worn-out past, with a new, not yet understood or realized present. This will be a struggle for equality, freedom, a new life, and a spiritual culture, the extinction of war. (Stanislavsky, 1968, p. 201)

The government adopted a middle ground in the debates that arose concerning the use of the pre-Revolutionary plays. Though they supported the mass festivals, the Bolsheviks did not turn against the indoor or the professional theatre.

Lenin, himself, saw the mass festivals as a mere form of entertainment, not living up to the standards of high art, which he considered indispensable for the formation of a new society. The new Soviet government saw theatre as a force that could unify people of previously different classes and set a common cultural denominator for the total of the Russian population. It was within this context that the founder of the Kamerny Theatre, Alexander Tairov, criticised the cultural practices of the Proletkult, objecting to the idea of a theatre for the people and comparing it with a train that has different carts for people from different classes (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). The new, working class inclusive, audience, according to the views of some of the artists and political leaders, would not benefit solely from a theatre tailored to their political circumstances, but from their exposure to the total of the Russian culture.

The Soviet government, therefore, placed its hopes on the old theatres to restore what it considered the foundation of the Russian culture, making it accessible and relevant to the new audience. Indeed, both Lenin and Lunacharsky openly supported the academic theatres and their work of spreading the cultural wealth of the past, believing in the value of merging the spiritual richness of the pre-Revolutionary culture with the Revolutionary spirit (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). Indeed, the new theatrical audience seemed to be taking great advantage of their opportunity to enjoy the repertoire of the professional theatre, which included plays from the pre-Revolutionary period. In Stanislavsky's memoirs (1945), we find the description of the audience's reaction to a production of the *Cherry Orchard*, which illustrates the relationship of the new working class with such texts. The production took place shortly before the October Revolution in an atmosphere of nervousness. The company members feared that the audience would attack the actors staging a play that romanticised the class against which the people were preparing their revolt. However, the audience surprised the actors by indulging themselves in the performance: "It seemed to us that all of them wanted to wrap themselves in the atmosphere of poetry and to rest there and bid peaceful farewell forever to the old and beautiful life that now demanded its purifying sacrifices" (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 554).

Yet, it was not only the academic theatres that embraced the dramatic wealth of the past. A common vision among the artists of the time suggested the reinterpretation of pre-Revolutionary texts and the reimagining of their theatrical potential when staged. Thus, the new theatrical forms and styles, created under the umbrella of the Avant-garde, were applied not only to the new dramas but also to older texts. The theatrical experiments conducted in this context, and supported by the schools of Futurism, Expressionism, and Constructivism, led to some

remarkable theatrical innovations and to productions that enjoyed great success; among these were the productions directed by Meyerhold. His 1922 productions of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* and *Tarelkin's Death* embodied the Constructivist vision of three-dimensionality, functionality, and mechanisation. Liubov Popova's highly industrial, large moving set for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* and Varvara Stepanova's small constructions on the set of *Tarelkin's Death* combined with the actors biomechanical acting, creating highly Futuristic, stylised performances. The impact of Meyerhold's directorial work on the drama in his 1926 production of *The Government Inspector* went beyond theatricalisation. Meyerhold interpreted the text with great freedom, eliminating the comedic elements and presenting the drama as a tragedy. The text was deconstructed, parts of the original text were blended with excerpts from Gogol's other works, and the production presented an overall complex composition set on a colourful and dynamic set with moving platforms (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). In such successful cases, the plays, presented in new, Revolutionary ways, gained in sociopolitical context and became an effective means of reflection or commentary on the new reality.

However, in other cases, the enthusiasm about the changes brought by the Revolution acted as a distorting lens and trapped theatre practitioners in an unproductive impasse, that prioritised political compliance over artistic variation. In these instances, the increased emphasis on class and politics led to a trend that was soon named 'vulgar sociology'⁸⁵ and to rather schematic productions (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). In such cases the demand for theatre to represent the sociopolitical dimension of post-Revolutionary life was raised to dogma, thus counteracting the experimental nature of the Avant-garde. The maturation of this state would manifest itself in the canons of Socialist Realism which developed over the decade of the 1930s. Under the Stalinist conservatism, the radical experimentations with the theatrical form would become subdued and eventually eliminated. In its place, the establishment of a Communist canon predicated one ideal method of writing literature and creating theatre. Reminiscent of the work of medieval icon painters, who abided by very specific guidelines in the creation of their pieces, Socialist Realism canonised all creative aspects of theatre (Clark, 1985). Under the movement of Socialist Realism, the quest for a genuinely Revolutionary drama lost

85 The term 'vulgar sociology' or 'vulgar sociology' was widely used in the Soviet Union, since the 1930s, to describe a strict lens of class psycho-ideology. Found primarily in the history of cultural and literary criticism, the term carries a negative connotation and its practice is considered a simplistic and reductive application of Marxist method. As early as the 1920s, a 'vulgarised sociological' perspective in theatre would view all works of art as the propagators of the interest of a specific class, thus basing artistic criticism on the class of their creator and the sociological nature of the artwork's message (Bystrov, & Kamnev, 2019).

its meaning, and the artistic creation submitted itself to conformity and monotonous choices of content.

Vygotsky, who formed the majority of his views on art, at the threshold of the changes that accompanied the Revolution, agreed with the popular demand for art to be inspired by and serve the new cultural era; regarding the form of the new theatre he characteristically wrote: "one thing is clear [...] arising from reality and reaching toward it, art will be determined by the basic order of the future flow of life" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 259). Nonetheless, Vygotsky's theoretical construct stood in objection to the development of any type of artistic canons. In all of his writings on art, Vygotsky advocated the need for stylistic versatility and variety in the theatrical language. He believed that the essence of the aesthetic effect in theatre springs from the dynamic created between the form and the content of the dramatic piece; this dictated a uniqueness of both dimensions of the theatrical event. Under Vygotsky's perspective, the form of a work of art is created particularly for its content: "form in its full significance does not exist outside the material of which it consists" (Vygotsky, 1971, 60). Thus, the same form applied to a different content could not achieve any artistic effect; and the content of a piece of theatre, presented in any other way, would not yield the same aesthetic results. Similarly, any given content could not stand by itself: artistic tautonymy, according to Vygotsky, suggested that "to violate the combination of thoughts and words, that is, to destroy its form, is tantamount to destroying" the work of art (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 35). Therefore, any doctrine that evaluated a work of art based solely on its content (like those that only valued the dramas that demonstrated the Revolutionary symbols) or its form (like the canons of the Socialist Realism) would be opposed to Vygotsky's theoretical construction.

Vygotsky's theoretical perspective gave a whole new depth to the question of the relevance of the theatrical content to the historical, social reality. Vygotsky evaluated the theatrical productions of his time by examining the effects that the plays' content has had on the psychology of the contemporary human once it has been transformed by the artistic form. In consonance with his theory on the psychology of aesthetic reception, these effects, are manifested in the inner, emotional world of each audience member and work towards the developmental transformation of the incited emotions. Indeed, transformation was the key in art's function, according to Vygotsky:

The miracle of art reminds us much more of another miracle in the Gospel, the transformation of water into wine. Indeed, art's true nature is that of transubstantiation, something that transcends ordinary feelings; for the fear, pain, or excitement caused by art

includes something above and beyond its normal, conventional content. This 'something' overcomes feelings of fear and pain, changes water into wine, and thus fulfils the most important purpose of art. (Vygotsky, 1971, . 243)

Vygotsky, thus, approached the debates on the essentiality of the pre-Revolutionary dramas in the post-Revolutionary epoch from a dialectical viewpoint. He repeatedly expressed the belief that old text can have a profound and important effect on the contemporary psyche when writing his theatre critiques for the Gomel theatrical productions (Vygotsky, 2011, 2012a, and 2012b). What is more, his ongoing preoccupation with *Hamlet*, his admiration for Krylov's fables, and his deep belief that true art can affect people across time and cultures demonstrate Vygotsky's embrace of Russia's cultural heritage. Vygotsky, however, was not equally accepting of the work of the professional theatres of his time. He vividly described his opposition to the work of some of the most well-established theatres for their inability to engage with the new sociocultural era: "The old theatre decayed and died its own death. Only the great works of art stay alive; only art itself is eternal; artforms are born and die. Each era has its own theatre" (Vygotsky, 2015, p. 89).

Vygotsky demanded the creation of new forms, new styles of staging, that would replace the stagnant spectacles of the past. He advocated the creation of a theatrical language that would be appropriate to the new audience—a language inspired by the sociopolitical changes brought by the Revolution and that would help express the societal changes that this audience was undergoing. In his own words:

The new theatre is that, which will erupt out of the theatre's wings—that, which has never happened, but needs to happen, that, which is on its way and will come. It will not wait for plays-dictators, that dictate their staging. It will bring Shakespeare out of the rooms and onto the public square, as it will bring his magnificent hyperbole, his heroic style, the elevated, ceremonial dance of his actions, that dominate over the grandeur of the words, all this, monumental, designed not for the theatre of aestheticism; all this is excellent material for the new theatre, which will cross over from the bank of the indoor, domestic art, to the grand, nationwide art. This is the path on which theatre will lead the revolution. (Vygotsky, 2015, p. 90)

Vygotsky understood the Revolution as a force that would not reject the past but transform it. The same he envisioned for the theatre: the new forms, antithetical to the forms of the past, would help synthesise the new theatre. What Vygotsky expressed with these sentiments, in the above excerpt from his 1919 article, he would systematise in his 1924/5 monogram, *The Psychology of Art*. In the theory presented in this book, the dialectical synthesis of the form and the content of the drama—existing in an antithetical relationship—would be placed in the centre of the

mechanism of artistic creation and reception. To the contemporary debates on the form of theatre in the post-Revolutionary era, Vygotsky applied a similar mindset: the old plays—those that belong to the type of art that is eternal—would be transformed under the new forms into productions that are both inspired by and inspire the Revolution.

In Vygotsky's theoretical worldview, therefore, art's yielding to the Revolution could be observed, not in its content, but in the effect of that content on the individual's social psychology. Therefore, a drama written years or aeons before the Revolution could prove to be more Revolutionary than the dramaturgical efforts of his contemporaries. In this context, Vygotsky placed the greatest importance on the potential emotional effect of the dramaturgical material, which he believed to determine the relevancy of any drama, pre- or post-Revolutionary, to the reality of the time. This view distinguished Vygotsky's work in aesthetic psychology and continued to characterise his perspective in his later work in developmental psychology, where he elaborated on the "introspective consideration [refleskia] of old norms and relationships" (Sobkin, 2016a, p. 42) under the light of new influences.

Theatre Organising Life

Vygotsky envisioned theatre as a medium that would facilitate the psychological evolution of the society towards the new sociopolitical era—a vision that was rather popular in his time. Indeed, the concept of theatre serving as a laboratory for the development of the 'new' soul and the establishment of the Revolutionary social state, had sprouted from the enthusiasm about the potential that theatre presented in terms of public engagement, education, and propaganda, and was widely spread among the artists and theoreticians of the Avant-garde. The theoretical foundations of this vision were set to a large degree by the "Left Front of the Arts [Levyj Front Iskusstv]". The program, named originally "Theatrical October [Teatral'nyj Oktyabr]", was headed by Vladimir Mayakovsky and published its own journal, "LEF", which was subsidised by the Communist state. LEF promoted a series of Futurist ideas which were highly influential—though not always fully respected by its artist-members—and formed an attack on all previously achieved advances in the theatrical field. Their goal was to promote a dynamic art that would merge with life and, through this fusion, transform the old human being into the new Revolutionary person (Leach, 2018).

This aim was outlined by Sergei Tretyakov, who authored an article named

'From Where to Where?' for the first issue of *LEF*. The article traced the history of Futurism—accepting the criticism that the early movement had received with regard to its aestheticism—and anticipated its future as a means of organisation of life. In this sense, art was to be incorporated into daily life, undertaking a more utilitarian role, with the clear aim of affecting immediate and fundamental change. The estrangement and agitation of the audience was a principal means of inciting the envisioned reorganisation of thought and emotion. Tretyakov's own work was based on such destabilising techniques, which included the fragmentation of the narrative and the dynamic juxtaposition of unexpected associations. His drama *Roar China!* was a characteristic example of such writing and enjoyed great acceptance in its time. A similar effect was produced by "Futurism's wildest and most daring director" (Leach, 2018, p. 171), Igor Terentiev, who employed nonsensical and even offensive—scatological—vocabulary and imagery in order to provoke his audiences. Characteristic was his 1926 production of *Foxtrot*, that both fascinated and repulsed its audience. These agitational techniques were all based on the same theoretical premises that regarded the dialectics in artistic reception and had been stipulated by Eisenstein in his essay 'Montage of Attractions', which was published in the same journal in 1923.

Another way in which theatre aspired to effect a fusion with life was through the turn towards the everyday and the utilitarian. Rodchenko's, Popova's, and Stepanova's Constructivism turned its back to the romanticised and idealistic art, and created everyday, functioning objects that had a use in the real world. Similarly, Constructivist theatre founded itself on the reality of the working person and created systems of acting and staging that were tightly associated with the physical and psychological implications of the worker's life. The aim in many such cases was the propagation of Revolutionary ideas and the foundation of new social and technical skills necessary for the new class of workers to thrive. Meyerhold's biomechanics was the most notable such system that upheld—at least in part—the vision of theatre as a school of life.

Roughly in line with such practices were the high number of youth and amateur theatres that thrived during the same time. These theatres were born from the generalised demand for the involvement of vast numbers of non-artists in the production of art, following the belief that such active participation in the theatre would serve an educational purpose for the participants. A notable example was that of Mikhail Sokolovsky's TRAM (Leningrad Theatre of Young Workers), a large-scale amateur theatre created in the mid-1920s. Sokolovsky envisioned a theatre that would portray the life of the young workers and, through the theatrical action, help

reorganise it, “introducing correctives into reality, amending and improving it” (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 203).

However, the submission of theatre to the education of the working class posed a problem as such productions were characterised by low artistic quality and lack of professionalism. As a matter of fact, the amateurism that was evident in some of the spectacles of the mass pageants and Sokolovsky’s theatre led many professionals to criticise such attempts as dilettante and often inadequate (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988). Sokolovsky brought the TRAM movement to an end in 1928, when he gave in to the realisation that amateurism was not sufficient and yielded his theatre to the experience of the professionals. The sacrifice of the aesthetic quality for the benefit of the participation of the working class became too high of a price to pay for the TRAM theatre, as well as the numerous smaller amateur theatres that flourished in the same period, and soon the reins of theatrical exploration were passed back to the professional groups.

The professional theatre continued exploring the prospects for the utilisation of the powerful and socially inclusive means of theatre for the re-forming of life and the reconstruction of the social reality. Nikolai Evreinov had expressed a strong ideology on the transformation of life through theatre as early as 1912 (Evreinov, 1973). Similarly, the Constructivists advocated the creation of widely accessible aesthetic forms that would lead to the development of the new consciousness desired by the Revolution. According to the Constructivist beliefs, the new human being would be formed “if one applied ‘scientific’ laws to man’s behavior patterns at home and in the workplace so that in his every movement he might live the maximally rationalized and simultaneously collectivized and aestheticized existence” (Clark, 1995, p. 51). Theatre, in this respect, became a pseudoscientific laboratory for the study of human physical behaviour and the development of the new physical and psychological being.

Towards this goal, physicality acquired a distinguished position. The studies of movement in sports, in the arts, and in the workplace were all merged to serve the theatricalisation of life and the creation of a new sociopolitical consciousness (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017). The period that followed the Revolution saw a series of studies in the management of the physicality of labour, such as the works of Frederick Winslow Taylor, Eadweard Muybridge, and Etienne-Jules Marey (Ziada, 2011). The adaptation of such practices by professional theatre makers gave birth to numerous performance methods that, applied to life, would serve a social, utilitarian role: through these systems, the Leftist theatre assumed the responsibility to teach workers how to move their bodies with safety and efficiency. What is more, it would

promote the image of the new Revolutionary human being as they emerged from the idealisation of the working class.

Meyerhold's biomechanics, a system that was the product of his efforts to create a method for the instruction of acting that fitted his vision of theatre, was probably the most important and influential of such studies. Meyerhold envisioned a theatre nude and dynamic, where the actor would sculpt his body into forms inspired by the reality of the working class and the ideals of the Revolution. In June 1922, while introducing a demonstration of a series of exercises in biomechanics by his students, Meyerhold characteristically exclaimed:

In the past the actor has always conformed to the society for which his art was intended, In the future, the actor must go even further in relating his technique to the industrial situation. For he will be working in a society where labour is no longer regarded as a curse but as a joyful, vital necessity. (Meyerhold in Braun, 1979, p. 165-6)

Meyerhold, thus, formed his biomechanics as a training system that led the actor to acquire through physical practice the knowledge and the expertise of the staged actions. This mirrored closely the basis of the scientific study of biomechanics—that is, the mechanics of movement of the human body—which, in Russia, aimed at the physical training of the workers towards mechanically and physiologically efficient movement at the workplace.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to stress that Meyerhold's system of biomechanics did not intend to equate the effects of art with those of other domains of life, as the most extreme Leftist doctrines dictated. On the contrary, Meyerhold created a theatre that emphasised its conventionality and its distinction from life, since he believed that "art and life are governed by different laws" (Meyerhold in Braun, 1998, p. 147). This distinction was crucial, for it allowed Meyerhold to serve with his training method artistic and not utilitarian goals. This stance against the Leftist doctrine that wanted to equate the natures of art and life was in the heart of Vygotsky's approach to art. Vygotsky based his theory on the premise that "the artistic truth does not coincide at all with the truth of life" (Vygotsky, 2012a, p. 223) and dedicated his book on the development of a method that would study art as a distinct area of human individual and social behaviour—a system with its own internal laws.⁸⁶

Vygotsky's psychological viewpoint dictated that art, though it rises from life, must distance itself from it, as art's function is to help release "an aspect of our

⁸⁶ Trotsky had also expressed similar oppositions to the Leftist theories that fused art with life: "Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes. [...] But for art to be able to transform as well as to reflect, there must be a great distance between the artist and life, just as there is between the revolutionist and political reality" (Trotsky, 2005, pp. 120-1).

psyche which finds no expression in our everyday life” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 244). Through art, according to Vygotsky, one is invited to experience those aspects of themselves that it would be impossible to do so outside the realms of imagination. Vygotsky agreed that in the dawning socialist reality theatre’s role would be to facilitate the psychological and cultural advancements necessitated by the historical times. However, he believed that this function could only be fulfilled by a theatre sensitive to the internal pressures experienced by the men and women of the Revolution; by a theatre that represents the inner psychological reality of the post-Revolutionary Russia.⁸⁷ This belief places Vygotsky in opposition to the Leftists doctrines that reduced theatre’s role to an immediately utilitarian one.

Another point of disagreement between Vygotsky’s view and the most radical Leftist notions is found in the latter’s insistence for the participation of the audiences in the theatrical events. This form of involvement was far away from Vygotsky’s understanding of the purposefulness of art. In his view, the benefits that derive from one’s exposure to art are directed by the aesthetic experience—a highly complex process of perception, processing, and response, that takes place entirely on the mental level. What is more, according to Vygotsky’s psychological scheme for the aesthetic experience, artistic catharsis can only be achieved once the individual’s imagination has been activated. The psychological rule of emotional inhibition, on which Vygotsky based his observations, dictates that in order to express the emotion that arises during an aesthetic experience through the imagination, the route of physical expression must be inhibited. Consequently, Vygotsky’s portrayal of an audience member in an effective artistic event shows a physically inactive individual, who perceives the staged acts without resorting into action, and responds to that input on a psychological level. Of course, Vygotsky believed that “a work of art is not apprehended by an utterly passive individual, and not just by the eyes and the ears, but through unimaginably complex interior activity in which listening and looking are only the first step, the first impetus, the elemental impulse” (Vygotsky, 1926). His definition of the process of artistic reception, nonetheless, shows the necessity for theatre to distance itself from the actions of daily life while clearly distinguishing the world of the stage from that of reality.

This vision of theatre complied with the views of prevailing artists who

87 Speaking of the conflict between the old individualistic and the new collectivist world, for example, Lunacharsky wrote: “Such is the basis of each world: on the one hand, the communisation of the labour process and its specific ambassador—the united proletariat, and on the other, the individual appropriation of the products of labour with its representative—the bourgeois capitalist. But for the artist, much more important is the internal process that takes place here—the struggle in the soul of man and in the soul of humanity that lives by two principles - individualism and collectivism” (Lunacharsky, 1908, p. 17). The excerpt is translated by myself.

sought to incite strong emotional reactions, rather than actions, from their audiences. The advocates of the 'rightist' theatre (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988), artists like Stanislavsky and Tairov, sought to preserve the cultural tradition and bridge it with the new epoch. Their views regarding the nature of the audience's involvement followed the traditional model that separated the actors from the audience by an invisible 'fourth wall'. As such, they stood in opposition with the most extreme Leftist practices, who envisioned a theatre with an immediate effect on an active, participating audience. Stanislavsky characteristically believed it "much more worthwhile not to have the public make a noise and shout, but to have them undergo a more lasting influence, to have impressions sink deep into their hearts, take root and remain forever a part of their being" (Stanislavsky, 1968, p. 129). This statement lies in agreement not only with Vygotsky's profile of the spectator, but with his overall aesthetic theory.

Nonetheless, Vygotsky's view does not oppose the work of all Leftist artists. Many Futurists, including Meyerhold, upheld the maxim of the demolition of the 'fourth wall' and pushed to various extremes the relationship between stage and auditorium, by challenging—or even offending—the spectators' emotions, inciting them to action, or expecting their participation. Leach (2018) describes a characteristic scene from Meyerhold's 1923 production of *The World Upside Down*, where automobiles and cyclists would run through the auditorium to reach the stage and an orderly would carry the Emperor's used chamber pot through the audience "to the screams and guffaws of the spectators" (Leach, 2018, p. 100). Yet, in these artists' hands these devices served more of an artistic, rather than a utilitarian purpose. In contrast to the beliefs that founded the numerous youth and amateur theatres, the interactive element of these performances did not aim to educate or train the audience. Their success was not measured by the immediate arousal of the spectators, or their ideological response, but from the audience's specific aesthetic response, which was understood as a much more complex process. This is why productions like those of Meyerhold were also rich in emotional tension. In this respect, Vygotsky's, Stanislavsky's, and Meyerhold's voices converge in the recognition of theatre as a distinct part of life, the domain of which lay in the inner world of thoughts and emotions.

In all cases, theatre was valued as a platform for the experimentation with the new socialist reality and as a means for the facilitation of the transition of the Russian citizens to the new era of social life. Vygotsky owes his perspective on theatre to such developments: like many of his contemporaries, he cultivated a strong belief that theatre could and ought to invoke the social and cultural revolution

and facilitate the evolution of the Revolutionary human being. What is more, these beliefs were carried in the development of Vygotsky's work as a psychologist, a work that focused on the cultural-historical influence on the development of the individual. On the other hand, refined through his distinct perspective as a psychologist, Vygotsky's theoretical approach to theatre added a level of depth and objectivity to these debates. As the next chapter will demonstrate, his focus on the psychological effect of theatre and his appreciation of the complexity of the processes of human development offered Vygotsky a unique standpoint for the investigation of the role and the effect of theatre on the society. This perspective not only reflected the most prominent, at the time, understandings of the issue but informed them and, at specific situations, offered solutions to their problems.

Chapter Six: Theatre's Effect on Its Audience: Theatrical Experimentations and Theories of Reception

The cultural developments that characterised the Russian Avant-garde heightened the role of theatre in the transformation of man and society. Under this light, the question of theatre's effect on its audience gained a heightened significance and artists and theorists alike eagerly engaged with attempts to decipher the implications of the various theatrical elements for the audience. Vygotsky's monograph—and his urging for the development of a methodologically sound approach to the study of the aesthetic processes (Vygotsky, 1971)—came as a response to this rising interest.

Yet, what Vygotsky performed as a thought experiment was already under investigation by the artists' practical endeavours. The theatrical practices of Russian Modernism experimented with a series of vital aspects of theatre, pertaining to the effect of the performance on its audience. This activity challenged the traditional understanding of such aspects, among which were the relationship between the actors and the audience, the role of the emotion in a performance, and the methods and approaches to acting, directing, and appreciating a performance. The experiments conducted by the Russian Modernist artists and their theoretical justification drew on the popular scientific and philosophical theories of the time and thus reflected the controversies that characterised those fields, while adding an ideological connotation to them. This chapter places Vygotsky's perspective on the aforementioned aspects of theatre among this activity and illustrates how the multidisciplinary nature of his research and the dialectical character of his thought helped him overcome the controversies and the impasses of the theoretical foundations shared by many of the theatre makers of the time.

Theatricality

The Avant-garde artists' desire to control and navigate their work's impact on the audiences led them to pay special attention to the artistic means of theatre—that is, the unique set of stylistic elements and methods that theatre employs in order to affect its audience. In view of the fact that the Avant-garde artists developed their particular styles with the aim of inciting and facilitating Revolutionary change in the audiences, theatricality—that is, the formal elements of a theatrical performance—became of paramount importance in the theatrical experimentations of the time. Yet, the movement of theatricalisation—a more general phenomenon which heightened

theatricality and stylisation—characterised the wider period of the first three decades of the 20th century. Indeed, the turn to theatricalisation was part of a general shift towards theatricality that characterised the artistic activity of Russia, and Europe as a whole, a shift that affected all aspects of theatre.⁸⁸ In Russia, the amplification of the artistic elements of theatre and the stylisation of the performances gained an essential importance in the Modernists' attempt to move away from the realistic portrayal of life and reconstruct the theatrical form. This section will explore the significance of theatricality for the theatrical activity of the Russian Modernists, placing within this context Vygotsky's understanding of form.

In Modernist Russia, the specific character of such stylisation derived from each practitioner's ideological scope; nonetheless, the general movement of the theatricalisation of theatre bore some common features. Among them was the turn to theatricality, which sprung from the rejection of representation, as it appeared in theatrical Realism. With it, the artists turned against European humanism which characterised the dramaturgy of the past and renounced its individualistic philosophical basis (Clayton, 1993). The highly stylised theatre also attempted to resolve theatre's dependency on the text. By promoting a series of action-based genres, the artists attempted to gain independence from the authoritative world of literature, while, simultaneously, provoking a fresh relationship between the theatrical creator and the audience—a relationship forged in the moment of the theatrical event. Indeed, through experimentation with theatricality, the artists placed great importance on removing the gap between stage and auditorium. Last, the creators of the stylised theatre based their performances on the belief that the activation of the spectator's imagination was crucial for a fruitful reception of the theatrical production. Therefore, and in contrast to the Naturalistic tendency to recreate on stage all details of life, the stylised theatre provided the audience with only that, which is necessary to stir their imagination. In this way, the spectator was free to superimpose "his own imagined or remembered experiences on the events enacted before him" (Braun, 1979, p. 79).

This quest for the theatricalisation of theatre led the artists towards the

88 In architecture, besides the utilisation of the ancient Greek and Roman amphitheatres that had begun with the development of the theatre festivals and the work of Max Reinhardt, brought huge scale productions in stadiums and circus tents, breaking the long-established association of European theatre with the Italian stage. In terms of acting methods and the aesthetics of the set, the works of Edward Gordon Craig in England - highly influenced by the sets of Adolphe Appia - and Vsevolod Meyerhold in Russia as well as the theatre of Yevgeny Vakhtangov, shifted the artistic and perceptual values of theatre from the text to the visual and performative elements of the production, thus, freeing the actor and the audience from the traditional dependence to the text. While the development of Expressionism in Germany, with its exaggerated emotion, gesture, and sets, all pointed to a general effort to distance theatre from the conservative concepts of Naturalism and stress its formal elements.

traditional folk street spectacle and the imported genre of *Commedia dell' arte*, as well as Oriental theatrical forms.⁸⁹ Russian Modernists were fascinated with street theatre, the circus and clown, the pantomime and the puppet theatre, the mini-drama (spread to Russia from Germany through the cabaret), and the grotesque elements of the Russian masked ball or masquerade (Clayton, 1993). The *Balagan*, a genre that combined many elements of the above styles, “was to be the dominant theatrical form of the 1920s” (Clayton, 1993, p. 74). These genres, with their strong improvisational element, and their similarity to public processions, “extended the proscenium into the auditorium and, in turn, merged the ivory tower of the studio with the communality of the street” (Bowlit, 2016, p. 211). What is more, the characteristic element of improvisation of *Commedia dell' arte* and the pantomime, symbolised for Russians the freedom of theatre from the bourgeois literature of the past, while giving its audience a sense of participation in the creative process. Yet, the greatest defiance of the humanistic values in the Russian Modernist theatre are observed in the import of elements from Eastern theatre as “oriental artistic modes presented the ultimate dehumanized art form” (Taxidou, 1998, p. 82). These styles provided Russian artists with a highly abstract and stylised vocabulary, which stood in opposition to the Realism of the past.

The theatrical experimentations conducted by the proponents of a stylised theatre, who inserted forms from all the above genres into the theatrical language of the time, challenged every aspect of the Realistic theatre: architecture, costumes, lighting, and acting. The common aim of the spectacles produced during this era was to stress theatre’s distinction from reality and to highlight the primacy of style over all the elements of the production (Clayton, 1993, p. 49). The resulting performances had great appeal to the public. The audience members found it easier to connect with a spectacle that was based on physical movement, contained stock characters recognisable by their mask, and was filled with folk references, rather than deciphering the nuances that characterised the imported genres of the dramatic art (Bartlett, 1995, p. 249).

In these spectacles, the dramatic text lost its centrality, and the director became the real author of the production. Indeed, it was common among the Futurists for the director to interpret the dramatic text with freedom, often moving far

89 Braun suggests that the resort to these genres developed from the social disengagement paired with the opposition to psychological Realism that characterised Petersburg’s artists for a short period before the Revolution. Before aspects of these genres passed into the Russian theatre as elements of style, the preoccupation with them expressed an escapist tendency. This disposition was not uncommon at the time: “it was an escapism that took many paths: to the exotic, the archaic, the mystical, the supernatural, even the coyly pornographic” (Braun, 1979, p. 120).

from the author's original intentions. This dismissal of the author's work derived from the fact that these artists were more occupied with the development of a particular style of theatre, rather than the staging of specific literary styles. For such artists, the dramatic author would ideally provide nothing more but some basic material on which the actor can improvise, as with the *Commedia dell'arte*. Meyerhold's 'theatre of the straight line' was a characteristic example of such treatment of the dramatic text. When directing, Meyerhold would sketch specific parameters for the style and the spirit of each scene of a play and then he would allow his actors to improvise in search of their personal way of expressing the essence of the scene. After, he would judge the outcome in relation to its style, its rhythm, and its atmosphere and make the necessary suggestions (Leach, 2003, p. 55). In this manner, the director was the creator of the style of the production and his role was to ensure that all of its elements complied with the set stylistic line. This function gave him control over the ways in which the performance would affect its audience.

The director, however, relied heavily on the actors, who, most times, and due to the improvisational character of the theatrical styles employed, would become the co-author of the production. Therefore, the directors of the stylised theatre placed great importance to the formation of a well-trained and well-integrated group of actors, whose role was to submit their expressive means to the style of each piece. Of course, the investigations in acting techniques and the development of acting pedagogies were not specific to stylised theatre; Stanislavsky's acting method is an explicit sign that a proper acting technique was paramount for the creation of his Realistic and later Symbolic theatre: "In order to express the most delicate and largely subconscious life it is necessary to have control of an unusually responsive, excellently prepared vocal and physical apparatus" (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 14). However, in contrast to Stanislavsky's 'Spiritual Realism', the stylised theatre used the actor's well-trained body and voice to illustrate not their inner world but the overall style of the production.

The Constructivist movement, which emerged in conjunction with the Revolution, adopted the techniques of the highly stylised theatre—developed from the start of the century—and bridged them with the ideological scope of Communism, at least in the way that the movement's artists interpreted it. Under the direction of the Constructivists, all elements of theatre—the visual design, the dramatic text and the music, the acting methods, and the ways in which actors and audience members would relate, all became highly formalised in an effort to express and inspire the sociological and historical shifts of the time. These shifts required that "the new culture, like its political superstructure, will be transnational, classless,

industrial, highly selective of bourgeois and feudal achievements, democratic and unashamedly tendentious” (Bowlit, 2016, p. 213). Therefore, in their theatrical endeavours, the Constructivists highlighted the collective, the eccentric, the grotesque, and even the mechanical, all of which stressed function over Realism. In Meyerhold’s words:

There must be no pauses, no psychology, no ‘authentic emotions’ either on the stage or whilst building a role. Here is our theatrical programme: plenty of light, plenty of high spirits, plenty of grandeur, plenty of infectious enthusiasm, unlaboured creativity, the participation of the audience in the corporate creative act of the performance. (Meyerhold in Braun, 1998, p. 170)⁹⁰

Part of these developments was the emergence of a new type of actor. Free from the heavy Realistic sets, this actor relied on their physical movement and their voice to express and convey meaning. On the new, bare stages this actor was “on his own, and if he succeeded it was because he employed all his own potential” (Leach, 2003, p. 61). Under these circumstances, the development of a novel acting style and its corresponding technique became a major point of interest. In their endeavours to reimagine acting, the Constructivist directors turned to the primitive, vital forms of the street theatre. In those, they found a formal language, and a heightened physicality—often stretched to the grotesque—which fitted so well with their aesthetic perspective. In their theatrical experiments the Constructivists bestowed these characteristics with their own values of collectivism, materialism and the stressing of function, as it derived from the art of manufacture and industrial productivity. One characteristic example of such stylised acting systems was Nikolai Foregger’s system of physical theatre—an experiment that “pleased the avant-garde but bored the paying spectators” (Leach, 2018, p. 114), due to its scholastic care of precision and tempo, which turned the actor’s body into a well-tuned machine. Similar was Boris Ferdinandov and Vadim Shershenevich’s metro-rhythmics system, which accentuated the actor’s movement within the integrated whole composed by the rhythm of the music, the architecture of the stage and the set, and the dynamic environments created by the lighting (Leach, 2018).

Probably the most influential system of stylised acting to this day was Meyerhold’s biomechanics, which developed gradually over the director’s career. The system introduced functionalism in acting, basing itself on the belief that all actions are motivated from external stimuli, and relying on set gestures which the

⁹⁰ From Meyerhold’s speech at the opening of the ‘R.S.F.S.R. Theatre No. 1’, founded soon after the Revolution and ordered to a close by the government due to the economic struggles of 1921.

actors learnt and developed to a point of near perfection. Under the system's techniques, the actors would resemble a machine that has a predictable reaction to its external stimulation. This allowed the director to 'choreograph' the actor's actions and reactions on the stage. What is more, the expressive gestures were often "distributed across an array of bodies instead of being intensified in a single actor's body" (Ziada, 2011, p. 200). This sharing of movements became an agent of collectivism—a stance that characterised the sociopolitical ideals brought forth by the Revolution.

In the development of their techniques all the above directors employed a series of scientific theories and premises that pointed towards the efficacy of their art in its social purpose, in contrast to the art of the past. These theories, originating from the fields of psychology, physics, and kinesiology,⁹¹ were, nonetheless, used uncritically, and often reductively, and their connection to the acting techniques was exaggerated. This served the artists in their effort to prove that they devised their systems "in response to the demands of the new machine age", and in contrast to the "unscientific and anachronistic" (Braun, 1979, p. 168) systems of the past. Meyerhold's adaptation of the term 'biomechanics', which originated as the scientific study of the mechanics of the human body in movement, was characteristic of the trend of applying a pseudoscientific terminology in the arts. Similarly reductive was his borrowing of algebraic formulations in order to describe the relations of the constituent elements of movement (Leach, 2003, p. 143).

Yet, Meyerhold created theatrically profound productions and opened with his system a dynamic dialogue between the theatrical form and the ideological scope of the Revolutionary spirit. Meyerhold, as with many of his contemporaries, sought an aesthetic form that would abandon its decorative purposes and would find its inspiration in the vulgarity of the worker's life. These artists believed that "the art of manufacture is more important than any tediously pretty patterns and colours" (Meyerhold in Braun, 1979, p. 157). The forms that they created were closely associated with the industrial life and their methods reflected a materialistic philosophy. Yet, the aesthetic result, with its simplicity and its directness was provocative of the audience's imagination and creative participation. In this context, the Constructivists were able "to produce something which is completely unreal, completely of the imagination, yet is completely rooted in and concerned with the real world" (Leach, 2018, p. 165).

This convergence of the Revolutionary reality and the artistic imagination

91 Some of the most influential theories were Taylorism and Pavlovian Reflexology (Sirotkina & Smith, 2017).

was deeply embedded within the Constructivist theatrical forms. In this context, the meaning of the theatrical event became equivalent to its artistic style. The Constructivists' enthusiasm for the development of such novel forms gave birth to some extraordinary theatrical experimentations. The application of the Constructivist credo 'function determines form' in theatre stripped the stages from everything decorative and transformed the sets into three-dimensional, moving constructions that expanded and simultaneously determined the movement of the actors and blended with their bodies to create a unified visual and physical rhythm. These constructions varied from enormous, functioning machines—like Popova's famous set for Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, and Aleksandr Vesnin's elaborate structure for Tairov's 1923 production of *The Man Who Was Thursday*—to functioning objects that accentuated the actor's movement—like in Vladimir Tatlin's *Zangezi* (1923), where the stage was "transformed into a kind of trampoline wherein kinetic bodies intertwine with abstract volumes" (Bowlit, 2016, p. 214) and Stepanova's apparatus for Meyerhold's production of *Tarelkin's Death*. The maxims of functionality and efficiency also affected acting and directing. Constructivists stressed technique over emotion and organised the craft of acting in new effective systems, with Meyerhold's biomechanics forming the most influential example. Under the movement's directors the productions became highly stylised, exposing of theatre's conventionality, and exceptionally efficient in causing immediate and profound impressions. This effect of theatre became the outmost goal of the Constructivist directors, who sought the most efficient ways to shock, estrange, and agitate their spectators. This effort was most famously embodied in Eisenstein's theoretical and practical model of the 'montage of attractions'. All the above explorations of theatrical form added to the multiformity and vitality of the Russian Avant-garde theatre.

Nonetheless, Constructivism also developed a series of dogmas, becoming, at times, "raucous, abrasive, unforgiving of deviation and, ultimately, dictatorial" (Bowlit, 2016, p. 213). In its most extreme forms, the Constructivist demand for the theatrical production to mirror the production of material goods appeared as highly eccentric and even ludicrous. Whereas the eagerness to achieve the highest possible level of efficiency in the fulfilment of the social purpose of theatre disregarded many intrinsic aesthetic aspects of theatre. Sergei Eisenstein, who, for a period of time, subscribed to the movement, developed his notion of the 'montage of attractions' in such an effort to create a materialist and highly efficient theatre. The result was, at least in theory, highly eccentric and simultaneously simplistic:

If the theatre, like a factory, were reduced to its essential, productive

elements, what would be left? For Eisenstein, only those features that cause emotional or ideological reactions in the spectator. Those shocks, or 'attractions'—not the plot, language, dramatic interactions, etc.—held the key to the new ideological art. (Law & Gordon, 2012, p. 81)

Essentially, Eisenstein's theory on the 'montage of attractions' dismissed the greatest part of every piece of the dramatic literature of the past, salvaging only those few moments that made an immediate emotional, mental, or political imprint on the spectator. The focus on performative moments that aimed at such an immediate and one-dimensional effect on their audience characterised a great part of the Constructivist theatre, as well as the Russian Futurist theatre as a whole. Many of the productions, which derived from such an ideological standpoint and aimed at shocking, or even estranging the audience, were criticised as unintelligible (Leach, 2018).

Vygotsky's theory also appears contrary to the dogmatism of the Constructivist movement: in Vygotsky's view, the undermining of the complexity and multidimensionality of theatre and the equation of its ultimate transformative power with the short-term excitement of the spectator, reduces theatre to an—undeniably effective—podium for the dissemination of political ideas to the public, and it robs it from its deep psychological function. Ironically, the Bolshevik government, for the benefit of which much of the Constructivist theatrical activity was performed, was not pleased with the support of such artists "fearing that their uncompromising brutalist vision of the new mechanised age might prove insufficiently beguiling for the masses" (Braun, 1979, p. 148).

Nonetheless, the majority of the artists that abided by the movement of Constructivism would follow the established rules loosely and many of them, including Eisenstein, would eventually renounce them. Through these artists, Constructivism produced a series of successful theatrical productions that assisted in the development of highly influential theatrical forms and acting methods. A great example is Meyerhold's major Constructivist production, *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), that employed strong Constructivist visual, verbal, and acting forms. Along with all of Meyerhold's 1920s productions, *The Magnanimous Cuckold* was simultaneously highly technical and efficient and exceptionally moving (Leach, 2018). The production enjoyed great success at the time and became a hallmark for Meyerhold's acting system of biomechanics. Another example of a strong Constructivist was Eisenstein's 1923 staging of Ostrovsky's comedy *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man*; besides its profound circusisation, the play was staged as a 'montage of attractions' with the clear aim of "aggressively" shocking the

spectator and then lead them towards an “ultimate ideological conclusion” (Eisenstein, 1974, p. 78). Though the production was mildly received by his contemporaries (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988), when Eisenstein applied the same technique on his 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*, the result was highly acclaimed.

In the above cases, the Constructivist guidelines were never seen as an end in themselves; they were aesthetic means in order to achieve a particular effect, which then served its specific role in the larger scheme of the production. According to the beliefs of the Constructivist artists, the aesthetic-cum-material environments that they created could facilitate the development of the human behaviour, which was, under their lens, ‘scientifically’ objectified, collectivised, and eventually aestheticised (Clark, 1995). This scheme stood in line with the shared vision of the Avant-garde theatre, which assigned a pivotal role to theatre in the development of a new human being. Thereby, the Constructivists came closer than any other Futurist movement to Revolutionising the theatrical form—that is, reimagining theatricality under the direction of the Revolutionary vision for a new human era.

Under these developments, the notion of theatrical form gained a much more significant and holistic character than it had before. For Stanislavsky, for example, form referred to the technical means that the actors employ in order to express the inner world of their characters and achieve a lifelike performance; such means are the actors’ diction, intonations and pauses, the plasticity and rhythm of their movement, and the tempo of their speech (Stanislavski, 2014a&b). For the Formalists, on the other hand, the notion of form encompassed not only the technical but also the structural elements of a production, and it was seen as representative of the artwork’s meaning to the expense of its content. Eventually, this distinction between form and content, and the favouring of one over the other, was overcome through the experiments of the Russian Futurists.

The Russian Futurist movement owed much to Formalism. In many cases, “theatricality in itself could be seen as the equivalent of the formalism that characterizes more literary expressions of Modernism” (Innes, 2011, p. 146). That is to say, with the welcoming of theatricality, theatre became the canvas on which the innovations of Formalism were applied, experimented with and developed. The theatrical experimentations that were inspired by such a view of theatricality—and that were conducted by diverse and prevailing directors such as Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Foregger, and Tairov—placed the greatest importance on the artistic form. In the most extreme cases, including some Constructivist theatrical endeavours, the favouring of form over content led to productions vulnerable to

negative criticism.⁹² Such a commentary would note the reduction of theatre to the external elements of its spectacle and the superficiality of its expressive elements (Mal'cev, 2012).⁹³ Yet, as Vygotsky observed, the theoretical foundation of Formalism was overthrown by the theatrical practice of the Futurists, who created works based on strong plots and often traditional themes:

Here, as always, we check the theory of art against its practice. Practical outcroppings of the ideas of formalism were the early ideology of Russian futurism, the propagation of abstruse language, the absence of plots, etc. We see that practice has led futurists to loudly repudiate all they had asserted in their manifestoes on the basis of theoretical assumptions. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 56)

In reality, it was because of this discrepancy between theoretical credos and artistic practice, that Russian Futurism achieved the creation of theatrical forms that surpassed their Formalist origins and encompassed the multidimensional views of art under the influence of the sociopolitical changes of the time. And it was in this context that Vygotsky's views—as he expressed them at the dawn of the Revolution—predicted the evolution of the theatrical form by the Futurists, as an agent of development of the individual and the society.

Vygotsky described the artistic form as the structural reimagining of the content. Under his definition, the formal treatment of the content aims at transforming it into a device with significant aesthetic-psychological effects. Vygotsky linked these effects, caused by the formal treatment of a theatrical production, to the social function of theatre. This led him to advocate, at the dawn of the Revolution, the development of new theatrical forms which would bear the Revolutionary ideals and would facilitate the social psychological changes required by the new era. In this context, Vygotsky's understanding of the transformative power of the form reflects the Futurists' notion of theatricality; not as it appeared in its beginning, devoid of social purpose and distanced from life, but as it eventually prevailed, engaged with the social shifts and able to augment and transform life itself.

92 Characteristic is the audience's response to the experiments of Foregger, Ferdinandov and Shershenevich, that are discussed earlier. The Futurist demands for complexity, abstraction, and formality characterised these productions, leading to results that were deemed monotonous or incomprehensible (Leach, 2018). Another example is Eisenstein's 1924 production of *The Gas Masks*, staged in a gas factory, rather than a theatre, where the industrialisation of art was taken to such an extreme that "theatre failed to resolve its aesthetic essence in practice" (Tretyakov in Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 97).

93 Vygotsky presented a similar critique of the 'theatre of gesture', in his review of Tairov's 1916 production of *Famira-Kifared* (Vygotsky in Sobkin, 2017).

Theorising the Theatrical Experience

The fundamental belief in the ability of theatre to form and transform life, shared by Vygotsky and the Russian Futurists, responded to the significance that theatre gained during Russian Modernism in leading the cultural revolution envisioned by artists, theorists, and political leaders. In view of this, the Modernists engaged with the development of theories that attempted to explain theatre's effect on the spectator and provide insight to the nature of the theatrical experience. The questions of theatre's *psychological effect* on its audience, the nature of the actor's engagement with their role, and the effect of the actor's work on the spectator, were all raised and experimented with. Vygotsky's work added to these attempts to theorise theatre in relation to its influence on the spectator. This section traces the connections between Vygotsky's theoretical approach to the question of the theatrical experience and the credos that formed among the artists of the time. Such an analysis sheds a better light on the spectrum of varying beliefs on theatre's effects on its audience that emerged during Vygotsky's time and stresses the essence of his unique contribution to the field of theatre studies.

Vygotsky's success in addressing the problem of theatre's effect on its audience, within a socially and politically turbulent epoch, lies in his methodological approach, which combined a humanistic standpoint, with an objective-scientific approach. This view was contrary to the trend of his time that directed artists to base their understanding of theatre's effect on one or the other extreme of the spectrum. The reason being that in the formation of their novel aesthetic theories, the Modernists relied on the developments in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and science. Therefore, the theoretical background that each school of thought chose had a profound impact on the perspective of the artists, as well as the style of their productions. Vygotsky's wholistic and fluid perspective, on the other hand, allowed him to manage a synthesis between the early Modernist approaches to spiritualism or individualism, which focused their attention on the psyche and the emotional communication between actor and audience and the more mechanistic approaches of the Futurists, which based their work on the external and the collective. Indeed, in Vygotsky's understanding of aesthetic reception and creativity, one finds the spiritual and psychological richness of the pre-Revolutionary era paired with the scientific systematisation of the Futurists and, thus, a bridge from the personal to the public aesthetic psychology.

Vygotsky's particular synthesis of philosophical perspectives was unique in its marrying of an idealistic view towards the human psyche and culture with progressive objective/scientific psychological models. However, the dualistic issues

that his theory touched upon were central in the investigations of the Modernists. As Olga Taxidou points out: “the binaries of internal/external, free will/control, material/metaphysical, anthropomorphism/ abstraction are all experimented with during this period” (Taxidou, 2017, 13), creating a debate that was ultimately “located on the body of the actor” (14). This debate supported the division of acting methods into those that emphasised the emotional/psychological route to creating a character and those that followed the opposite route, prioritising the physical and the kinaesthetic over the internal—a dichotomy that lives to these days (Whyman, 2016). Yet, during the Modernist theatrical experimentations, the lines between the one perspective and the other were rather blurred. On the one hand, much of the work undertaken by the actors required their intuitive and emotional engagement. What is more, physical and psychological approaches to acting often came with strong spiritual connotations. On the other hand, the physical aspect of acting was highly stressed and, at times, prioritised over the emotional/psychological dimension of the craft.

Stanislavsky, who centred his teaching on the emotional engagement of the actor with the role, believed that physical means could sometimes trigger the necessary emotions (Whyman, 2016). Whereas Michael Chekhov’s technique of embodiment was founded on the belief that the internalisation of the sensations created by expressive gestures could evoke the desired internal state of mind (Taylor & Whyman, 2004). Delsarte’s system, which had been rather influential in Modernist Russia, with its Law of Correspondence, also suggested that the “physical expression was identical to the internal impulse” (Taylor & Whyman, 2004, p. 99). Therefore, Delsarte’s system aimed at prescribing the exact gestures that corresponded to the specific internal states. In Russia, this notion of correspondence between the physical and the psychological was pushed to the extreme in the experiments of Meyerhold, who urged the actors to become highly precise with their physical representation of inner experience.

All the above practices developed during a time when theories, such as the James-Lange theory of emotions and Pavlov’s reflexology, were widely accepted among the scientific communities, in Russia. These perspectives viewed human behaviour as an expression of either conscious will or natural reflexes and equated the mental state with its physiological counterpart. This means that if one was to emulate the physiological reflex associated with an emotion, the person would experience the emotion itself. This philosophical standpoint led some directors to believe that, by offering their actors the appropriate stimuli, and by training them to respond to such stimuli with efficiency—that is by gaining conscious control over

their reflexes—they could predict and control their physical and psychological responses, which would be common for the whole ensemble. Theories, directing styles, and acting systems—including Meyerhold’s biomechanics—were inspired by experiments such as those on the efficient organisation of labour in industry by Taylor and Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev and Pavlov’s psychological experiments on his theory of reflexology (Braun, 1979, p. 165). At its most extreme, this mechanisation of the actor reduced his role to that of a well-trained marionette, whose task was to closely follow the directorial demands.⁹⁴

These theories, however reductionist in their view of human psychology (Whyman, 2016, pp. 162-3), were embraced by many of the Futurists, who searched for a scientific grounding for their art that would stress their opposition to humanism. Through such philosophical views, the Futurists developed also their understanding of the effect of the actor’s work on the audience—a study, which drew the attention of many directors, including Eisenstein, who developed his own system of biomechanics with the aim of training his actors to excite in the spectators “something determined in advance” (Eisenstein in Law & Gordon, 2012, p. 86). Evidence shows that the most successful productions that derived from such perspectives were efficient in inciting strong emotions in the audience, emotions that were closely associated with the events depicted on stage (Law & Gordon, 2012, pp. 83). The Futurist experiment, in this respect, was able to create a theatre that was grounded upon principles such as scientific observation and equalisation of behaviour. Its result was highly efficient theatrical productions that had an exciting effect on its audiences. Foregger’s 1922 music-hall dance show, *Machine Dances*, was a distinctive example of the application of a scientific theory of labour in theatre: the bodies of the dancers employed detailed movement and well-trained skill to create the impression of a complex machine making the scene highly reminiscent of a factory. The production gained much praise from his contemporaries. Yet, the most successful productions, that are associated to a reflexological approach to performing, are admittedly several of Meyerhold’s productions, which were founded upon his system of biomechanics. As early as 1918, in his staging of *Mystery Bouffe*, Meyerhold directed his actors to play with extreme technical precision with the aim of inciting specific and strong emotions in the spectators. The result made a great impression: “the audiences’ emotions were roused to revolution while the actors remained in control of their performances” (Leach, 2018, p. 97). Meyerhold’s

⁹⁴ Gordon Craig’s views on the role of the director and the actor as a Hyper-marionette were among the most famous and most characteristic examples of this perspective and were well-known in Russia, at the time.

most extreme Futurist productions, *The World Upside Down* (1923) and *The Mandate* (1925) had a similar effect. The stage and actors submitted themselves to a common rhythmic score, designed to stimulate desired responses from the actors and command the emotional response of the spectators. Both productions were reported to be highly moving and enjoyed great success (Leach, 2018).

Nonetheless, the excitement incited by these productions resembles more Tolstoy's theory of emotional contamination in art,⁹⁵ than Vygotsky's psychology. The engagement of the unconscious—a crucial aspect of theatre, in Vygotsky's, as well as many of the early Modernists' views—had no place in these productions. The artistic creation, here, would resemble material production; the actor would act as “a machine responding to stimuli, rather than to his or her own mental perception and interior states” (Paraskeva, 2013, p. 164). The actor's work, once seen as an intuitive “study of the inner life of other human beings” (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 81), was now converted into an objective-scientific study of reflexes.

Vygotsky appeared highly critical of such artists' over-reliance on reductive psychology, in approaching questions regarding the actor's work:

Psychotechnical investigations [...] lose sight of all specificity, all the uniqueness of the actor's psychology, seeing in the creative work of the actor only a special combination of the same mental qualities that are found in a different combination in any profession. Forgetting that the activity of the actor is itself a unique, creative work of psychophysiological conditions, and not analyzing these specific conditions in all the variety of their psychological nature, the investigator-psychotechnicians dissolve the problem of the actor's creative work in general, and at the same time, banal test psychology, paying no attention to the actor and all the uniqueness of his psychology. (Vygotsky, 1999b)

Vygotsky subscribed to the search for an objective-scientific grounding for aesthetics. However, his approach to matters of psychology was far from reductionist. As I discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, Vygotsky took his first steps in the science of psychology by working next to the reactologist Kornilov and based some of the elemental principles of his psychology of art on Kornilov's views. Kornilov's reactology had offered Vygotsky a firm objective ground for his psychology of art; however, he soon arrived at the conclusion that Kornilov's interactionist approach to the mind-body problem was not sufficient to encompass the developmental aspect of the human mind. Vygotsky's mature understanding of the human psychological processes dictated a model that opposed the Cartesian

95 In his monograph titled “What is art” (1897), Tolstoy suggested the idea that art's essential purpose is to ‘contaminate’ its recipient with a specific emotion and criticised art with a moral criterion, in relation to the kind of emotion that it stimulated.

dualist division of mind and body—a premise that characterised most approaches to psychology of the time, including reflexology. To all those schools of thought, Vygotsky counter-proposed his monistic approach, which viewed the mind and body as manifestations of the same substance.

Therefore, statements that characterised some of the Futurists' beliefs which declared that "all psychological states are determined by specific physiological processes" (Meyerhold in Braun, 1979, pp. 165-6) were criticised by Vygotsky as mechanistic and unable to provide a constructive understanding of human psychology. Vygotsky was not willing to sacrifice his humanistic beliefs in his quest for scientific objectivity. By believing that psychology and physiology are indivisible, Vygotsky suggested that a human being could be understood equally through scientific analysis and by an intuitive sense; or better, through the synthesis of the two approaches. His view created a dialogue between the Futurists' reliance on reflexive psychology, and Stanislavsky's belief that "very often we cannot come through definite data to know the inner life of the person we are studying, and can only reach towards it by means of intuitive feeling" (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 81).

The Emotion in Theatre and its Social Significance

The debates on the question of the actor's work and theatre's effect on its audience, in which Vygotsky adopted a middle, dialectical stance, were centred around the notion of emotion in theatre. The ways in which each of the Modernist directors understood their work in the theatre, as well as the style of their productions, were all determined by their understanding of emotion's role in theatre and the ways in which emotion was to be handled and expressed by the actors. Therefore, artists like Meyerhold and Eisenstein, who more or less envisioned human psychology as a set of reflexive actions, spoke of the excitability of emotion in theatre and grounded their approaches in physical and visual expressions of emotion. Stanislavsky and his associates, on the other hand, grounded in a humanistic view of psychology, developed acting techniques that allowed the actors to create characters by connecting with their own humanity.

In all cases, regardless of how the actor carried and communicated the feelings, affecting the audience with emotion became a primary goal of every theatrical production. Even the most mechanistic approaches to acting, such as Meyerhold's biomechanics, aimed at the efficient transference of emotion from the actor to the spectator:

By correctly resolving the nature of his state physically, the actor reaches the point where he experiences the excitation which communicates itself to the spectator and induces him to share in the actor's performance: what we used to call 'gripping' the spectator. It is this excitation which is the very essence of the actor's art. From a sequence of physical positions and situations there arise 'points of excitation' which are informed with some particular emotion. Throughout this process of 'rousing the emotions' the actor observes a rigid framework of physical prerequisites. (Meyerhold in Braun, 1979, pp. 165-6)

Though Meyerhold viewed the character as only a fragment of the play, with no further dimensions than those presented on stage, he understood the importance of the emotional identification between the character and the audience. Similarly, Eisenstein's theory of the 'montage of attractions' aimed at the efficient inciting of both emotional responses in the audience, and the actors. Specifically, Eisenstein devised a mathematic formula which dictated the nature of the performer's actions creating a visual rhythm that had an immense effect on the spectator's psychological state—an experiment that proved highly successful in eliciting a major emotional response from the audience (Law & Gordon, 2012, pp. 82-3).

It is, thus, apparent that the emotional excitation of the actors and the spectators was part of the goal of the performing techniques developed by the Futurists. Emotion, however, played an even greater role in the practice of the 'Academic theatres'.⁹⁶ Stanislavsky devoted his career in the search for a true feeling and an authentic emotional experience on stage; though originally a Naturalist, he did not limit his work in the pleasing of the eyes and the ears of his spectators, but aimed to portray deep, genuine emotion. In fact, the total of Stanislavsky's acting system was designed to facilitate the expression of the emotion by the actor:

"Now that we have examined all the 'elements', and methods of psycho-technique, we can say that our inner instrument is ready. All we need is a virtuoso to play on it. Who is that master?"

"We are," answered several of the students.

"Who are 'we'? Where is the invisible thing called 'we' to be found?"

"It is our imagination, attention, feelings." We ran over the list.

"Feelings! That's the most important," exclaimed Vanya. (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 211)

Typically, in Stanislavsky's theatre, the character's emotion was as realistic

⁹⁶ This was a group of theatres supported financially by the government, which included the Moscow Art Theatre with its First and Second Studios and Tairov's Kamerny Theatre.

as possible. The actor was challenged to portray a character that possesses a complete biography and presents genuine reactions to the events happening on stage. Through the experimentations that took place in the First Studio, Stanislavsky, along with his students, developed a more profound version of his technique. The 'Emotional Realism' of the Studio aimed at the communication between the actor and the audience of even the most elusive feelings. The Studio's small, intimate stage served this purpose—it was a stage where an actor could whisper and still be heard. "Nowhere before had the language of the eyes attained such eloquence. Every glance became as rich in meaning and distinct as a spoken line" (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 21).

Emotion continued to play a central role in the theatre of practitioners that emerged from the Studio, though its portrayal took different forms. Vakhtangov developed a theatre with sharp Expressionistic notes, and "focused on the poignancy of psychological portrayal, on abrupt and extreme play of contrasts" (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 21). Meanwhile, Michael Chekhov experimented with emotion on a wide spectrum, and distinguished himself for his ability to bridge the ordinary and the mundane with the highly expressive and even the grotesque (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 21). Finally, Tairov, in his Kamerny Theatre—which followed a distinct, yet commensurate to the Moscow Art Theatre developmental path—used elements of design to underscore and accentuate the emotional scope of the dramatic action (Torda, 1980).

This centrality of emotion in theatre was in agreement with Vygotsky, who believed that the developmental processes associated with the artistic experience are rooted in the emotional engagement of the spectator with the performance. Yet, Vygotsky viewed emotional engagement as a crucial means for setting in motion the psychological mechanism of the artistic experience rather than an end in itself. What is vital in the process of aesthetic reception, according to Vygotsky's theory, is that the performance guides the spectator's emotions into a dynamic state of internal conflict and then provides a solution in the form of a dialectical synthesis, which is experienced by the spectator as a sensation of catharsis. Therefore, the methods that the actors employ to affect their audience emotionally are only relevant in the context of their ability to successfully guide the spectator through the aesthetic experience, towards the experience of catharsis, and are thus relative to the overall function of the performance.

This last statement explains why it is easy to find points of agreement between Vygotsky's writings and the views of practitioners that are often considered as rivals, such as those of Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. In point of fact, Vygotsky's

comments on acting, found in the theatrical reviews of his Gomel period, place equal importance in the stylistic consistency, the technical ability, and the psychological integrity presented by the actors. Not unlike Stanislavsky, Vygotsky placed great importance on the ability of the actor to portray and express emotion. His reviews “repeatedly register emotionality [emotsional’nost’] as a unique trait of the actor’s individual personality” (Sobkin, 2016a, p. 57). In his reviews, he often commented on the sincerity of the actor’s emotional expression as well as the internal justification of his or her portrayed feelings. Equally important for the young Vygotsky, was the correspondence of the actor’s emotional expression to the overall style of the performance, as it was dictated by its genre and the directorial approach. In this context, stylised expression, in Vygotsky’s reviews, was often supported and constructively criticised.

Vygotsky’s impartiality to both the realistic and the stylised emotion in theatre can be better understood when placed in the context of his dialectical scheme for the psychology of art. If the content of a play—its theme, or the events presented on stage—produce specific emotions, then the style or the form of a theatrical performance must dictate how these emotions will be expressed or communicated. According to Vygotsky’s theory, every artistic form relates to its content in such a way that the two stimulate opposing reactions in the spectator’s psyche. Therefore, every content should generate a unique form; some plays—and in specific situations—may require a realistic expression and others stylized, as long as the resulting effect leads the spectator to a dialectical reception of the performance.

Vygotsky’s insistence for a dialectical relationship between form and content in art was also reflected in his attempts to understand questions regarding the aesthetically creative behaviour and the psychological implications from the participation in the creative processes of theatre. According to Vygotsky, the results of and the reasons for taking part in an artistically creative process are similar to those of the reception of art. He thus believed that examining the creative behaviour of the artists, could shed light on our greater understanding of art’s role in our life:

An understanding of the biological meaning of the aesthetic act must be sought along the path followed by modern psychology, in an unravelling of the psychology of the creative work of the artist and in a convergence of our understanding of apprehension and of the process of creation. Before we ask ourselves why it is that we read, we must ask ourselves why it is that people write. [...] According to contemporary psychology, the most reasonable interpretation of creative effort is that which views it as sublimation, as the conversion of lower forms of mental energy which have not been consumed and which have not found an outlet in the individual’s everyday activity, into higher forms of mental energy. (Vygotsky, 1926)

Such a process, according to Vygotsky, could only result from the dialectical synthesis of the lower forms of mental energy into a higher state—a process that he firmly believed necessitated the engagement of emotion.

Vygotsky elaborated on this aspect of the actor's emotion in an article written in 1932, years after the completion of his monograph on the psychology of art. The article titled: "On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work"⁹⁷ analysed the paradoxical nature of the actor's emotion engaging with the opposing views on the question of whether the actors should or should not experience the emotions that they stimulate in their audience. The article exposed the polarity that characterised the approaches to the paradox of the emotional state of the actor—from the emotionally disengaged actor of Diderot to the emotionally immersed actor of Stanislavsky—and presented Vygotsky's disagreement with the dualistic foundation of both approaches. In contrast to those, and in accordance with his greater worldview, Vygotsky suggested a dialectical synthesis of the opposing views, believing that their "contradiction, which cannot be resolved in abstract psychology with the metaphysical formulation of the question, has a possibility of being resolved if we approach it from the dialectical point of view" (Vygotsky, 1999b).

For Vygotsky, the problem with the paradox of the actor's emotion lay in the "relation of the artificially produced emotion of a role to the real, live, natural emotion of the actor playing the role" (Vygotsky, 1999b). Vygotsky was not the first to point out that the actors on stage can experience simultaneously the emotions of their role, which are produced by their creative engagement with the character, and their own, real-life emotions, generated by their experience of themselves in their public performance. In other words, just as the actor perceives at the same time the dramatic space (i.e. the space that the stage symbolises) and the real space (i.e. the stage itself), he or she can simultaneously experience a dramatic and a real emotion. Stanislavsky described this paradoxical experience of acting as "a constant wavering back and forth between belief and doubt, real sensations and the illusion of having them" (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 247). In fact, though he deeply believed in the authenticity of the emotion that the actor experiences on behalf of his character, Stanislavsky would urge his actors to always remain aware and in conscious control of the technical methods of their craft, such as the tensions in their muscles, their cues and lines, their vocal technique, and their relationship to the audience. In his triptych on his method of acting, Stanislavsky (2013, 2014a, and 2015b) portrayed

⁹⁷ The article with the Russian title "K Voprosy o Psihologii Hudozhestvennogo Tvorchestva Aktera" was first published in 1936, in P. M. Yacobson's book *Psikologiya Stenicheskikh Chustv Aktera*.

the successful actor as one who becomes simultaneously the object of the work of art—the one who experiences the role, and the artist—the one who presents the experience:

One half of an actor's soul is absorbed by his super-objective, by the through line of action, the subtext, his inner images, the elements which go to make up his inner creative state. But the other half of it continues to operate on a psycho-technique. (Stanislavski, 2014a, p. 149)

In a way, Stanislavsky's scheme of emotional immersion and simultaneous self-awareness and artistic control mirrors Vygotsky's dialectical relationship between artistic form and content. The actor, in this context, is responsible for embodying the content and delivering it to the audience through artistic form.

This form, in Stanislavsky's case, referred to the genre of his 'Spiritual Realism'. Yet, as many of the Futurists believed, the form that emotional expression takes is socially constructed—it belongs to a crystallised psychology, shared by the living people of a community, and affected by the specific socio-historical circumstances of the time. This belief led to the demand for the creation of artforms that corresponded to the contemporary psychology (Trotsky, 2005), thus creating a specific proletarian aesthetic.⁹⁸ The notion of the socially constructed psychology was also central in Vygotsky's theories, which dictated all mental functions, including the emotions, are formed through the individual's interaction with his or her social environment:

In the process of social life, feelings develop and former connections disintegrate; emotions appear in new relations with other elements of mental life, new systems develop, new alloys of mental functions and unities of a higher order appear within which special patterns, interdependencies, special forms of connection and movement are dominant. (Vygotsky, 1999b)

In this sense, the ways in which actors process their emotions and the forms in which they express their feelings result from the social psychological reality of their historical time. For this reason, Vygotsky concluded, in his 1932 article, that the psychological activity of an actor could only be constructively evaluated when examined within its socio-historical context.

The social nature of the actor's emotion became crucial in Vygotsky's investigations in theatre, mainly because of the innate public and social character of the artform. Vygotsky stressed the fact that the actor's emotion at the time of the performance becomes part of a greater system, one that includes the audience. The

⁹⁸ Meyerhold's development of biomechanics was a characteristic attempt in creating a system appropriate to a post-Revolutionary aesthetic.

emotion in theatre, is a shared, social emotion: “The actor creates on the stage infinite sensations, feelings, or emotions that become the emotions of the whole theatrical audience” (Vygotsky, 1999b). With his short investigation in the psychological processes involved in the actor’s work, as with his greater study of the psychological processes of artistic reception, Vygotsky was able “to comprehend the psychology of the actor in all the qualitative uniqueness of its nature, but in the light of more general psychological patterns” (Vygotsky, 1999b), a study that led him to highlight the centrality of emotional transformation for theatre’s social purpose.

Through his investigations, Vygotsky concluded that the emotion incited during the reception of a performance catalyses the process of aesthetic reception—a process that takes place simultaneously for all members of the audience but is not public or identical for all. Vygotsky’s psychological scheme dictates that the artistic emotion is born out of the exposure of the spectator to the specific elements of the performance, but as an element of the spectator’s psychology, it belongs personally to each individual. Similarly, the actor’s emotion when enacting a role, though it serves the aesthetic mechanisms of the theatrical work, as a psychological element it is always unique to the specific actor within their historical time. In Vygotsky’s view, and through the dialectical forces produced by the conflicts that are intrinsic to all art, the personal emotion is transformed, becomes communal, and prompts mental development affecting both the personal and social life of the spectator. Viewing the actor’s emotion not as part of an individual’s mental processes, but as an aspect of a social psychological system allowed Vygotsky to define its role in theatre’s purpose—that is, the social psychological transformation of its audience. This way, Vygotsky showed how “the experience of the actor [...] serves as a transitional stage from psychology to ideology” (Vygotsky, 1999b). This transformative power of theatre, and the essential role of emotion in it, highlighted the Futurist demand for a theatre able to transform the audience ideologically. In the Futurists’ practice, emotional excitation was often used as a tool for more effective intellectual transformation (Braun, 1998), which then led to the formation of ideology.

The view of the theatrical emotion as an agent that unites the actor and the spectator in a common developmental process was based on Vygotsky’s psychological research on the development of the mental functions of humans. Nonetheless, the seeds of this idea are also found in his early writings such as the theatre reviews of his Gomel period. In these short pieces, Vygotsky often expressed the idea “that emotional experiencings are to be jointly distributed between actor and spectator” (Sobkin, 2016a, p. 69). The extreme importance that Vygotsky placed on the performance’s emotional atmosphere, in his theatrical

critiques, suggests a belief that the emotional experience of the spectator is the aim of every theatrical event. This point of view justifies Vygotsky's understanding of the directorial role as the composer of the emotional score of the performance (Sobkin, 2016a, p. 53).

The director's role, in the Vygotskian perspective, is to oversee not only how the emotions that are appropriate to the play are carried by the actors, but also the overall emotional development that is to be experienced by the spectators on the performance nights. According to the dialectic scheme of the aesthetic reception, presented in Vygotsky's *Psychology of Art*, the emotional activity within the receiver of an artwork must be developed on two contrasting, parallel paths, each directed by the form and the content of the work, respectively. To that end, the director that complies with Vygotsky's views, takes on the responsibility of identifying and preserving the conflict of the form and the content embedded in each play and transfer it onto the stage. As it happens, the Russian Avant-garde gave rise to more than one such director.

The theatrical experimentations on the relationship between the artistic form and the content, performed by the Futurists during Vygotsky's time, brought forth several theatrical styles, many of which aimed to stir in the spectators a unique and transformative reaction by creating a conflict between the theatrical style and the artistic theme. The actors, in such performances, were often encouraged to act in ways deliberately contrasted to their characters' emotions (Leach, 2003). Such attempts were supported by the theories developed by Viktor Shklovsky, which focused on the impact that aesthetic form may have on the human psyche. Shklovsky studies on the habituation of perception—the process in which the sensations of a perceived action are recorded within the individual and recalled when the same, or a similar, action is perceived—made the altering of perception the most significant function of art. According to Shklovsky, although the process of habituation serves a 'mental economy', it keeps humans from fully perceiving the stimuli around them leading to what he calls an 'automatism of perception'. Thus, for him, "the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult" (Shklovsky, 1917/1998, p. 219), in order for the artfulness of the object to be fully revealed.⁹⁹

A characteristic example of a theatrical practice that conformed with Shklovsky's views was Meyerhold's creation of the theatre of the grotesque. "The art of the grotesque is based on the conflict between form and content" (Meyerhold in

⁹⁹ Vygotsky was familiar with Shklovsky's work and had most likely met the man in person during his youth (Feigenberg, 2000). Therefore, the effect of Shklovsky's theoretical perspective on the formation of Vygotsky thought is noteworthy.

Braun, 1998, p. 141), Meyerhold would preach. Under this theatrical style, the form—usually understood as the design elements and the general rhythm of the production—was specifically devised to oppose the psychological consistency of the play. In his experimentations with the grotesque Meyerhold sought to create the effect of conflict through the contrast of elements of the design with the content of the staged plays, or through the adoption by his actors of emotional reactions contrary to the psychology of their roles. Indeed, for many of the Futurists, the expression of a conflict in art served the infliction of the estrangement effect to the audience. For Eisenstein, the power of conflict in theatre led to a more complex process; the exposure to the contradictions embedded in the artwork was enough to lead the spectator in the dialectical synthesis of new intellectual concepts. To support this belief, Eisenstein created a theoretical model for the development of conceptual thinking in humans that mirrored the corresponding research conclusions of Vygotsky.

As a matter of fact, no one's ideas on the role of conflict in theatre among the artists of the Russian Avant-garde converged more with Vygotsky's than those of Eisenstein. The famous theatre and film director was a close friend of Vygotsky and was well acquainted with his manuscript *The Psychology of Art*¹⁰⁰ and his views of the dialectic nature of the artistic conflict almost match those found in the book:¹⁰¹

For art is always conflict:

- (1) according to its social mission,
- (2) according to its nature,
- (3) according to its methodology.

[...] The logic of organic form vs. the logic of rational form yields, in collision, the dialectic of the artform. (Eisenstein, 1949, pp. 46-7)

Therefore, for Eisenstein, as for Vygotsky, the essence of art lies in the dialectic composition of a conflicting pair of form and content, where the content is based on phenomena that derive from the experience of life, and the form, consciously constructed by the artist, is based on the structures of those phenomena, while being simultaneously contrary to them.

100 In fact, it was in Eisenstein's personal archive that the manuscript was first discovered years after the death of its author.

101 One impressive point of corresponding ideas between Eisenstein and Vygotsky relates to the role of rhythm in poetry. In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky indicated that the emotional conflict in metrical poetry is produced from discrepancies in the rhythmic patterns. For Eisenstein, "it is from this principle that the whole charm of poetry derives. Its rhythm arises as a conflict between the metric measure employed and a distribution of accents, overriding this measure" (Eisenstein, 1949, p. 48).

Although many of his views on art lay remarkably close to those of Vygotsky's, Eisenstein had failed to fully grasp the significance of the psychological transformations of the emotion that take place during the reception of art and their benefits for the individual and his or her society. For Eisenstein, art possessed a social mission—that of generating in the spectators' minds new ideas appropriate to the historical developments of the time. This mission, though it relied on the activation of an emotional conflict, prioritised in terms of result the intellectual growth at the expense of the emotional (Ivanov, 2013). This demand for the intellectual development of the spectators and the conformation of art with the social norms led Eisenstein toward a crisis in his relation to his craft. In the early 1930s, Eisenstein arrived at the extreme conclusion that “exposure to art leads the viewer into cultural regression” (Eisenstein in Ivanov, 2013, p. 186), pointing that art distances people from rational thought while engaging them in sensual thinking, all of which signified, for Eisenstein, emotional and ethical eruption. Under such rationale, the emotional immersion during the reception of art has such strong paralysing effects on the human intellect that it is comparable to alcohol, or worse, schizophrenia (Ivanov, 2013). Eisenstein's radical deviation from his artistic path resulted from a moral misconception of the nature of emotion. By applying a dualistic canon—reminiscent of the Christianised doctrines—on his understanding of the human psyche, he placed a negative assessment on the regressive, emotional part of it. His conclusion, therefore, was inevitable; by stirring the emotional darkness in its spectators, art acts catastrophically for the whole culture of men.

Luckily, Eisenstein “was dissuaded from his intention, if not to destroy art, then in any case to abandon this shameful activity, by the late Vygotsky” (Ivanov, 2013, pp. 186-7). Vygotsky was well aware of the dangers that lay in the adoption of dualistic views of any kind, and he had repeatedly warned against systems of the human psychology that did not allow for change. His theory combined a monistic philosophy with a dialectic methodology resulting in an approach that views the human psyche as a dynamic, flexible system that exists under constant change. Under this light, all aspects of human psychology are agents in the mechanisms of development and no single part could receive a negative assessment. After all, as Vygotsky's theory of artistic catharsis suggests, the incitement of a negative emotion that is destructive for the social life through our exposure to the dialectic forces of art, results in the development of a socially stable individual. In fact, it is the transformation of such latent, difficult emotions that, according to Vygotsky, helps shape the culture of the future.

This last statement illustrates the range of Vygotsky's perspective in

psychology, which extends from the Freudian-inspired notion of catharsis to the prevalent post-Revolutionary vision of theatre as a catalyst for social change—an impressive synthesis of diverse viewpoints, which characterises and distinguishes his approach to theatre. Indeed, it is Vygotsky's impartiality to any specific school of thought of his time along with his striving for a holistic theory that embraces all aspects of the human nature, that allowed him to surpass the respective advances of his time. In particular, during the first decades of the 20th century, much of the progress regarding the understanding of theatre's nature and function lay in the achievement of the new generation of artists and critics to break free from the moralism, subjectivity, and individualism that characterised the humanistic approaches of the past. Vygotsky's attempts to view the theatrical art from an objective-analytic lens, the grounding of his research on art in the scientific theories of his time, and even his eventual digression from art and his immersion in the field of psychology, all place him within the general trend of his time. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, in his search for objectivity and scientific clarity, Vygotsky retained a sense of humanism. In all those aspects of theatrical criticism that the Avant-garde opposed, Vygotsky found great significance. Above all those elements, was the individual's unconscious engagement in theatre, to which he placed great importance, as he strongly believed in the need for deep psychological progress in the process of social and cultural development.

With his unique perspective, Vygotsky was able to tackle the great problems that arose within the sociocultural changes brought by the Revolution and regarded the transition from the old values of the past to the newly established ideology, as well as the submission of the individual to the collective. Vygotsky's vision of theatre, as a platform from which such a transition could be inspired and facilitated, offered a valuable solution to these problems, a solution, which honoured equally the past and the present, the individual and the society, the inner subjective psychology and the outer objective world.

The last three chapters have presented an in-depth discussion on the close connections between Vygotsky's aesthetics and the theatrical investigations of his time. This examination acts as a proof for this thesis' premise that we can interpret Vygotsky's early writings as a system of aesthetics. The study presented here, also evidences that, although Vygotsky wrote most of the texts under question while living in the periphery of the cultural life of Russia the topics that his writings raise converse with the heart of the discussions regarding theatre's role in a changing society. The illumination of this conversation—which surpasses any previous attempt to connect Vygotsky's early ideas with those of his contemporaries—has

highlighted a crucial aspect of his aesthetics; the ultimate purpose of art as a medium of social change. It has also stressed the nature of the social evolution that is stimulated by art as one which emerges from the unconscious of the individuals that form the society and is achieved through the transformation of their emotional world. As a result, the juxtaposition of Vygotsky's aesthetic theory to the work of his contemporary artists and theorists, has shed light on a significant dimension of Vygotsky's early works that has been overlooked by all those scholars that examine his work only as a system of psychology. Under the lens of this thesis, Vygotsky's theory emerges not as an outdated and incomplete system of psychology, but as a holistic and highly dynamic aesthetic theory that informed the artistic debates of its time and that presents all the potential for informing relevant theories and practices of today.

**PART THREE: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Modernist Russia: A
Case Study in Vygotsky's Aesthetics**

Introduction

Having defined and re-articulated Vygotsky's aesthetics and having examined their essential notions under the prism of the Russian Modernist theatre I am now proposing an experiment: applying Vygotsky's aesthetic-psychological theory on a specific drama and its reception, thus creating a vision of its potential social psychological effect. The following chapters present such a 'case-study' examining the reception of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Vygotsky and his contemporaries while theorising the role that the tragedy could have played within the life transitions experienced by the Russians of the first three decades of the 20th century.

The drama of *Hamlet* presents an excellent case for my experiment for several reasons. Firstly, *Hamlet* was a key text for Vygotsky and it showcases his understanding of the effect of theatre and drama in all its range, as it features twice in his writings: once in his early 1915/6 essay and again in his more mature work *The Psychology of Art*. Secondly, and as the following chapter will elaborate, the Shakespearean tragedy was deeply embedded in the Russian tradition of the pre-Revolutionary era and remained present in the discussions of the post-Revolutionary period, gaining an extraordinary place on the Avant-garde stage. Finally, Hamlet, the hero, had gained a reputation within the psychoanalytic school as a character that reflects a deep and insoluble existential human trauma. As such, the tragedy of *Hamlet* appears as a remarkable synthesis of the various conflicts that characterised the transitions taking place in the beginning of the 20th century, in Russia.

The examination of the ways in which these transitions were reflected in the reception of the Shakespearean classic and the juxtaposition of Vygotsky's vision of its effect on the readers deepens his aesthetic theory, reviews its practicality, and showcases the distinction of his approach. Through this study, Vygotsky is painted as a man with a heightened sensitivity towards the internal conflicts experienced by his countrymen and a profound belief in art's ability to ease psychological pain and mediate deep and holistic psychological growth.

Chapter Seven: Vygotsky's Vision of *Hamlet* and Prominent Interpretations of the Shakespearean Tragedy during Russian Modernism

From its first appearance in Russia, *Hamlet* has engaged, enthralled, and even irritated the literary critics and artists, placing the play among the most influential works of literature in the development of Russian culture.¹⁰² The Shakespearean tragedy was embraced so dearly by Russian and Soviet culture and was appropriated so many times that its protagonist was received as the epitome of a Russian. Indeed, the surprising number of twenty-two translations of *Hamlet* into Russian, and the numerous Russian texts that are based on the original (Semenenko, 2007), reflect an ongoing preoccupation with the story of Hamlet and the ever-changing shifts in the understanding of the tragedy's world and the nature of its protagonist. In the context of Russian Modernism, more specifically, the diversity in the visions of *Hamlet* that appeared during that time, points to yet another dimension—the burning concern about the function that the tragedy can take within a changing world.

Undoubtedly, the reception of *Hamlet* in Modernist Russia was highly influenced by how Russians experienced life and its conundrums under the massive sociopolitical transitions of the time. The various readings of the tragedy that appeared during Modernism sprung from very specific philosophical viewpoints and made equally specific suggestions on the solution to the moral-cum-spiritual and social problems explored in the play. The staged realisations of the tragedy often came with a strong ideological ethos which heightened and displayed one or the other characteristic of Hamlet and his world. In all cases, *Hamlet* was interpreted under the lens of theatre's social responsibility towards the public, and the image of its protagonist alternated between being widely problematic and forcefully drastic: "Hamlet has had many masks through time: he has been gentle and melancholic, reflective and irresolute, passionate and brutal" (Semenenko, 2007, p. 140). Similarly, the extreme shifts in the sociopolitical and cultural reality of the time were projected onto the tragedy's mysterious world. In this context, the question of "who is Hamlet?" and "what is Elsinore?" became for the Russian Modernists aliases for the questions "who are we?" and "what is Russia?".

Responding to the concerns of his time on the social function of theatre and sharing the enthusiasm over the Shakespearean tragedy, Vygotsky returned twice

102 Extended and fascinating studies on the phenomenon have been conducted by Eleanor Rowe (1976) and Aleksei Semenenko (2007).

to the study of *Hamlet*. Both monographs, one written before his transition to the field of psychology and the other soon after, reflect the developments in the play's reception and follow many of the popular convictions regarding the meaning of the tragedy. Indeed, placed within the context of the tragedy's reception by the artists and critics of the time, Vygotsky's approaches to *Hamlet* stress the deep reliance of his theories on the cultural advancements taking place around the landmark of the Revolution. Meanwhile, the discrepancies found between the two analyses, reflect not only the author's professional growth and his progressive passage into the field of psychology, but also the profound changes in the sociopolitical and cultural life that took place during the transitional years following the 1917 Revolution, and that radically altered the theatre's social role. Simultaneously, Vygotsky's vision of *Hamlet* resulted from his particular ability to merge in his work opposing perspectives in a dialectic manner: next to the searching for the place the tragedy could assume in the emerging socialist society, Vygotsky peered deep into the play in search of the existential pain shared by Hamlet and the people of his time. Thus, in line with his work in the field of psychology and even way before he even knew he would undertake such work, Vygotsky presented a profoundly humanistic reading of *Hamlet*.

This perspective is rooted in Vygotsky's worldview and his methodology in approaching the tragedy: as with all art, Vygotsky pursued to examine the question of *Hamlet's* effect on its readers or spectators and the potential psychological function of the tragedy for the developing society. For this reason, his two essays on *Hamlet* make up an excellent case study for his theory on the psychology of art, which maps the psychological mechanisms that are embedded in the structure of a drama and guide its reception. Yet, prior to articulating the potential social and individual psychological effects of *Hamlet* in Modernist Russia, this chapter engages critically with Vygotsky's visions of the tragedy while mapping the relations that exist between his work and the approaches to the tragedy and its hero by the theatre makers and critics of his time.

In his texts, Vygotsky examined the Shakespearean drama in relation to its effect on its readers. However, in the following chapters, the discussion will include *Hamlet's* impact on the spectators attending the various staged productions that took place during Vygotsky's time. Such a generalisation in the application of Vygotsky's theory is possible due to the nature of Vygotsky's approach. That is, the focus on the social-psychological effect of the interplay between the artistic and thematic elements of an artwork. Accordingly, in Vygotsky's discussion of the myth and the plot, I will include an examination of the Russian tradition in the reception of

Hamlet, as this will help establish what the audiences of the first three decades of the 20th century understood as the tragedy's content. Similarly, in my discussion of Vygotsky's views on the formal treatment of the tragedy, I will include the theatrical elements of the productions of the time. This will allow me to examine the dynamic interplay between the elements of form and content, as they manifested in the dramatic text and on the stage, and theorise the impact of *Hamlet* on both readers and spectators. As a result, the chapter will highlight the reliance of Vygotsky's theories on the theatrical activity of the time, on the grounds of the social psychological function that *Hamlet* acquired during the transitions of Modernism.

The Tradition of *Hamlet* in 18th and 19th Century Russia

The Russians' identification with Hamlet and his world has been a central characteristic of the play's reception from early on. The uniquely obscure nature of the play lent itself to a wide range of interpretations; thus, throughout history, Russians have projected onto Hamlet their own feelings, their worries, and their philosophical anxieties. "Hamlet has frequently been the mirror held up to Russian life, and as the image changed, so did the function of the play and the image of the prince" (Rowe, 1974, p. 289). These changes in the tragedy's interpretation were achieved or expressed through the editing and the adaptation of the text, the language employed in translations, and, more profoundly, through the portrayal of the play by actors and directors in staged productions. As I will illustrate, these renditions have varied from suggesting or stressing one aspect of the play over another, to distorting the text to the extreme.

Characteristically, the first ever translation of *Hamlet* that appeared in Russia in 1748 (and on stage, in 1750) did not even bear the name of Shakespeare, "its authorship invisible because culturally insignificant" (Holland, 2000, p. 319). The adaptation in question belonged to Alexander Sumarokov, a follower of the French Neoclassicism, and bore distinct differences to Shakespeare's original. In Sumarokov's version, all scenes and elements that would conflict with the canons of the conventional classic tragedy were altered: the Ghost was completely eliminated, Hamlet's character appeared as a stereotypical Neoclassic tragic hero, and his story was rendered with realism and a sense of decorum (Holland, 2000).

The French Neoclassic lens dominated the reception of *Hamlet* until the beginning of the 19th century, when the early Romantic Movement helped popularise the author's original voice and establish his aesthetic value. By 1828, and as Russian Romantics raised the English dramatist to a symbol of universal genius,

attempts were made at accurate translations of *Hamlet*.¹⁰³ The interpretations of the tragedy, at the time—based heavily on readings imported from Germany and in some cases England—stressed the existential insight embedded in Shakespeare’s tragedies. In compliance with the readings of the German philosophers, the Russian Romantics read *Hamlet*, as the tragedy of a noble, gentle, and highly moral hero suffering under the burden of a binding mission. Their interpretation of the tragedy shifted “the Russian attitude towards *Hamlet* from primarily a political drama to a philosophical-historical tragedy” (Assay, 2016, pp. 83-4). It also bestowed on *Hamlet* a spiritual dimension—an element that would survive past the Romantic era, that would define the tragedy’s reception during Russian Modernism, and that would become the source of its problematic nature in the early years of Socialist Realism.

This highly Romanticised vision of the drama was based on the portrayal of Hamlet as a suffering hero, in conflict with his world. During the early 19th century, the dominant interpretations of *Hamlet*—including those found in the works and comments of Pushkin and Lermontov—focused on the philosophical aspect of the play and the futile conflict between a human and the force of fate (Rowe, 1976). Hamlet was seen as a delicate and noble soul that was forced to undertake a task too great and brutal. In recognition of his sense of duty Hamlet sacrificed everything and still his dark fate defeats him. Under this view, Hamlet’s procrastination carried the pain and agony of a rational character that feels the weakness of his nature and the futility of his duty. Yet, this positive disposition towards Hamlet’s sensitivity shifted, with Nikolaj Polevoj’s 1837 translation, which stressed the weak and deficient nature of the character. In his translation, which premiered in Moscow in January 1837 with Mochalov in the protagonist’s role, Polevoj eliminated everything that points towards Hamlet’s heroism and presented Hamlet as a weak-willed man, who failed to respond to his moral duty and resolved in complaining about his own failure (Holland, 2000). This image of a weak-willed Hamlet would prove highly influential in the reception of the tragedy during the Realist era and become the heart of a great controversy in Russia, centred around Hamlet’s character and his actions—or lack thereof.

By the 1850s Russian literary and theatrical criticism had established a demand for literature and theatre to serve a moral duty towards the society. This notion transformed and survived past the turn of the century and the 1917 Revolution and shaped to a great degree the dominant receptions of *Hamlet* (Rowe, 1974). Under the light of theatre’s moral responsibility, Hamlet’s procrastination and

103 Mikhail Vronchenko’s 1828 translation “prided itself on being accurately translated line by line and, where possible, word for word” (Holland, 2000, p. 319).

his obscure internal moral battles became problematic, leading to the canonisation of the tragedy's reception and simultaneously giving birth to a series of attacks on the text. The fascination and parallel frustration with the tragic hero infected the majority of the Russian intelligentsia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Blok, Bryusov, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, and Pasternak with the majorly influential cases of Turgenev and Tolstoy. Grouped under the term Hamletism, the visions of the tragedy by all the above artists constituted a unique phenomenon with an exceptionally wide scope of influence extending to and past the years of Modernism. The magnitude and prominence of Hamletism dictate a brief examination of the phenomenon in order to gain a concise understanding of the interpretation of *Hamlet* in Modernist Russia and Vygotsky's vision of tragedy.

Hamletism

Hamletism brought a gradual dissociation of the tragic hero from the world of the tragedy and enabled the symbolisation of the character. In his book, Semenenko gives a concise definition of the phenomenon that characterised the reception of *Hamlet* around the time:

Hamletism is a tendency to interpret Hamlet the character as a symbol (a proper name turns into a common noun) which embodies certain philosophical, social, psychological, or political characteristics and represents a certain type, or behavior, or anything else one might find appropriate for such representation. (Semenenko, 2007, p. 139)

The symbol of Hamlet, under this phenomenon, was detached from the drama and stood on its own to be shaped by the most influential interpretation of each given period. Polevoj's translation and Mochalov's performance set the first such canon, which was based on Goethe's view of the drama. Mochalov's Hamlet was alienated from the world of Elsinore and was entrenched in melancholy, struggling with the question "to be or not to be". This view stood in line with the predominant European view of the Danish Prince, and the fashionable qualities of subjectivism, individualism, and even idealism that characterised Romantic prose. Yet, Polevoj's translation bore another crucial element: it focused on Hamlet's failure to fulfil his duty and blamed for this failure the hero's weak will (Holland, 2000). While Hamlet's weak and delicate soul had been received in high regard during the Romantic period, the transition toward Realism and the age of literature's moral responsibility towards the society, rendered such a character problematic. "As an increasing need

was felt for men of action, Hamlet's image changed, he came more and more to be associated with inaction, excessive intellectualisation, and weakness of will" (Rowe, 1974, pp. 134-5). Hamlet's procrastination and his indulgence in melancholia and philosophical thought opposed the call for action and assumption of social responsibility that characterised the era of the late 19th century. As a result, in the acme of Russian Realism Hamlet assumed the popular epithet of 'superfluous man' [lishnyi chelovek]¹⁰⁴.

The Russian intelligentsia saw in the face of this 'superfluous man' their own struggles to understand the essence of their time and find a solution to the crisis that had engulfed both the spiritual and the political life of their country. Hamlet's practical incapacitation symbolised for the Russian intelligentsia the thing that they despised most about themselves—their inability to prompt any concrete changes in the lives of their countrymen (Rowe, 1974). It is of no surprise, then, that the phenomenon of Hamletism came under attack, under the premise of the hero's impotence in making any form of social intervention, and his failure to grasp the social and political climate of the time. Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy committed the two most famous such attacks on the phenomenon of Hamletism and the Shakespearean text.

In his famous 1860 essay titled "Hamlet and Don Quixote", Turgenev depicted Hamletism "as a disease of the mind, a disease of brooding and agonizing introspection" (Rowe, 1974, p. 155). In the context of his narrow sociological reception of the tragedy, Turgenev derogated the tragedy's spiritual dimension; for him, the unseen forces that are evoked in the play and surpass the individual hero are only an alibi employed by Hamlet to justify his personal failure. This failure, for Turgenev, signified the inadequacy of the tragedy to engage constructively with the social and political reality of the late 19th century Russia. Turgenev argued that the example provided by the character of Hamlet, a man unable to lead himself to action, is useless for the people of his time. Hamlet's extensive soul-searching, in

104 The term describes a literary character type that is characterised by intelligence, idealism, and great sociopolitical awareness, but remains passive in the face of life's challenges. It was popularised by Turgenev's 1850 story *The Diary of a Superfluous Man*—a narration of one man's recollections during the last days of his life, where the sense of alienation from life and nature prevails. The character type soon became an archetype for the Russian 19th century culture and featured in many novels of the 19th and 20th century. The superfluous man was at times seen as having a deep and authentic personality: the eponymous hero of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (1959), an idealistic, non-conformist poet is celebrated for his individualism and independent thinking. The term has also been applied to characters from earlier works such as Pushkin's novel *Eugene Onegin*, written between 1825 and 1832; here, however, Onegin's inability to fit within societal norms is viewed with an ambivalent attitude, evidencing the uncertainty with which the archetype of the superfluous man was received among the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century. The most extreme example of this attitude is probably found in Goncharov's 1859 novel *Oblomov*, featuring a character who spends almost his entire time lying in bed, contemplating all that he would do if he got up.

Turgenev's view, expresses indifference and even contempt towards the masses. Hamlet, in this context, was seen as a representative of the self-serving aristocracy, which disregarded the social reality (Holland, 2000, p. 325).

Tolstoy expressed similar views in his 1903 essay, "On Shakespeare and On Drama" (Tolstoy & Courtney, 1906). Tolstoy, who presumed that the morally educational power of art constituted its essential value, opposed himself to the vulgar content of Shakespeare's dramas, which depict a highly immoral way of life. His attack on Hamlet and the generalised phenomenon of Hamletism focused therefore on both the vulgarity of life depicted in the drama and on Shakespeare's aristocratic and anti-proletarian moral values. However, Tolstoy found the tragedy of Hamlet—not to mention all of Shakespeare's plays—not only ideologically but also aesthetically repugnant. Pointing out the psychological inconsistencies in the character of Hamlet and his confusing role in the plot, Tolstoy expressed the belief that the tragedy possesses no admirable aesthetic qualities and that the positive reception of *Hamlet* had been solely based on the fear of diverging from an established view.

In his writings, Vygotsky, who appears to be well versed in the phenomenon of Hamletism and the ideological or critical attacks that *Hamlet* had been submitted to, took a unique position on the matter. His methodological premises in his two approaches to *Hamlet* dictated that the analysis of the drama be performed solely on the text 'as it stands', discounting the weight of previous interpretations and studies of the tragedy. This brought him in opposition to the phenomenon of Hamletism, in the context of its tendency to isolate the character of Hamlet from the tragedy and stereotype it. Vygotsky viewed Hamlet solely as an artistic construction, which would lose all meaning of existence once separated from the play. In this context, Vygotsky praised Tolstoy for his bravery in pointing out the psychological inconsistencies of the play:

He was the first to express boldly what now has been confirmed by many, namely, that Shakespeare fails to give convincing psychological motivation to quite a few of the intrigues and actions in his plays, that his characters are often implausible, and that frequently there are serious incongruities, unacceptable to common sense, between the protagonist's character and his actions. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 179)

However, Vygotsky's agreement with Tolstoy ends here. As Vygotsky strived to show, the psychological incongruities in *Hamlet* are an integral part of the artistic structure of the play, which serves specific and complex aesthetic functions. Thus, Vygotsky argued that Tolstoy:

fails to understand, or perhaps does not want to accept, Shakespeare's aesthetics. By narrating the latter's artistic devices in plain language, he transposes the author's poetic language into a language of prose, removes the devices from the aesthetic functions which they perform in the drama—and reaches a nonsensical conclusion. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 179)

Though he does not mention Turgenev's view on the tragedy, Vygotsky would have equally opposed the latter's demand for art to provide the society with a behavioural model. In his writings, Vygotsky often employed such cases of ignoring the particular psychological function of art and disregarding the poetic dimension of literature and theatre as counter-examples for his theory on art.

Nonetheless, the views of Tolstoy and Turgenev did not constitute an unbroken rule in *Hamlet's* reception in 19th century Russia. Parallel to the image of the weak-willed Hamlet, stood that of the Romantic hero, "the noble sufferer, hating the evil of the world and raging against it" (Rovda in Rowe, 1974, pp. 178-9). This vision disconnected Hamlet's indecision from cowardice and gave rise to a series of strong, active, sarcastically ironic Hamlets that appeared on the Russian stages by the end of the 19th century (Assay, 2016). Contrary to Turgenev's superfluous man, these modern Russian Hamlets faced their responsibilities with full awareness of their moral complexities, and their procrastination became an opportunity for constructive introspection, and for active reflection on the self and the world.

The aspect of active reflection became increasingly important in the dawn of the 20th century, when Hamlet's image would come to represent the contemporary, modern man, and his internal dilemmas would mirror the psychological torments that derived from the transitions in life experienced by the Russian people of the time. Indeed, this Hamlet, "like Dostoevskij's underground philosophers, often appears at symbolic thresholds" (Goldman, 1975, p. 240). In the poetry of Blok, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, and Pasternak, characteristically, *Hamlet's* myth was employed, and its protagonist reincarnated in order to express the emotional uncertainty and grief that characterised the poets' heroes in their effort to find their place in a changing society. These poets, as well as many Modernist artists showed an affinity and an attraction towards Hamlet, which is easily understood: through the lens of Modernity, the Danish Prince was seen as a divided man, struggling to form his identity under the ambiguous and uncertain currents of his world. Indeed, Hamlet stands in the margin of the social, spiritual, and political life of his world and regardless the amount of contemplation he is unable to form a real understanding of the meaning held by the signs around him and what they signify for his future. Equally, the writers that appropriated the myth of Hamlet during Modernism tended to be themselves people that struggled to find their place within the social norms (Goldman, 1975).

These writers strived to form an understanding of their changing world, and in their struggle, it was common for them to identify with Hamlet. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of *Hamlet's* reception in Modernist Russia was the tendency of the writers, theatre artists and critics, including Vygotsky, to see in *Hamlet* a mirror of themselves and the world.¹⁰⁵

***Hamlet* in the Modernist Russian Theatre**

The tendency of Modernist Russians to see in *Hamlet* a mirror of their world manifested itself also in the staging of the tragedy. The Modernist Russian theatre inherited the ongoing preoccupation with and the fixed stereotypes of the character of Hamlet that characterised the phenomenon of Hamletism. During the first three decades of the 20th century, the question of the nature of Hamlet's character became particularly important as its answer would form the perspective into the whole tragedy. Many of the Modernists believed that the world of the play and its people were depicted through Hamlet's soul. In line with the development of the distinct theatrical genre of the monodrama,¹⁰⁶ *Hamlet* was repeatedly read and staged through the lens of its protagonist, where his entire world would appear as a reflection of his soul. Yet Hamlet's soul is by its very nature obscure—a dark, distorting lens to the whole tragedy. The image of the world, in this case, is blurred, relative to the consciousness of a hero with a lost identity. At a time of massive changes in the life of Russians, this indeterminate nature of the tragedy's world allowed for a flexible interpretation, one that mirrored the artists' understanding of life itself. As Scofield argues, the very tragedy invites this: “When we ask of the play ‘Who's there?’ it challenges us to stand and unfold ourselves” (Scofield, 1980, pp. 5-6).

This perceptual relativity, along with the general ambiguity of the play's atmosphere, allowed the Modernists to project the different stages of their radically changing world onto the same canvas. As the sociopolitical situation in Russia changed drastically, the tragedy of *Hamlet* became the mirror of extremely diverse realities. Therefore, the various productions of *Hamlet* in the Russian Modernist and

105 Dobkin, in his memoirs, claims that Vygotsky's first essay on *Hamlet* had an autobiographical character: “in it Lev Semenovich expressed himself most freely and completely” (Dobkin in Feigenberg, 2000, p. 20). Vygotsky's affinity to the Danish Prince is also evident from the fact that he brought the book with him at his final hospitalisation and from his last words, that quoted Hamlet: “I am ready” (Zavershneva, 2010b).

106 The emergence of monodrama was further discussed in Chapter Four.

Avant-garde theatre reflected the different developmental phases of both the Russian society and its theatre. Equally, the theatrical explorations of the Shakespearean text during the first three decades of the 20th century showed a great diversity in the stylistic theatrical realisation of the tragedy, which reflected the artistic developments of the time. This was, indeed, a period when “the stylistic pendulum swung widely and the stagings of Shakespeare were often located at the extreme points of its swing” (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 109). The Russian productions of *Hamlet* in the first three decades of the 20th century both employed and made contributions to the developing theatrical styles of the time while their stylistic choices expressed the essence of each director’s interpretation of both the tragedy itself, and *Hamlet’s* overall role within the changing society.

Such investigations of *Hamlet’s* place on the Russian stage in the turbulent years of the early 20th century, were often anchored in the directorial visions of the nature of Hamlet’s character and his moral dilemmas—or lack thereof—as well as on the definition of the spiritual and the moral aspect of the tragedy. Indeed, the various staged interpretations of *Hamlet* during the Modernist period gave rise to questions pertaining to the existence and the function of the Ghost and the authority that it represented. In this sense, “the realized Ghost determines the nature of the entire theatrical event and is intrinsically linked to the larger sociopolitical milieu, be it as its barometer or as an active, often prescient participant” (Axline, 2001, p. 7). Similarly pivotal for the interpretation of the tragedy was the understanding of the condition of vengeance. The nature of the sin against whom Hamlet had to seek revenge and what that sin represented took on the Russian stage as many forms as the Ghosts and the Hamlets. The divergence between the established visions of the tragedy and the novel interpretations of these elements, proposed by the productions of the Shakespearean tragedy, formed the meaning that the drama took within the Russian community.

When placed on the Avant-garde stage, the tragedy of *Hamlet* would submit itself to a particular phenomenon: by the start of the 20th century the play was famous enough so that the contribution of each staging did not lie in the presentation of the tragedy itself, but the interpretation of the contemporary life through it. Therefore, by studying the Russian Modernist visions of *Hamlet*, as they were presented in the various productions of the tragedy, one is able to gain an advantageous view of the cultural and social life at the time and trace its development through the first three decades of the 20th century. This section aims at performing such a study by focusing mainly on three stagings—Craig and Stanislavsky’s 1911/12 production, the 1924/5 Second Moscow Art Theatre

production with Michael Chekhov in the role of Hamlet, and Akimov's 1932 *Hamlet* at the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre—taking into account Meyerhold's unrealised vision of the tragedy and Radlov's 1938 production.¹⁰⁷ The brief analysis and juxtaposition of these visions and their staged realisations will be viewed against Vygotsky's two approaches to the play, revealing the connections of his work with the general reception of Hamlet and stressing the uniqueness of some of his insights.

Craig-Stanislavsky

In the years 1911 and 1912 the Moscow Art Theatre presented a production of *Hamlet* that was to be remembered as one of the most important theatre productions of the 20th century. At the time, the production received mixed critiques and was denounced by many for its internal conflicts. The production resulted from the collaboration of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Edward Gordon Craig, with Vasily Kachalov in the role of Hamlet—an extraordinary combination of three distinct interpretations:

The discrepancies between all three were quite serious, for which reason neither Craig nor Stanislavskij was satisfied with the production. Craig was especially dissatisfied with Kacalov, whose Hamlet was reflexive and thoughtful. Apart from that, Craig's idea of complicated dynamic decorations was technically not feasible in the MAT, and the proposed routine of the production (Stanislavskij handling the actors and rehearsals, Craig making *mise-en-scenes*) often led to arguments and conflicts. (Semenenko, 2007, p. 127, footnote)

Indeed, the collaboration between Stanislavsky and Craig, initially orchestrated by Isadora Duncan, was notable for a series of arguments and conflicts; these disagreements were reflected on the stage, leading the production to be considered in Russia as “a qualified failure or, at best, a succès d' estime” (Senelick 1982, p. xvi).¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, and possibly due to the discrepancies in the ideas of the two major artists, the production brought together some of the most important theatrical

107 An interesting fact is that all these productions were the fruit of several internal conflicts from within the creative team. Debates among the artistic heads, external pressures, and stylistic or methodological conflicts characterised much of their creative process causing, in most cases, the end result to diverge from the directors' initial intentions. For this reason, in my examination of these staged versions of *Hamlet*, I will consider the productions' final result as well as the unrealised elements of the directors' visions.

108 In the Western world, on the other hand, and due to Craig's publications on the production in his own periodical, *The Mask*, the production won a reputation for excellence (Taxidou, 1998).

movements of its time and became a milestone in the development of *Hamlet's* reception in Russia, and in the world. Craig's famous, abstract, and highly stylised set design, with his large, monochromatic screens, formed a turning point in the history of set design, which until then was limited to realistic and historically accurate scenery (Burian, 2007). Stanislavsky's techniques in actor training prompted the transformation of Hamlet from the spasmodic and unstable character, nourished by the theatrical tradition, to a realistic man—a character recognisable by the early 20th century Russian.¹⁰⁹

Pertaining to the interpretation of *Hamlet*, the most important aspect in which the Moscow Art Theatre production broke all previous stereotypes was its grounding in Symbolistic ideals, which revealed and stressed the tragedy's spiritual and metaphysical depth. Craig was indeed highly influenced by Romantic idealism, mysticism, and Symbolism and he envisioned theatre as a 'temple' where truths beyond the social and the individual are revealed (Burian, 2007). This stance led Craig to view Hamlet as a highly spiritual being who, like Christ or Dionysus, would pass across the earth cleansing it from the accumulated sin and vileness. Radically divergent from the dominant Russian vision of *Hamlet*—and in anticipation of Pasternak's view of Hamlet as a Messiah—Craig presented the Shakespearean tragedy as a ritual of a cleansing sacrifice (Rowe, 1974).

Craig's mise-en-scène for the production was constructed to present Hamlet as a pure spirit, living in a world of degrading matter. To depict Hamlet's world, Craig designed a series of highly versatile panels which were moved, folded, and lit in different colours to represent different environments and create profound atmospheres. The interior of the palace was presented in gold, under an intense light. Yet, as the Japanese theatre artist, Kaoru Osanai described, this light "never lighted up the whole stage with dazzling brightness—the interior, rather, was to create the effect of tarnished gold" (Osanai in Osanai & Tsubaki, 1968, p. 589). Hamlet, in contrast, lingered in the shadows, completely isolated from the golden world of Elsinore. There, he appeared as the only true being, the only one who sees the degradation of the material world. The tragedy unfolded between these two contrasting worlds and through the impossibility of them ever truly meeting. This emblematic set of the production, based on the contrasting interplay between light and shadow, depicted a highly Symbolistic terrain on which Hamlet's tragedy and sacrifice took place.

Although we do not know the extent to which Vygotsky was aware of the

109 Valery Bryusov, a famous critic of the time wrote characteristically about Kachalov's Hamlet that he was presented as one of these persons that we "daily meet among our dear friends in drawing-rooms, at opening nights and vernissages" (Bryusov in Senelick, 1982, p. 181).

innovations of the Craig-Stanislavsky production,¹¹⁰ his 1915/16 essay on *Hamlet* presented the drama in a similar light: a battle between the world of light and the world of darkness (Vygodskij,1986). As in the vision of Craig and Stanislavsky, Vygotsky honoured, in his early essay, the mysticism and spiritual depth of the tragedy. What is more, in this first approach to the play, Vygotsky stressed the significance of Hamlet's contact with a metaphysical world through his meeting with his father's Ghost. He placed on this meeting the cornerstone of the tragedy's moving force and identified in it the cause of Hamlet's transformation. His view closely mirrors Stanislavsky's words regarding his production:

Hamlet was not a neurasthenic and even less a madman, but he had become different from other people because he had for a moment looked beyond the wall of life into the future world where his father was suffering. After he came to know the life of tortures and suffering on the other side, the actuality of life change in Hamlet's mind. (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 513)

Nonetheless, the interpretations presented in Vygotsky's essay and in the Stanislavsky-Craig production bear some key differences. The two directors saw in Hamlet's transformation a social purpose. Hamlet, in the Moscow Art Theatre's version, returned from the accursed meeting to see with clarity the moral decadence of the court, attack all transgressors, and cleanse their world of their sin. In order to accommodate Craig's view, Stanislavsky stated that "it was necessary to think that Hamlet, as the best most suffering man on earth, raised to heaven after his earthly deeds, would there meet his liberated father" (Stanislavsky, 1945, p. 514). Vygotsky, on the other hand, gave no such purpose to the tragic hero; Hamlet does not meet his father in heaven, his suffering does not transform him into a Messiah, it does not make him into a better person. Quite the contrary: Hamlet, for Vygotsky, is chiefly a mortal man, who experiences the incongruities of human existence to their fullest. Under Vygotsky's lens, moral evaluation of either world—the one here, or the one beyond—has no meaning. Spiritual morality has no place in the tragedy, as the mysticism that fills the atmosphere of *Hamlet* is an artistic and not educational device.

It was of the foremost importance, for Vygotsky, to preserve in his analysis the human nature of Hamlet and resist any attempts at glorifying his tragic story through a moral lens. This intuitive standpoint was adopted in this essay written at the end of his Gymnasium years and foresaw the development of a psychological

110 At the time of the production, Vygotsky was a young teenager living in Gomel. Therefore, it appears that he had not attended the show. However, Vygotsky was well versed in the contemporary theatrical life, and it is possible that the talk of the production and its specific characteristics had reached him in Gomel.

understanding of the tragedy a few years later, when Vygotsky was already immersed in the world of psychology. Relieved from any moral or religious connotations, *Hamlet*, as Vygotsky believed, allows for the readers' or audience's psychological identification which is required by the mechanism of the aesthetic experience. In this context, Hamlet cannot be good or bad, the character needs to stand beyond any evaluation; only under these circumstances the most inner, latent, and potentially destructive elements of the individual psychology can safely surface and be projected on the face of the tragic hero, so that they can be released and transformed in the moment of catharsis. Where Craig and Stanislavsky saw in the tragedy's metaphysical element a socially moral effect, that was bordering on the political, Vygotsky saw an aesthetic device with a concrete psychological effect. Yet, according to Vygotsky's theory of the psychology of art, it is this psychological effect that has a highly social dimension.

Despite their differences in the interpretation of the protagonist's nature, Vygotsky, Craig, and Stanislavsky agreed in the centrality of Hamlet's figure in the play. The Moscow Art Theatre production presented *Hamlet* as a monodrama: every aspect of the production was submitted to the tragic hero—his world and the people in it were portrayed as seen through Hamlet's eyes. The use of the panels and light, in the production, stressed the isolation of Hamlet from the rest of the characters creating a physical barrier or a strong contrast between them. With Hamlet often appearing more real than the rest of Elsinore, the scenes gave the impression of “a nightmare which was seen through the mind's eye of Hamlet” (Osanai in Osanai & Tsubaki, 1968, p. 590).

This monodramatic perspective lies in agreement with the psychoanalytic view of the tragedy's psychological function and characterised Vygotsky's approach to it. For him, the centrality of the character of Hamlet and the subjugation of the play to his experience served an essential function: it created a clear plane for psychological identification to take place. According to his aesthetic theory, the phenomenon of identification with the tragic hero is indispensable in the process of artistic reception:

The hero becomes the point upon which our attention is focused and simultaneously serves as a support for our feelings which would otherwise be lost in endless digressions as we evaluate, empathize, and suffer with every character. [...] It suffices to examine any tragedy, Hamlet in particular, to realize that all its characters are portrayed as the protagonist sees them. All the events are refracted by the lens of his soul. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 192)

The seeds for these conclusions, arrived to in 1924/5, are found in Vygotsky's first approach to the tragedy. In his essay, and in an attempt to understand the relationships between the play's characters and Hamlet, Vygotsky adopted such a monodramatic view of the play, where Hamlet acts as the medium through whom all the tragedy is realised:

If we compare Hamlet's place and role in the play with that of a magnetic needle lying in a field of magnetic forces—in a whirlpool of invisible threads that stretch through the tragedy giving it its direction—then we will need to compare all the other characters of the play with that of iron, non-magnetized needles, which fell in the same field: the guiding influence of the magnetic forces (that lie beyond the stage) affects Hamlet directly, but through him the forces' influence is also spread to the other, "unmagnetised" characters; just as the magnetic needle magnetizes the iron, Hamlet infects everyone with the tragic. (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 454)¹¹¹

The centrality of Hamlet's figure in both the structure and the meaning of the play, as it was suggested by Vygotsky's writings and the Craig-Stanislavsky production, continued, in its own way, the tradition of Hamletism. However, in contrast to this tradition, the monodramatic perspective did not separate Hamlet from his world but viewed the character and its function as deriving from Elsinore and existing only in relation to it. Contrary to the detached figure of the end of the 19th century, withdrawn in self-contemplation and philosophical criticism of the world, the Hamlet of the early 20th century sprung out of the clash of two worlds—a here and a beyond or a heaven and a hell—and was presented as the bearer of the consequences of this deep crisis or even the saviour for his world. His inevitable sacrifice was presented as the beginning of a new era for the world, that would eradicate the degradation of the old world. Craig and Stanislavsky created this impression with their choice to stage the final duel with Laertes in the presence of only four characters—the King, the Queen, Horatio, and Osric—a scene that contrasted with the arrival of Fortinbras' men who, after Hamlet's death, filled the stage "like a rising tide" (Osanai in Osanai & Tsubaki, 1968, p. 593). In this manner, and as observed by Liubov Gurevich—a famous literary journalist who wrote a critique on the Moscow Art Theatre *Hamlet* production - "Hamlet reflected the spiritual crisis going on in the souls of Russian intellectuals at that moment" (Senelick, 1982, p. 176).

111 All excerpts from Vygotsky's early essay on *Hamlet* are translated by myself.

Michael Chekhov

More than a decade after the Craig-Stanislavsky production and in the same year that Vygotsky wrote *The Psychology of Art*, the Second Moscow Art Theatre presented *Hamlet* under the direction of the trio: Valentin Smysljaev, Vladimir Tatarinov, and Aleksandr Chebana, with Michael Chekhov in the protagonist's role. A "radically stylized and philosophical interpretation" (Axline, 2001, p. 133), Chekhov's *Hamlet* combined highly diverse elements of reception and theatrical style. In line with the Craig-Stanislavsky production, Chekhov's interpretation followed the monodramatic approach. It also portrayed Hamlet as a Christ-like figure, a strong character whose task was to cleanse the world of a particular sin. Nonetheless, taking place after a decade of intense theatrical experimentation, Chekhov's production presented a much more complex theatrical style than that of its predecessor, as it employed stylisation techniques similar to those of Constructivism, the theatrical Expressionism's methods of creating atmosphere, as well as Chekhov's own developing method of acting. What is more, the production pioneered by adopting a humanistic stance towards the play as a whole. This approach, which opposed itself to the rising 'vulgar sociology' of the time, presented Hamlet as a "solitary champion for humanist values in a repressive and evil age" (Rowe, 1974, pp. 264-5).

A characteristic of Chekhov's *Hamlet*, was that he appeared as a strong man, fully capable of effecting changes—an image that stood in contrast to the 19th-century stereotype of the superfluous man. The production employed a tight rhythm, eliminating any element that would slow down the pace. Hamlet acted with excitement and often frenzy, his moods rising and changing suddenly. The main scenic element—a set of steps—along with the use of a double curtain, allowed for rapid changes of scenery and the stylised set and costumes created an "almost nightmarishly phantasmagorical" world on stage (Law, 1983, p. 36). Within this world, Chekhov's Hamlet, dressed in a leather costume reminiscent of armour, appeared as a passionate warrior.

Yet, this Hamlet was also mournful in the face of the grave and violent task that was bestowed upon him. The tragedy here lay in the fact that this sensitive and compassionate Hamlet had to overcome his humaneness and fulfil his mission of punishment quickly:

He passed among the tragedy's characters like a dark shadow, all dressed up in velvet and silks, dragging his heavy sword behind him. In appearance not a prince at all, but rather more a warrior, much experienced in his lifetime and prepared for the worst, Chekhov's Hamlet delivered soliloquies with anxiety and pain, a pain that was

abundantly clear to the audience. (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 114)

This pain would arise from Hamlet's ability to see a clear picture of his world and its unrecoverable decay. Hamlet, in Chekhov's interpretation, was portrayed as highly intuitive and intelligent in a "monstrous and terrifying, almost psychopathic" world (Senelick, 2015, p. 147). This world, set in the Middle Ages, was depicted in a highly theatrical manner, creating an intense mystical atmosphere, with stylized costumes and masks and a heavy atmosphere supported by Nikolai Rakhmanov's lighting and music. The *mise-en-scène* was inspired by the Gothic cathedrals, adorned with a series of stained-glass windows, which strengthened the mystical ambience of the stage. The court's eccentric make-up and uniform attire, suggestive of a horde of mice, created the impression of a spiritually hollow world, which stood in contrast to Hamlet's image. Visually, the stage was divided into black—for Hamlet's enemies—and white—for Hamlet's friends—with the latter filling the stage at the end of the play, light winning over darkness and death. Though this contrasting visual world was highly reminiscent of Craig and Stanislavsky's interpretation, in Chekhov's vision, the light from Hamlet's death did not illuminate the dark world of Elsinore; it shone only on Hamlet's soul. Hamlet's death did not take place as a purifying sacrifice, but as a liberation from a dismal world.

Pessimism for the future of the world went hand-in-hand with strong spirituality in this production. In his moments of solitude and self-reflection, Hamlet was not striving to find a way to salvage his world; he was opting to connect with a world beyond reality—the world that his father's ghost had introduced him to. This meeting with the Ghost—referred to in the rehearsals as 'the Spirit'—became the pivotal point in the development of Hamlet's character. The theatrical tension that characterised the scene in the Second Moscow Art Theatre's productions is conveyed by Law:

Hamlet follows the Ghost. The stage darkens. The light of the moon breaks through thick clouds, its rays illuminating only Hamlet's face and hands. A gong and a drum mark the invisible Ghost's steps. Against a background of off-stage music, a chorus of male voices speaks the Ghost's words. As if straining to memorize the words of the old King, Hamlet slowly repeats some of the Ghost's lines. The cadence is broken by Hamlet's deafening shout when he learns that Claudius killed his father by pouring poison in his ear. (Law, 1983, p. 38)

In the production, this Spirit came to symbolise the battle between light and darkness and acted as a catalyst to Hamlet's quest until his death came as a cathartic moment: "Hamlet accepted death as something familiar: he crossed over peacefully, with a lucid mind, as if carefully laying out his body" (Chekhov in

Senelick, 2015, p. 152).

Chekhov was highly influenced, in his interpretation, by Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy, a spiritual and therapeutic philosophy that employed the practice of eurhythmics. Steiner saw theatre as a spiritual temple—not unlike Vyacheslav Ivanov and Fyodor Sologub—where the actors perform mysteria focusing on the eternal battle between heaven and hell, light and darkness, body and soul. Chekhov's *Hamlet*, with its binary vision of Elsinore and the focus on the spiritual battles unravelling through Hamlet's soul, mirrored closely such a mysterium; it also reflected his general beliefs regarding the role and function of theatre in the society.

Chekhov attempted to marry Steiner's philosophy with Stanislavsky's psychological characterisation and incorporated it into his own developing acting method, thus grounding his work as an actor and teacher in profound spirituality. In a time when 'vulgar sociology' was making itself felt in theatres, Chekhov chose such an interpretation of *Hamlet* to highlight the distinction of the First Studio which had just become an official theatre under the name Second Moscow Art Theatre. "It was to be a vision statement expressing the theatre's denial of material propaganda in favor of aesthetic experimentation and spiritual striving" (Senelick, 2015, p. 147). Nonetheless, in a time of high enthusiasm over the politicisation of theatre, the production received negative criticism from many of the Leftist artists. Deemed as decadent and unnecessary, Chekhov's mysticism was regarded as inappropriate or even dangerous in the quest of creating a truly Communist theatre. Yet, the production ran in Moscow for four consecutive years and many theatrical concepts that were cultivated during its rehearsals became the cornerstones of Chekhov's acting technique, the fame of which survives to this day.

Vygotsky's first essay on *Hamlet*, as I have already argued, highlighted the metaphysics of the tragedy. In line with Chekhov's interpretation, Vygotsky stressed the existence of an ever-present spiritual dimension, a plane that is separate from the physical world and that accompanies every aspect of the tragedy: "Everything in it carries two meanings—the one apparent and simple, the other unusual and deep" (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 357). Like Chekhov's, Vygotsky's *Hamlet* was also experiencing a painful battle in his soul. This battle, however, was not between the two ends of Chekhov's binary spirituality; it was between the earthly life, as we humans know it to be, and the beyond—all that we are unable, and even afraid to regard. *Hamlet*, for Vygotsky, was not conscious of his real role in the tragedy, the choice to fulfil his mission was never his to make. As with all the characters in the play, *Hamlet* was the victim of the supernatural force that guided the tragedy, and his death was his final defeat by this force. This distinction bears much significance as Vygotsky had

repeatedly stressed the importance of resisting any temptation to explain the mystery of Hamlet. For him, it was essential that one of the two battling forces was left unnamed; only thus would an analysis preserve and not diminish the psychological depth of the tragedy, a pitfall in which he believed many scholars and artist to fall, including the ones involved in the 1924 Second Moscow Art Theatre production.

Chekhov's interpretation was indeed a simplified view of *Hamlet*. In his effort to give the production clarity, he and his directors sacrificed the play's and the characters' complexity. The radical cuts in the text and the schematic decor reinforced the image of Hamlet as a warrior while depriving the play of its intricate ambiguity. Vygotsky, working and living in Moscow at the time, had attended Chekhov's production, the rationalisation of which left him with an unfavourable impression. Comparing the dominant interpretation of the production with that of Volkenshteyn, who supported the view of Hamlet as a strong character yielding under a titanic task, Vygotsky wrote in his *Psychology of Art*:

Equally poor interpretation was the staging of Hamlet by the Second Moscow Art Theatre, a production which followed Volkenshteyn's line closely. The directors proceeded from the clash of two distinct aspects of human nature. [...] They admit quite openly that for stage requirements and for better understanding of the tragedy they had to perform the following three operations on the play: to discard from it everything that prevents such an understanding; to condense the obstacles that lie in Hamlet's way; and to accentuate the shades and colors in the play, while transferring the action to the Middle Ages (despite the fact that the play is usually seen as taking place during the Renaissance). After three such operations it is obvious that any and all interpretations of the drama are possible. It is also obvious that these three operations transform the tragedy into something diametrically opposed to the author's intent. The fact that such radical surgery was required to produce a particular interpretation of Shakespeare's work is the best evidence of the immense discrepancy between the true meaning of Hamlet's story and the meaning attributed to it by the critics. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 172)

Vygotsky's dismissal of Chekhov's interpretation stresses his sincere belief in theatre's ability to bear and reflect unfathomable psychological depth. For Vygotsky, one who had been profoundly influenced by the psychoanalytic theories, the essence of art lay in its prompting the contact with this depth, the unconscious, unnamed part of ourselves. In *Hamlet*, Vygotsky found an invaluable such resource; this explains his polemic against any interpretation that deprived the tragedy of its subtlety and its complexity. In other words, *Hamlet*, for Vygotsky, was a highly effective work of art and any view that interfered with its psychological effect was, for him, invalidated.

Other early Soviet productions

However schematic and simplified, the *Hamlet* production of the Second Moscow Art Theatre reflected the ongoing investigation into the ways in which the Shakespearean text could enter the early Soviet reality. While most such attempts, as with all theatrical explorations of the time, took place in Moscow and St. Petersburg, there is evidence of two productions of *Hamlet* taking place in the periphery of the Soviet Union. The one was staged at the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi in 1925 by Kote Mardzhanishvili—a former assistant to Craig in his 1911/12 production, and the other was presented at the Azerbaijan State Theatre in Baku in 1926 under the direction of the Russian Alexander Tuganov.

The visual world in the Rustaveli Theatre production, was evidently influenced by Craig's vision. Mardzhanishvili adopted Craig's screens and enhanced their Symbolistic effect by placing them on a revolving disc and by adding a grand staircase on which the most essential scenes were performed. Hamlet, in this production, was portrayed as a noble soul, a man with a vulnerable and turbulent spirit, though he did not mirror Craig's Christ-like figure; this was primarily a tragedy of revenge. Hamlet did not question the need to avenge his father's murder, and any delay was justified through his love for Ophelia. The overall interpretation focused on "the romantic play of contrasts between dark and light, lofty spirituality and base sensuality, heroism and villainy" (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 114). The resulting performance was considerably lighter than that of its predecessor but appeared more consistent with its vision and more approachable to the Georgian public.

The Azerbaijan State Theatre production presented a much more radical view: in an attempt to better reach the Azerbaijani audience Tuganov gave all elements in the play a local, traditional colour. The action was transferred to an imaginary Oriental country, the décor followed a Turkish/Persian style, and the names of the characters—aside from Hamlet's and Ophelia's—were changed into names "with familiar connotations for the Azerbaijani audience" (Assay, 2016, pp. 96-7). As in Mardzhanishvili's production, Hamlet was presented through a Romantic lens, deprived of his stereotypical hesitancy. In line with the local fantasy that inspired this interpretation, Hamlet "with assured mastery brought to the poor the sacred loyalty to the Oriental law of blood revenge" (Rudnitsky & Milne, 1988, p. 116). The local audience responded positively to this unusual for the time theatrical experiment, and the production stayed in the theatre's repertoire for many years.

The modernisation of *Hamlet*

Similarly to the major productions of *Hamlet* that took place in Russia during the first quarter of the 20th century, the efforts of Mardzhanishvili and Tuganov represent a significant development towards the modernisation of Shakespeare's texts. The artists of the time freed the text of its traditional conservative associations—whether in relation to the staging of the tragedy or the interpretation of its meaning. Shakespeare's tragedy was now staged under Modernist aesthetics holding the tragedy up as a mirror to life in Modern Russia and as life changed under the dramatic sociopolitical shifts of these turbulent times, so did the reception of the play. The theatrical choices made by the creators of these productions became a most potent tool in shaping the reception of the tragedy. The stylistic and technical approaches to the staging of *Hamlet* derived from the heart of the theatrical developments of the time. In this manner, the theatrical elements employed by each production became a lens through which the classical drama was reimagined and the instrument that redefined its place in the changing Russian society. In this sense, the Modernisation of *Hamlet* became possible through the theatricalisation of the Shakespearean tragedy.

Overall, this period of *Hamlet's* reception brought forth a deep spirituality. The Ghost—along with all that it symbolised—and Hamlet's association with it became the driving force of the plot and the carrier of the very essence of the tragedy. In a world of heightened spirituality, the character of Hamlet was portrayed as a lone sufferer, all of his world's conflicts contained in his soul. Therefore, the tragedy was often read as a monodrama of a deep conflict between an unreachable or lost spirituality and a dying, decadent material world; whereas Hamlet was received as a spiritual saviour or, at least, as a man that looked into the spiritual world as a refuge from the world's decay. On the flip side, Hamlet's role as an avenger was also heightened. The weakness of will and moral confusion that characterised the Hamlet of the 19th century Russia was now replaced by a strong-minded hero able to avenge the death of his father. In all cases, Elsinore came to represent a place of social impropriety and moral decadence, and Hamlet, whether as a fighter or a spiritual leader, was depicted as the solitary saviour of the world.

Vygotsky's vision of the Shakespearean tragedy was cultivated among these developments in the reception of the play and in part follows many of its convictions. He, too, was captivated by the metaphysics of the play and based much of his interpretation in his 1915/16 essay on the mystical power that governs the tragedy. What is more, he also viewed the entire tragedy as a battle between two worldly dimensions, a familiar and an unearthly one, taking place within the protagonist's

soul. In contrast, however, to his contemporaries, Vygotsky did not place a positive or negative value on either side of this conflict. What others had associated with only positive connotations—a probable derivative of Christian thought—Vygotsky left dark, silent, and unnamed. When writing his *Psychology of Art* such a choice was explained by his focus on the psychological effect of the tragedy on its reader or audience: according to Vygotsky, the elements of a tragedy that are perceived by the reader's unconsciousness need to remain unexplained, as any attempt at such "conscious and reasonable interpretation or comment given to a work of art by the artist or the reader must be regarded as a subsequent rationalization. As a self-deception, a justification before one's own intellect, or an explanation devised post factum" (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 72). In 1915, however, when Vygotsky was formulating his interpretation of *Hamlet* under the direct influence of his teacher, Aikhenval'd, the respect towards and admiration for the obscurity of the text stands as a remarkable prefigure to Vygotsky's work in psychology.

Another element, unique for its time, in Vygotsky's first essay, that also anticipated his later conclusions in *The Psychology of Art*, was the focus on the existential aspect of Hamlet's tragedy. Vygotsky did not read *Hamlet* as a tragedy of revenge; though the meeting with the Ghost is seen as the pivotal moment for the tragedy, it was not seen as the call to arms for a war against the sin and wrong of the world. In Vygotsky's interpretation, by appearing to Hamlet, the Ghost breathed into Elsinore the wind of the 'other world', entrapping Hamlet and everyone related to him into an inexplicable 'machine', a turbulent journey towards unavoidable destruction. As Vygotsky pointed out Hamlet senses deeply the destructive powers that have taken over his life and his world. Under these circumstances, Hamlet appears to represent the deep suffering of the existential aloneness, the ache that arises from the feeling of confinement to a world that does not make sense and the painful understanding of the limits of one's powers to bring any effective change. As with the artists of his time, Vygotsky identified with the Danish Prince and read in his story the tragedy of the people of his time: spiritually alone and confused, living in an unstable world, feeling the social responsibility and, yet, experiencing the inability to effect real change. Nonetheless, when the other artists attempted to solve this moral, spiritual, or social impasse through the vision of a strong Hamlet, a Messiah, or an avenger, Vygotsky preferred to focus on listening to the deep existential pain that came with it.

The politicisation of *Hamlet*

The highlighting of spirituality and the presentation of Hamlet as a man capable of effecting social reform, echoed the sense of social responsibility evoked by the artists of the 19th century along with the rediscovery of mysticism that accompanied the movement of Symbolism. Although such interpretations of the Shakespearean text survived until the middle of the 1920s, the drastic changes taking place at the time on Russia's cultural terrain made them highly problematic:

Hamlet has presented quite a dilemma for the Soviet mind. The tragedy had to be coped with, for it was deeply embedded in the nation's cultural tradition. Since the Soviet government has always considered it essential to exploit literature as an instrument of social and political control, its problem was to determine the "correct" attitude to take towards Shakespeare's play. The ideal Soviet literary mind cannot tolerate mystery, uncertainty, or doubt. All valid questions have clear answers. Yet it would seem that mystery and enigma are part of the essence of Hamlet. (Rowe, 1974, p. 258)

On the other hand, since its first appearance in Russia, *Hamlet* had always carried a political overtone (Rowe, 1974). The very structure of the tragedy—with one solitary and misunderstood hero turning against the men that hold power—invited for the politicisation of the play. Hamlet in this context was viewed as a rebel and the authority (political or otherwise) that he opposed changed as the cultural and political life of Russia evolved. If in the first few years of the 20th century Hamlet battled the moral decadence of the court, a few years after the Revolution, Hamlet was called to join the ranks in the fight for social and political reform.

One of the most influential voices promoting the politicisation of the play was that of Ivan Aksyonov, a poet and theatre critic who, throughout the decade of the 1920s, gave a series of lectures presenting Shakespeare's plays through a Marxist lens.¹¹² Aksyonov read in *Hamlet* the tragedy of a man caught between the values of two different sociological epochs: in the tragedy, the duty of revenge—a moral value of feudalism—conflicts with the demands of contemporary life. Hamlet's procrastination, in this context, is seen as his attempt to solve the inconsistencies that arise from this conflict. Taking place in the State Higher Workshop for Directors, these lectures were attended by many prominent artists, and Aksyonov's "vulgar sociology" (Rowe, 1974, p. 132) proved to be highly influential on the theatrical developments of the time. Against this background, productions like the one by the Second Moscow Art Theatre, in 1924, "the last Russian Hamlet in the nineteenth century tradition" (Rowe, 1974, p. 259), were bound to cause an upheaval from the

112 Many of the ideas discussed in these lectures were included in his book *'Hamlet' and Other Essays in Soviet Shakespeareology* that was published in 1930.

Communist press. The official ideology demanded a Marxist interpretation of the play.

Akimov

The demand for a reinterpretation of *Hamlet* that would spring from a Marxist viewpoint was taken to the extreme by Nikolay Akimov in 1932, when he directed *Hamlet* at the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre. This highly controversial production, employing aesthetic paradigms from both the Avant-garde and the developing Socialist Realism, adopted a harsh sociological viewpoint that transformed the plot of the play to that of a struggle for political power. Hamlet was portrayed as a cheerful, outgoing, and gluttonous figure; the role of the Ghost was reduced to a pretend-play by Hamlet—a device to lure supporters to his cause; and the meaning of Hamlet’s famous monologue, ‘To be or not to be’, was drastically changed: “sitting on a table in a tavern with a bottle of wine and a papier-mache crown, Hamlet deliberates on whether or not to be king” (Rowe, 1974, pp. 260-1).

This extraordinary reimagining of the play sprung from Akimov’s radical opposition to all previously conceived images of Hamlet. With his production, Akimov vowed to free *Hamlet* from Hamletism, in the phenomenon of which he saw the epitome of bourgeois ideology. Instead, Akimov maintained that the classic tragedy is viewed with modern eyes. In his words: “it is not surprising if the symbolists, the idealists or the mystics didn’t use sociological analysis of Hamlet. But it will be most outrageous if we in 1932 were to do things the same way as our predecessors” (Akimov in Assay, 2015; 4).

Therefore, Akimov attempted to read Hamlet through a sociological, rather than philosophical or metaphysical lens, and portray Hamlet as a real person living in the 16th century society. With the supernatural element eradicated, Akimov focused his interpretation on the struggle between social rankings. Nonetheless, his sweeping treatment of the play resulted in its radical alteration:

In the first place, we set ourselves to present an optimistic, vigorous, and cheerful performance of “Hamlet”, a play that bore such infamy of a macabre, mystical, symbolistic, and philosophically reactionary drama. A play which I was only allowed to produce because my rendering distanced itself from these traditions that hung unto “Hamlet” and because I attempted to re-interpret it anew. (Akimov, 1978, p. 3)¹¹³

Indeed, the production followed Akimov’s convictions that theatre’s primal function is to entertain the masses and that, in his effort to bring a classical text to the

113 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from Akimov’s writings have been translated by myself.

contemporary people, an artist is entitled to alter and even ridicule elements from the original text. The result was a lively and highly amusing show, reminiscent of a farce. Directly influenced by both the high theatricality of the Avant-garde and the developing aesthetic canons of the Socialist Realist movement, the production committed to creating a Hamlet that would serve as a reflection of ordinary people while providing them with a high aesthetic experience. In that, Akimov's production constituted a unique example of the theatrical and cultural developments of the time.

Akimov's was foremost a highly theatrical *Hamlet* that created strong and immediate impressions. Grotesque images, spectacular scenes, and the fusion of a variety of techniques characterised the production. The use of masks, papier-mâché dummies and the ingeniously theatrical use of everyday objects—such as the use of a clay pot by Horatio to make eerie noises in accompaniment of Hamlet's Ghost masquerade—was combined with the use of “an array of soldiers and townfolk, beggars and cripples, even live horses and dogs.” (Law, 1977, p. 101). The spectacular livelihood of this production was also fused with highly dramatic moments. Hamlet's entrance in the second scene of the first act is a great example of Akimov's use of theatrical techniques to achieve a profound moment: “Following Claudius's words justifying his marriage and the celebrations, Shostakovich's ‘Funeral march’ is played while Hamlet enters wearing a black veil that covers his face” (Assay, 2016, p.168).

The production was indeed an exemplary Avant-garde experiment and, as such, it was positively received by the audiences who formed long lines at the ticket booths night after night. Yet, it is hard to say that Akimov's interpretation of *Hamlet* provided the solution to the question of the Shakespearean tragedy in the new theatrical and sociopolitical era. On the contrary, the production stressed the problematic nature of *Hamlet* in the time of vulgar sociology and the gradual establishment of the Socialist Realist canon. In Akimov's words:

At the time [...] I was simply not permitted to present on stage the ghost of Hamlet's father. But, then, it was precisely because I proposed a new theatrical solution to the staging of this “character” that I suffered the greatest attacks [...] and was called a futurist, in the reproaching meaning of the word. (Akimov, 1978, p. 3)

The critics' response to the production appeared rather severe, albeit highly divided and ambiguous, leading eventually to the removal of the production from the theatre's repertory (Semenenko, 2007). Despite its good qualities, Akimov's severe distortion of the meaning of *Hamlet* was not forgiven by his contemporaries, and the production was bound to be remembered as a travesty or a fiasco (Rowe, 1974).

In terms of the Vygotskian aesthetics, the problematic aspect of Akimov's *Hamlet* lay in his use of theatricality. In line with the most extreme leftist vision of theatre, theatricality, here, was employed as a means of breaking any connections with the tradition and to illustrate the contemporary life. This approach did not intend to submit the content of the tragedy in a creative artistic treatment that would transform it into a novel work of art, with a distinct socio-historical significance, as Vygotsky's theory would suggest. On the contrary, the dismissal of all elements of the drama, except for the struggle for power, created a shallow interpretation in which Shakespeare's text sounded odd and foreign. As the critic Zagorskij wrote: "The key moments of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are avoided by the director with an unusual 'lightness'. The historical era is not revealed, the meaning of the tragedy is distorted and suppressed, the text acts against the director's design, the social prospects are lost. A grim outcome." (Zagorskij, 1932, p. 3)¹¹⁴

Meyerhold

Another possible solution to the problem of *Hamlet* in the Soviet epoch could have come from Vsevolod Meyerhold: evidently, the resourceful director had often fantasised about a production of the tragedy but never saw the fulfilment of his wishes.¹¹⁵ His vision of the tragedy partially survives in his many notes concerning his plans for the play. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know how Meyerhold's profound theatricality, his highly experimental spirit, and his ability to bridge high tragedy with elements of folk and popular theatre would apply to a staging of *Hamlet*.¹¹⁶ What is certain is that Meyerhold's interpretation of the drama, as his general approach to theatre, would have been at the forefront of the ideological and cultural advances of the 1920s. Indeed, at a time that demanded the application a Revolutionary lens on the reading of the classics, Meyerhold's was first and foremost a political interpretation of the play as he envisioned Hamlet as "a revolutionary deposing the last tsar from his throne" (Semenenko, 2007, p. 142).

Meyerhold fantasised a production of *Hamlet* that incorporated the latest advances in the fields of art and theatre. Not unlike Chekhov, he aspired to use

114 The translation is my own.

115 Anecdotally, Meyerhold is said to have requested that his gravestone bears the words: "Here lies an actor and director who never acted and never directed *Hamlet*".

116 Meyerhold did stage a short excerpt of *Hamlet* as part of his production of Yuri Olesha's *A List of Assets*, in 1931. Axline argues that "his only realized production of Hamlet (in brief) lacked the innovation and inspiration that we would expect of him when tackling this (in)famous text" (Axline, 2001, p. 185). This staging, however, was conceived to serve specific purposes related to the function that the *Hamlet* passage serves in Olesha's drama. I would thus refrain from deriving any conclusions regarding Meyerhold's vision of *Hamlet* from this production.

Hamlet as an emblem for his new theatre. With regards to the opening of his new theatre building—a project that was never realised—Meyerhold stated: “And now I’ve definitely decided that Hamlet will be our first production in the new building. We will open with Hamlet! We will open the new theatre with the best play in the world! A good omen” (Meyerhold in Gladkov, 1997, p. 97). In contrast to Chekhov, however, Meyerhold turned against the spiritual height of the drama. The Ghost in his vision was depicted as a human figure that would come out of the sea, and embrace Hamlet, while Hamlet was interpreted as a fighter, a man of the Avant-garde times.

In line with the Avant-garde ethic, Meyerhold envisioned Hamlet, as well as all the characters in the play, as fragmented and full of contrasts. In his plans for the tragedy’s production, Pablo Picasso would design the set—a stage specifically created to support the actors in revealing the characters’ complex mixture of highly dramatic and comedic elements. In fact, Meyerhold had even considered symbolising the fragmentation of Hamlet by employing two actors for the same role:

I used to dream that Hamlet, in my production, would be played by two actors: one—vacillating, another—strong-willed. They would change places with each other, and when one was working, the other would not leave the stage, but sit with his feet up on a stool, emphasizing the tragic element in the opposition of the double temperaments. Sometimes even, the second actor would suddenly express his own attitude to the first, and vice versa. Sometimes he would jump up and antagonize the other, taking his place. (Meyerhold in Axline, 2001, p. 186)

Nonetheless, however extreme the theatrical innovations that Meyerhold was planning on employing for his production of Hamlet, he did not wish to reconstruct the play in a way that would deplete it of its traditional meaning. Though Meyerhold was a strong supporter of the director’s right to alter the theatrical text, he did not take this privilege lightly. In his directorial endeavours, Meyerhold’s ultimate goal was to stage a play in such a way that it expresses the struggles of his time. However, he found the practice of completely dismantling a play in the name of contemporaneity unacceptable. In line with this stance, Meyerhold expressed great discontent for Akimov’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s classic:

The new ‘remakers’ [peredelki]—not all, but many—think that remaking is a self-sufficient art in itself. This is no good. These adapters have started to break away from the tasks set by the author. The most unfortunate example of this, in my opinion is *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov theatre. This is to such an extent ‘not Shakespeare’ that there is already nothing remaining of Shakespeare. (Meyerhold in Assay, 2016, pp. 133-4)

It can be inferred that Meyerhold, unlike some of his contemporaries, trusted

the value of *Hamlet*; his search for a new perspective into the world of the drama implies that he desired to see the tragedy's true meaning, as it could exist in the times of the Russian Avant-garde. In line with Meyerhold's sentiment, Vygotsky's understanding of the psychological function of theatre ascertained that the human truths instilled in the classic dramas surpass the text's epoch and, once translated into a modern theatrical language, such texts can depict the suffering of the contemporary man. Thus, for Vygotsky, as for Meyerhold, the conservation of the original intentions of a dramatic text was deemed imperative. Seeing his strong disapproval of Michael Chekhov's alterations to the text, which entailed the omission of those passages that contrasted with the production's main line of interpretation, Akimov's experiment would have found Vygotsky in great disagreement, similar to that of Meyerhold.¹¹⁷ It is regrettable that Meyerhold's vision of *Hamlet* was never realised, as it is likely that his production would have manifested Vygotsky's understanding of the potential of the play.

Radlov

As Meyerhold's *Hamlet* was destined to remain unrealised, the next significant production of the Shakespearean tragedy—Sergei Radlov's 1938 *Hamlet*—continued Akimov's legacy in approaching the Socialist Realist theatrical canon. The establishment of the theatrical Socialist Realism demanded that any interpretation of a classic drama would reveal a social or political conflict within its content while presenting an ideologically robust hero in his striving to bring progress for his whole society. In Radlov's production, Denmark was presented as a prison and the dramatis personae as prison-guards. In it, Hamlet, alone, fuelled by the hatred against the true criminals, fights "until his last breath, until his last drop of blood" (Cimbal, 1938, p.3) to restore justice. His tragedy is that of a Socialist Realist hero: a lonely defender of high ideals in an epoch of historical degradation.

Yet, Radlov's *Hamlet* was not by intent a Socialist Realist production. His interpretation was based on the belief that Shakespearean dramas dictate a single correct reading and a production that follows this approach is bound to present the authentic meaning of Shakespeare's work. This interpretation, in Radlov's view, was based on a realistic treatment of the play [realisticheskaya traktovka] without, though, reducing it to an archeological reconstruction (Assay, 2016). The Realistic elements in the production, therefore, were connected with the reality of life in Russia. Characteristic was the lighting design for the first scene of the play: "Believing in the necessity of differentiating between Shakespeare's nordic tragedy and his southern

117 However, Vygotsky did not leave any evidence that suggests that he audited the production.

ones (i.e. Othello, Romeo and Juliet) Berezark suggests that the stage designer, Vladimir Dmitriev and Radlov should use the blue tones of Leningrad's White Nights as the closest thing they knew to a northern landscape" (Assay, 2016, p.234).

Following his beliefs, Radlov undertook a study of the historical context of the tragedy and the social profile of its author; this led him to adopt a dialectical-materialistic approach to Hamlet's story. This characteristic, along with the portrayal of Hamlet as a people's Prince, placed Radlov's *Hamlet* in the lineage of the tradition of 'vulgar sociology' and in close accord with the commands of Socialist Realism. Be as it may, Radlov's approach did not have the radical experimental character of its predecessor: "it is clear that his production achieved a convergence - if not harmony - between conception, realisation and acceptability within fraught ideological conditions" (Assay, 2016, p. 274). Its prospects, therefore, seemed positive, and the production could have enjoyed a long run had it not been interrupted by the outbreak of the War.

It can be argued that, just as Akimov's, Radlov's *Hamlet* accentuated the social and political dimension of the tragedy in the expense of the tragedy's obscure complexity and its psychological depth. Both approaches to the drama, along with Meyerhold's concerns about the destructive power of extreme text alteration, stress the growing problem of *Hamlet* in the Stalinist years—a problem that arose from the excessive focus on the political intrigues that are integral to the tragedy. Indeed, the Soviet years saw a generalised obsession with the sociopolitical narrative of *Hamlet*, which led to Stalin's famous distaste of the play and the stigmatisation of the drama as dangerous. As rumours of Stalin's dislike towards the Shakespearean tragedy became more prominent, the tragedy attracted less and less attention (Assay, 2017).

After the death of Stalin, a new enthusiasm broke over *Hamlet*, but it carried the same political charge, emphasising the image of a courageous Hamlet set against the tyranny of the monarch (Rowe, 1974, p. 267). Where Vygotsky had envisioned a *Hamlet* that spoke to the most fundamental existential dilemmas of humans, the mature Soviet culture saw the political drama of a Revolutionary that opposes the established ruling power. Vygotsky did not live to see his favourite play marginalised and reduced to such a narrow context. Yet, even if he had survived his disease this long, it is unlikely that he would have remained untouched by the harsh restraints of the Stalinist regime. His profound humanism, his openness to the dark and undefined aspects of the human psyche would have been easily condemned and his work eradicated. The evolving Soviet culture of the 30s and the 40s could not tolerate darkness, obscurity, complexity, and unanswered questions and it made

sure that it erased these aspects from the tragedy of *Hamlet* as well.

Chapter Eight: The Psychological Effect of *Hamlet*

Art is the supreme centre of biological and social individual processes in society [...] it is a method for finding an equilibrium between man and his world, in the most critical and important stages of his life. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 259)

As an aesthetic psychologist, Vygotsky's primary interest lay in the psychological effect of art on its receiver. Art's psychological function was the focal point of Vygotsky's approach to *Hamlet* in *The Psychology of Art*, while it had been an essential consideration in his earlier essay on the tragedy. Therefore, when the Russian Modernist artists concerned themselves with finding ways to project Russia onto Elsinore and the Russian individual onto Hamlet, Vygotsky adopted the opposite perspective; he strived to understand what Hamlet and Elsinore, as they appear in Shakespeare's drama, could evoke for the Russian Modernist reader or spectator and what was the purpose of this psychological reaction in the greater picture of the sociocultural terrain of Modernism.

The perspective adopted by Vygotsky led to another crucial distinction between his conclusions and the artistic and critical efforts of his contemporaries. The elements of the drama that Vygotsky found most crucial for the delivery of catharsis, appear to be the same elements that challenged the Modernist artists and critics and that were often presented as problematic. Thus, as the previous chapter illustrated, elements that the artists often subdued or eradicated in their productions were deemed by Vygotsky as essential for the aesthetic-psychological effect of the tragedy. The reason for this lies in Vygotsky's belief that art serves as a means for a society to work out its most problematic and challenging aspects of mental life; Vygotsky, thus, leaned towards the uncanny and the unsettling part of *Hamlet* with hope for its cathartic potential. The same holds true for the field of psychoanalysis, which placed its focus on Hamlet's psychopathology, finding in it a remarkable example of human neurosis. Indeed, from Freud, to Ernest Jones, and to Jacques Lacan, *Hamlet* has appeared as an exemplary tragedy for the study of human psychopathology.¹¹⁸

In this chapter, I examine the tragedy of *Hamlet* in relation to its psychological effects, juxtaposing Vygotsky's perspective to that of the school of psychoanalysis. This study stresses the contextual and formal elements of the play that have a profound psychological effect on the receiver and reveals the potential

118 In contrast to the other two, Freud has only written a handful of short notes on the problem of *Hamlet*. In these, however, his understanding of the tragedy is delineated with clarity.

cathartic function that *Hamlet* could have served during the Modernist years in Russia, as it derives from Vygotsky's perspective. In this sense, *Hamlet* is here employed as a case study for Vygotsky's complete—and revised—theory on the psychology of art.

Hamlet Analysed: The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of *Hamlet*

A world-famous neurotic [...]—Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. (Freud, 1905b, p. 262)

In direct contrast to the materialistic interpretation of *Hamlet* in the times of Socialist Realism, the field of psychoanalysis, from its conception, embraced the psychological complexity of the tragedy. Psychoanalysis peered over Hamlet's atypical behaviour and the peculiar nature of his fate with great interest, for, like Vygotsky, they found in the tragedy's obscure and dark riddles some of the fundamental psychological traumas of human life. Vygotsky's close association to the psychoanalytic activity in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as his profound influence by Freud's early works (see Chapter Two), were reflected in his understanding of both the inner meaning of *Hamlet* and the tragedy's potential psychological function for its reader or spectator. Indeed, the general perspective adopted by Vygotsky in his two studies of the tragedy presents a significant similarity to Freud's analysis of Hamlet's behaviour. Many of the conclusions arrived at in Vygotsky's two essays also anticipated the later approach to *Hamlet* by another advocate of psychoanalysis—Jacques Lacan. This chapter places Vygotsky's vision of *Hamlet* on the map of the development of the psychoanalytic interpretation of the tragedy, thus, stressing the connection of Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology to the psychoanalytic school of thought, while underlining the novelty of his perspective.

Freud and Jones

The followers of the psychoanalytic school of thought, starting with Freud, found in *Hamlet* and its commentaries a prosperous ground to apply and test their theories. They approached the character of Hamlet as they would approach a patient: they analysed his behaviour, his actions, and his thoughts with regard to human psychology and proceeded to the diagnosis of his psychopathology. In their work, they applied the premise that Hamlet possesses an unconscious mind, from where the essence of his tragedy springs, and where the real driving force for his actions lies. In this context, the tragedy that we read, or watch realised on stage is

only the reflection of the real tragedy taking place deep within Hamlet's psychology, somewhere unreachable for his consciousness. This perspective became popular also in the field of artistic criticism towards the end of the eighteenth century, the very time that saw the rise of the psychoanalysis. Critics of the time focused on the complexity of Hamlet's character and studied the inconsistency of his behaviour and alleged madness with renewed enthusiasm. In Russia, the theoretical speculations on Hamlet's character went far and beyond simple explanations and attempted to peer deep into the psychological struggles of Hamlet (Semenenko, 2007).¹¹⁹

Vygotsky, however, markedly opposed himself to the popular practice of analysing a literary character. His Structuralist influences required that he viewed any dramatic character as a constructed structural element of the artwork that does not possess a psychology of its own. Nonetheless, the notion of Hamlet's unconsciousness, as psychoanalysis interpreted it, survived in Vygotsky's first essay in the form of an underlying obscure power—a place of darkness, silence, and madness, unreachable by any description—which forges the fate of the tragedy's heroes:

All events are developed and realised based on laws that are not here, on stage, but there, behind the curtain, their logic is there, they come from there. Here, they are incomprehensible; here, they are rootless, their events have no causes. (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 360)

The existence of such a place—where 'the real tragedy' springs from—and the necessity to preserve its unfathomable character became the central argument in both Vygotsky's approaches to the play. He argued that:

in the tragedy, most significant is not what takes place on stage, the visible, the given, but what is left in suspension, what is vaguely guessed, felt, and sensed behind the actions and the words, that ghostly atmosphere of the tragic, which incessantly presses on the drama causing images and faces to emerge in it. (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 365)

Vygotsky and the followers of psychoanalysis have all stressed the problem of Hamlet's procrastination—the constant avoidance of the fulfilment of a rather plain duty, and the intense pain and regret that accompany it (Jones, 1910). To explain the paradox of Hamlet's inactivity, Vygotsky appealed to the conflict of the two worlds ever-present in the tragedy—the one being visible on stage, and the other always remaining hidden. Similarly, the psychoanalytic approach argued that the reasons for Hamlet's inaction, his constant avoidance of fulfilling the simple

119 An interesting example of such theories was that of Innokentiy Fyodorovich Annensky, who suggested that Hamlet's madness and procrastination are caused by his suspicion that Claudius might be his actual birth father (due to his immediate marriage with Gertrude).

(however brutal) task bestowed on him, lay in a mental battle caused by the conflicting states of his conscious and unconscious mind:

Action is paralysed at its very inception, and there is thus produced the picture of causeless inhibition which is so inexplicable both to Hamlet and to the readers of the play. This paralysis arises, however, not from physical or moral cowardice, but from that intellectual cowardice, that reluctance to dare the exploration of his inner mind, which Hamlet shares with the rest of the human race. (Jones, 1910, p. 102)

For Freud, Hamlet's psychological dilemma is rooted in what he named the Oedipus complex: the young unconscious mind of Hamlet, according to Freud, had wished to extinguish and replace his father on the side of his mother. Faced, now, with a perpetrator who has done precisely that on the one hand, and the command to seek revenge against this crime on the other, Hamlet's mind is brought to a heightened state of conflict:

What is it, then, that inhibits him in fulfilling the task set him by his father's ghost? The answer, once again, is that it is the peculiar nature of the task. Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish. (Freud, 1900, p. 265)

Freud stressed that Hamlet's psychopathology results from the events of the play and that his neurotic state is induced under the pressure caused by the undertaking of his duty for revenge (Freud, 1906). In Freud's view, the meeting with his father's ghost, along with the unearthing of the facts concerning his death, triggers in Hamlet a strong, yet unconscious, sense of guilt. The severity of this emotion and the conflict with his conscious will leads Hamlet to a state of neurosis.

In his 1915/16 essay, Vygotsky, too, identified the moment of the meeting between Hamlet and his father's ghost as a point of total transformation for Hamlet's character. The Ghost, in his opinion, "is the bond of the tragedy, its otherworldly root" (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 379). At the moment of its appearance, Hamlet becomes infected with whatever lies 'beyond' and is reborn as one that embodies the conflict between two worlds: the world of light and logic, and the world of darkness and madness. Pressed under the strain of this conflict, Hamlet may appear insane, his actions inexplicable. The nature of Hamlet's conflict was deemed mystical in Vygotsky's first vision of the tragedy, and mainly structural in his second—as opposed to psychopathological in Freud's view. However, the understanding of the

hero's state as a man under a straining dilemma of an obscure nature that inhibits any decisive action is shared by both Freud and Vygotsky.

Another point of agreement between Vygotsky and Freud lies in the belief that Hamlet's psychological struggle is rooted deeply within his human nature and is shared by all humans alike. Freud postulated that all humankind shares the childish incestuous fantasy described by the Oedipal complex. What is more, due to the emotional laws of our civilisation, this fantasy is typically repressed to the unconscious mind never to be expressed in consciousness. Freud, thus, believing that Hamlet's psychopathological state is founded on the Oedipal complex, stressed the psychological proximity of the character to the tragedy's reader or spectator (Freud, 1906). In Freud's view, Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost evokes in the tragic hero this latent fantasy. The same holds for the tragedy's reader or spectator: the repression of the same latent impulse is disturbed by his or her exposure to the drama.

In *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky agreed with the psychoanalytic view, stating that art is specifically designed to unsettle the emotional balance of its receivers by stimulating the emergence of repressed emotions and fantasies while providing them with a route for the release of any underlying tension connected with them. Furthering this view, Vygotsky argued that although this process takes place in the psychology of each individual separately, it is highly relevant to the society as a whole, as the nature of such repressed tensions could compromise the societal peace (Vygotsky, 1971). Indeed, psychoanalysis postulated that the "mental trends 'repressed' by the individual are those least acceptable to his herd; they are, therefore, those which are, curiously enough, distinguished as 'natural' instincts, as contrasted with secondarily acquired mental trends" (Jones, 1910, p. 89). Consequently, in Hamlet's case, psychoanalysis searched for that type of 'natural instincts' in the realm of sexuality, and more specifically incest, which would have arguably been the most forbidden by our civilisation. *Hamlet*, under this light, appears to offer its spectator a course for the release of any personal latent emotions and fantasies connected with the Oedipus complex. This cathartic process, as Vygotsky's theory suggests, not only benefits the psychological health of the individual but also strengthens the unwritten social laws of our society. This vision of the tragedy, as is Vygotsky's understanding of the psychological function of art, reflects many of Freud's and Jones' presumptions. Additionally, it demonstrates how Vygotsky advanced his argument beyond Freud's simple principle of aesthetic pleasure, stressing the purposefulness of art for human societies, and distinguishing aesthetic behaviour from other domains of human creative activity.

Nevertheless, Vygotsky's work on the analysis of the Shakespearean tragedy does not parallel the methods of the psychoanalytic school. First, it is important to stress that Vygotsky strongly disagreed with the aesthetic value of the psychological analysis of a literary or dramatic character. Such an approach, in his view, did not offer any valuable insight into the field of artistic criticism as it could not facilitate or augment in any way the psychological processes of aesthetic reception. Furthermore, Vygotsky believed that a psychoanalytic interpretation of a play threatened to bring its artistic cohesion to ruin, thus incapacitating its psychological function. By shedding light onto the dark, unfathomable parts of the tragedy, according to Vygotsky, one only achieves to make the unconscious, conscious, thus breaking the fundamental law of the tragedy that requires *Hamlet* to be obscure, its mystery unsolved. In this sense, the attempts to analyse Hamlet's character made by the followers of the psychoanalytic school were as catastrophic towards the tragedy's aesthetic function, as the theatrical interpretations of the tragedy by the Avant-garde artists which shifted the meaning of the play towards a single desired direction.

When examining the effect of the tragedy on the spectators, Freud had arrived at similar conclusions:

It appears as a necessary precondition of this form of art that the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly it is recognizable, is never given a definite name; so that in the spectator too the process is carried through with his attention averted, and he is in the grip of his emotions instead of taking stock of what is happening. (Freud, 1906, p. 309)

In the case of *Hamlet*, in particular, Freud claimed that the true nature of the psychological conflict was so artfully disclosed that he alone was the first to expose it (Freud, 1906). This claim, however, could not satisfy Vygotsky's demand for the protection of the play's mystery. As he remarked: "Other critics had also acknowledged the tragedy's 'obscurity', but they also attempted to surpass it" (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 347). In contrast to those practices, and in his effort to preserve the tragedy's subtlety, Vygotsky turned first to mysticism and then to Structuralism. In both cases, Vygotsky steered clear of any specific psychological characterisations of the play's characters or their experiences.

All the same, Vygotsky did not overlook the character's psychological profile; on the contrary, he appreciated the aesthetic importance of the psychology and character of the dramatis personae, as the artist has shaped them to appear (Vygotsky, 1971). In other words, instead of examining the ways in which a hero's psychological profile represented or reflected a real person's psychology, Vygotsky

was interested in the effect of the tragedy's specific characters on the psychology of an imagined reader or spectator. Indeed, Vygotsky never wondered why *Hamlet* behaves one way or the other; the answer to this question, for him, always was: "that is what the tragedy wants" (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 427). This aesthetic function of the tragedy—and the ways in which this function is achieved—was the centre of Vygotsky's investigations. Vygotsky's preference to the study of the teleological and not the causal meaning of all artistic devices, including the protagonist's character, marks a crucial distinction between his approach and the psychoanalytic viewpoint.

What is more, his disagreement with the pansexualism and infantilism of the psychoanalytic school of thought led him to seek art's deeper meaning in domains that were much more complex and inclusive than was indicated by the conclusions of psychoanalysis (Vygotsky, 1971). Consequently, Vygotsky saw in *the case of Hamlet*, not a drama centred around the Oedipal complex, but a tragedy of deep existential pain arising from one man's inability to escape his own fate. In agreement with Vygotsky, the followers of the psychoanalytic school did not overlook this aspect of the tragedy entirely; Jones characteristically wrote about Hamlet:

Being unable to free himself from the ascendancy of his past he is necessarily impelled by Fate along the only path he can travel to Death. In thus vividly exhibiting the desperate but unavailing struggle of a strong man against Fate, Shakespeare achieved the very essence of the Greek conception of tragedy. (Jones, 1910, pp. 112-3)

In the excerpt above Jones has set aside the psychoanalytic lens—that is, the practice of using literary or theatrical texts as case studies for psychological theories—and has peered over the aesthetic dimension of the tragedy. In a sense, with his observation, Jones is serving not the field of psychoanalysis, but that of artistic criticism—the precise reason why his deductions about the tragedy coincide with those of Vygotsky. Indeed, Vygotsky separated himself from the psychoanalytic approach to literature and drama, exactly on that conviction. In his view, the aim of aesthetic analysis is to shed light, not on the human psyche—be it the author's or the literary character's—but on the work of art itself and on its function for the psychology of its receiver. Therefore, when analysing *Hamlet*, he remained focused on the dynamic structures among the events, the actions, and the words uttered in the play, while the epithets that he used marked, not the nature of these structures, but their relationships. For this reason, and despite the difference in objectives, whenever the psychoanalytic interpretations of *Hamlet* engaged with the relationships between Hamlet, the hero, and his world, or discussed the specifics of the Shakespearean narrative line, their comments appeared closer to Vygotsky's vision of the tragedy.

Lacan

A noteworthy such convergence appears between Vygotsky's work and Jacques Lacan's analysis of *Hamlet*, as it was presented through a series of lectures, delivered in 1959—over three decades after the composition of Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*. Lacan affirmed Freud's and Jones's observations regarding Hamlet's psychopathology and developed the character's psychological profile in further detail and under a strict psychoanalytic lens. As follows, Lacan focused his analysis around Hamlet's sexual desire—mainly repressed and unconscious—and the implications that arose from its misplacement and Hamlet's detachment from it. Yet, Lacan's analysis also bore a crucial—for our purposes—characteristic: it paid tribute to the specifics of the formal manipulation of the myth of Hamlet by Shakespeare, stressing thus some of the fundamental elements of the tragedy's structural synthesis. As a result, Lacan arrived to conclusions that bear value not only for the field of psychoanalysis but also for the field of theatrical or literary criticism. As such, many of his remarks mirror Vygotsky's understanding of the dynamics present within the Shakespearean tragedy.

These remarkable convergences are manifested most profoundly in Lacan's notion of the 'Other'.¹²⁰ Through this concept, Lacan demonstrated the partial loss of Hamlet's self-control and the character's subordination to some power that has been displaced outside and beyond him: for Lacan, "Hamlet is constantly suspended in the time of the Other, throughout the entire story until the very end" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 17). Indeed, as Lacan pursued to demonstrate, Hamlet's actions are guided by a will that seems to surpass his own. In the tragedy's course of events, Hamlet appears unable to fulfil any of his plans; on the contrary, "he seems just to lie down and roll over [...] as if there were nothing in him to stand in the way of his being constantly and fundamentally at somebody else's beck and call" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 30). Lacan's conclusion about this type of behaviour is that Hamlet has lost his identity, or rather that his identity is defined by someone or something outside the realm of his personality.

Where Lacan viewed this misplacement of Hamlet's identity as a symptom of his psychopathology, Vygotsky—at least in his 1915/16 approach to the tragedy—attributed it to the presence of the metaphysical element in the tragedy's content. The Ghost, in Vygotsky's early analysis, infiltrated Elsinore with his appearance with the essence of a different world—the dark counterpart to the world of the living. This other world, symbolised in the face of the Ghost, was seen by Vygotsky as the

¹²⁰ Lacan introduced the term to illustrate the misplacement of Hamlet's desire and the allegorical loss of his phallus (see Lacan in Felman, 1982).

essential power in the tragedy's plot: "The Ghost—this is the otherworldly root of the tragedy, the 'mortuary' mechanism of its development, the link connecting the two worlds of the play, their mediator, through whom the other side affects this side" (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 380). From the moment of Hamlet's meeting with his father's ghost, this mystical force stays within him and guides him through a labyrinth of impulsive decisions and passive submission until his tragic death. The overpowering impact of this force—which in the later analysis of Vygotsky was explained through its structural and psychologically teleological function—mirrors the effect of Lacan's Other.

Another point of convergence between Lacan and Vygotsky was the focus of their interpretations of the tragedy on Hamlet's character, in line with the generalised early Modernist tendency to read *Hamlet* as a monodrama. "The principal subject of the play is beyond all doubt Prince Hamlet. The play is the drama of an individual subjectivity, and the hero is always present on stage, more than in any other play" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 12). In both Lacan's and Vygotsky's approach, Hamlet's character appears to embody the meaning of the tragedy, as he simultaneously suffers under a psychological or spiritual schism and contains within his soul the two opposing forces that guide the development of the play. For Lacan, Hamlet's mind, in its effort to cope with his grievous situation, is divided and part of it alienated to him; in Vygotsky's early view, the Ghost reveals to Hamlet a second dimension of the world, which is added to his identity; finally, in *The Psychology of Art*, the character of Hamlet is seen to contain the opposing forces of the form and the content of the tragedy.

In both cases, Hamlet appears to linger at the threshold of two dimensions of being, unable to move towards either direction, bound by chains that he cannot see. In contrast to the image of Hamlet developed by the Russian Avant-garde artists, as one that sees with clarity the moral decadence of his world, both Lacan and Vygotsky, observed how Hamlet's awareness appears clouded: though he is earnestly seeking to understand his situation, the reality escapes him. Hamlet in Lacan's analysis appears to be unwillingly and unknowingly guided towards his own catastrophe, "an act that he carries out, in some sense, in spite of himself" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 12). Vygotsky's image of Hamlet is very similar:

He does not understand why his growing passion dissolves into nothing, why he procrastinates and remains inactive, why there is no driving, productive rage in his soul, no impulse, no push to carry out his deed. He blames himself for it all, for he does not understand why he struggles with it, not knowing that that is what the tragedy wants. (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 427)

Vygotsky employed the notion of the tragedy's want in order to explain its fatality. In his first approach to *Hamlet*, he imagined a metaphysical force ruling over all that lives and acts in Elsinore. This force, for Vygotsky, has its own plans for the future of Hamlet and his world; no matter how much the characters fight against it—a blind struggle, as we have already observed—they are destined to fail and succumb to its will. Vygotsky characteristically describes this force in his remarks on Claudius's prayers:

But the prayer cannot help him—there is no forgiveness in the tragedy's religion, no atonement, no praying, no return; there is only one rite—the sacrifice of life, death, a compelling doom—there lies the meaning of the tragedy. (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 469)

In his second approach to *Hamlet*, in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky replaced the image of an omnipotent dark force with the notion of the psychological function of the tragedy. The 'that is what the tragedy wants' of his early essay took on a new meaning under his new psychological theory: the events of the drama need to unfold in a specific way in order to fulfil the tragedy's psychological effect on the reader or the spectator. The idea that Hamlet is unknowingly bound by the tragedy to his own catastrophe, however, remained unaltered.

The same notion was expansively stressed by Lacan: "For Hamlet [...] there's only one hour, the hour of his distraction. The entire tragedy of *Hamlet* is constituted in the way it shows us the unrelenting movement of the subject towards that hour" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 25). In his lectures, Lacan illustrated how Hamlet's actions are constantly regulated by a drive that does not conform to Hamlet's own conscious wishes. Opportunities for Hamlet to fulfil his revengeful task are not scarce, but the time does not seem to mature until the very end. Albeit the constituent of the time's maturity is located without Hamlet, outside of his sphere of consciousness: "Until the last term, the final hour, Hamlet's hour, in which he is mortally wounded before he wounds his enemy, the tragedy follows its course and attains completion at the hour of the Other" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 19).

Until that moment, Hamlet, in Lacan's analysis, appears adrift, floating along the path of the tragedy, having no particular effect on its course. Indeed, both Lacan and Vygotsky noted how all determining actions, in the play, take place despite Hamlet, enabled by his submission to a force beyond himself. The duel with Laertes, the final scene of the play that marks the resolution of the tragedy and, simultaneously, Hamlet's bitter end is a profound example of this dynamic. Orchestrated by forces of synchronicity—forces beyond the control of any of the dramatis personae—the final act requires from Hamlet only one thing: his

acceptance of the invitation for the duel. In Lacan's view, the resolution of the drama is a "trap laid by the Other" (Lacan in Felman, 1982, p. 19). For Vygotsky, it is the final triumph of the tragedy's machination, secretly plotted throughout the play:

The final catastrophe seems to be contrived for completely different reasons. Hamlet does not kill the king to fulfil his promise to the ghost. The spectator learns that Hamlet is virtually dead because the poison is already in his blood and he has less than half an hour to live. Only now, with one foot in the grave, does he kill the king. The final scene leaves absolutely no doubt that Hamlet kills the king for his latest crime: the poisoning of the queen, and the killing of Laertes and Hamlet himself. Not a word is said about Hamlet's father, and the audience has completely forgotten about him. The denouement is astonishing and inexplicable—nearly all the critics agree that the killing of the king leaves us with the feeling of duty unfulfilled, or, at best, fulfilled by default. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 184)

Vygotsky, here, appears in agreement with Lacan in highlighting Hamlet's resistance to the task bestowed on him by the tragedy. What is more, he emphasises the power that the tragedy—that mystical force—has over Hamlet: Hamlet kills the king only when he is half-dead, immersed in the otherworldly dimension which acts as the moving force of the tragedy. In Vygotsky's view, it is not Hamlet's will that kills the king, but the tragedy itself that forces Hamlet into murdering his uncle and into his own destruction. This premise paints not the picture of a hero, an avenger in the moment of retaliation, but that of a man defeated by his own fate. Similarly, for Lacan, Hamlet is defeated by his own mind, the nature of his human psychology. In this respect, the tragedy, what we witness on stage or read in Shakespeare's text, is the grievous, futile battle of one man against what he cannot change, against what forms the very essence of his identity. *Hamlet*, for both Vygotsky and Lacan, is a tragedy of a man unable to overcome himself; his suffering reflects the pain arising from the futility of our struggles against our human nature. The tragedy is nothing but a pause in time, the stretching of a moment, where this existential pain can be seen in all its depth and intensity.

Such similarities between Vygotsky and Lacan's interpretations of *Hamlet* are evident after juxtaposing the two theorists' conclusions on the meaning and the structure of the play. However, the presentation of their reasoning and their convictions differ significantly. Lacan's comments on the aesthetics of the tragedy are subordinate to the analysis of Hamlet's psychopathology; all that happens in the play, for Lacan, is a clue into Hamlet's unconscious life, of which the unmasking is the central aim of his investigation. His methodology is that of a psychoanalyst: much like Freud and Jones, Lacan began with the premise that Hamlet's psychological profile is representative of a real man's psyche. By studying Hamlet,

he aspired to disclose truths about human psychology.

Vygotsky's objective in his approaches to the play opposed that of the followers of psychoanalysis. However, it could be argued that his remarks on the tragedy anticipated some of his later theories in the field of psychology. Indeed, Vygotsky's specific view of *Hamlet*, formed as early as 1915, was important for the formation of some of the core notions found in Vygotsky's work in psychology, from *The Psychology of Art* onwards. The most essential such element is Vygotsky's dialectic approach, which characterised his aesthetic theory.¹²¹ Another interesting connection exists between Vygotsky's vision of *Hamlet* and the formation of his later views on personality development. The dialectic structure of Hamlet's world, as illustrated by Vygotsky in his early essay, and the problems arising from Hamlet's co-existence in two opposing dimensions, anticipated his later views regarding the fundamental role of society in the developments of one's personality and cognition. In this view, as Bayanova (2013) remarks, Hamlet's alleged madness is explained by his problematic parallel existence in two different worlds: "the simultaneity of Hamlet's birth and death in two different worlds that have different regulations for normalizing a prince's behavior" (Bayanova, 2013, p. 38). In that manner, the description of Hamlet's 'rebirth' after the meeting with his father's ghost along with the dialectical synthesis that forms his character, pointed to Vygotsky's later analysis of the dialectical development of personality (Bayanova, 2013).

Nonetheless, as much as these attributes reveal the seeds of Vygotsky's future thought, they do not constitute a part of his aesthetic theory; that is, the deciphering of the meaning of the drama and its purpose, as a work of art, for the individual and the society. If examined only under the context of his future work, Vygotsky's early writings can lead to an overestimation of their theoretical proximity to some of his future notions, or equally, they can provoke negative criticism over the outdated nature of some of the views presented in them.¹²² For Vygotsky, at the time of composing *The Psychology of Art*, it was the issue of the artistic effect on both the individual and the society that formed his unique perspective into the tragedy and guided his arguments against the strictly formalistic, as well as the psychoanalytic approaches to it (Vygotsky, 1971). Vygotsky's two visions of *Hamlet* may relate closely to many of his theoretical influences—such as the psychoanalytic

121 I explore the extent of this connection in Chapter One.

122 The result of such psychology-centred readings are views that overlook the complexity of Vygotsky's approach while focusing on a specific narrow dimension of it. Characteristic is Bayanova's comment: "In this sense, it is not the story of the tragedy that makes the work interesting but the artistic form introduced by Shakespeare, which reveals to the reader the sacrament of psychological birth" (Bayanova, 2013, p. 37).

school—and his developing understanding of psychology. In themselves, however, they pose a distinctive methodology that focuses on the ways in which a tragedy may affect the psychology of its reader or spectator and propose a unique view into the psychological benefits that *Hamlet* may bear for a society. As this section demonstrated, it was only as such that Vygotsky's theories provided insight into the aesthetic characteristics of their tragedy and the drama's potential psychological function.

***Hamlet's* Function in Modernist Russia through the Vygotskian Lens**

The purposefulness of art in general, and the specific psychological effect of *Hamlet* in particular, lie in the core of Vygotsky's work in aesthetics. The previous chapters have elaborated on how the issue of *Hamlet's* place in the pre- and post-Revolutionary Russia, the questions of the effect of theatre on its audience, and the relevance of the classics to the changing community became exceedingly burning issues among the artistic and cultural community of Modernist Russia and how Vygotsky's theorising and advocating of the cathartic role of literature and theatre for the society, as it appears in his early writings, answered to these issues raised by the artists and the theorist. In that capacity, Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology, paired with his analysis of *Hamlet*, anticipated the potential psychological and social function that the Shakespearean tragedy may have served during those transitional and highly turbulent years.

The following section engages with the examination of the psychological impact of *Hamlet* on Vygotsky's contemporaries and the social-historical significance of the tragedy's stagings. This theorisation stems from the juxtaposition of the essential elements of Vygotsky's vision of *Hamlet*, to the generalised psychological state of Russians under the influence of the given historical period. Paired with Vygotsky's overall aesthetic theory—as it has been defined in this thesis—this perspective creates a lens for a critical examination of the theatrical approaches to the Shakespearean tragedy by Vygotsky's contemporaries. The examination proposed in this section is based on the premise of the applicability of Vygotsky's theory on the critical analysis of a performance. It thus adapts Vygotsky's structural dialectics between the form and the content to the particular corresponding elements that guide the artistic reception of the audience: that is, the interplay between the expectations set by the myth, or tradition of *Hamlet* in Modernist Russia and the stylistic treatment of the tragedy by each production. The resulting

discussion focuses on the potential—according to Vygotsky’s theory—psychological effect of *Hamlet* and the tragedy’s social significance within the specific psychological conditions of life of the Modernist Russian society.

As such, this discussion reveals an interesting dimension of the inner, emotional and existential experience of life in Russia, at the time, in the light of which, Vygotsky’s two approaches to the tragedy signify the deep existential crisis of life experienced by the people of his time. What is more, the section provides an explanation to the difficulties that the Shakespearean tragedy posed to the artists during the years after the Revolution, while stressing the importance of *Hamlet* in the country’s cultural history. This section also highlights the connections between Vygotsky’s visions of *Hamlet* and the life experience of the Russians of the early 20th century providing a further resource in understanding the intricacies of Vygotsky’s early thought. Finally, this examination suggests the potential of the Shakespearean tragedy, as it was understood by Vygotsky, to reflect the turmoil of the life in Modernist Russia and stresses the socially therapeutic function that *Hamlet* did or could have served during that time.

Modernism inherited the late 19th-century stereotype of a melancholic Hamlet, who, through the phenomenon of Hamletism became the representation of the intelligentsia’s ‘illness’. Truly, at the time, the educated elite of Russia expressed their growing sense of pessimism, distrust towards the future and a sense of hopelessness. With the coming of the 20th century, and after the disheartening experience of the 1905 Revolution, “this lingering philosophic dread had become urgent daily news. It broke out of the confines of literature and letters to become a remarkably public language reproduced by newspaper reporters, journalists, and other writers for an increasingly broad readership” (Steinberg, 2008, p. 814). The pressing social tensions, the dramatic changes in the economic and technological fields, as well as the generalised mood of uncertainty that characterised the Modernist condition, were largely responsible for establishing a morose atmosphere among the Russian public.¹²³ Though this sense of depression was felt privately, it was discussed as a social condition stemming from the shared experience of the Russian people. Accordingly, in the open public discussions, this melancholy was

123 A series of wars added dramatically to the psychological toil of Russians. Modern armaments made the early 20th century battlefields extremely lethal (Steinberg, 2005); the numbers of deaths that occurred during the Russo-Japanese War (1905), as well as the 1st World War were phenomenal for the time. The magnitude of both wars had devastating effects on all sides, and their absolute effect did not take the form of a complete transformation or a solution. In contrast, it exposed humanity to a transitional state of limbo, one that would lead to a new circle of political conflict and a new toll of deaths. In Russia, this state would lead industrial workers, peasants, military officials, and political parties to the uprising of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, while in the rest of the Western world, it would result in the 2nd World War.

directly connected to the disorder found in the modern world and the uncertainty posed by the future. In a time when “the question of the obshchestvennoe nastroyenie—translatable as the ‘social mood’ or the ‘public mood’—became, itself, a public emotional obsession” (Steinberg, 2008, p. 813), *Hamlet* could not have seemed more relevant.

A drama inherently rich in grievous atmospheres and dark moods, heavy with the heritage of Hamletism which had established the image of the demoralised, melancholic Prince, *Hamlet* posed against this background of modern life as a profound and dark mirror. The embracing of the tragedy by the Russian Modernist poets, the frequent references to the Danish Prince in literary works, presented a positive reception of the tragedy’s ability to reflect the emotional dread that characterised the period. In the same spirit, Vygotsky’s reading of the tragedy, as it appeared in his first essay, reflected the generalised mood of melancholy that dominated the life in Russia in the few years before the 1917 Revolution. In his analysis of the drama, Vygotsky painted the picture of a dark, uncertain world, ruled by forces beyond one’s will, where a deep sense of sorrow prevails. Similarly, Kachalov’s *Hamlet* of the Moscow Art Theatre production became known for his deep sense of disenchantment and mistrust towards his dark and unjust world that. Thereby, according to the critics of the time, “he became the prosecutor of the modern society” (Markov in Stroevea, 1973, p. 286). In all these examples, Hamlet’s sense of grief and hopelessness was highlighted and connected not just to the nature of his task, but to a more abstract sense of sorrow that seems to govern the tragedy.

Not unlike the Russian people during the first few years of the 20th century, Hamlet feels a pain that is not entirely his—it belongs to the world of the tragedy; it comes from a dark place, and it infects Hamlet. Vygotsky described the sorrow of Hamlet:

This is not a light, covertly sweet and pleasant melancholic sadness - the wistful yearning of youth, this is deep and heavy sorrow. There is always something otherworldly in grief; it is the pain, the disease of life, the degeneration of earth. Hamlet’s sorrow is from ‘over there’.
(Vygotskij, 1986, p. 419)

The Moscow Art Theatre production gave a similar impression of a hero caught within a mystical, transcendental environment. The critic A. Kugel’ described this world as “the mystical blanket of infinity”, a plane that is “tremendous, glorious, boundless, compared to life; humane and merciful, and at the same time, painful” (Kugel’ in Bachelis, 1983, p. 296). These examples of the displacement of the origin of Hamlet’s sense of sorrow to an otherworldly dimension are also connected with

the highlighting of the drama's inherent spirituality and mysticism. The Second Moscow Art Theatre production highlighted the tragedy's mysticism even further. During rehearsal, Chekhov had directed his fellow actors to always retain the sensation of the Ghost—which during rehearsals they would refer to as the Spirit (Kirillov & Chamberlain, 2013). The resulting effect, paired with the cathedral-inspired set of the production and the appearance of the Ghost as an incorporeal entity—the voice of which was produced by an off-stage chorus—gave the impression of a profoundly spiritual world, the influence of which caused Hamlet great pain. Indeed, as Vygotsky observed, Hamlet's sorrow connects him with the metaphysical plane of the tragedy's world:

Here, on earth, grief cannot be born; in life, such as it is, it cannot be. Life's grief comes from death; grief is that element of dying, the reflection of death, which exists in life. That is why there is always something mystical in grief. Hence the mystical element in the whole play, in Hamlet himself, all of whom is grief. (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 419)

This mystical seed of the tragedy, according to Vygotsky's reading, lives within its protagonist and leads him into his nonsensical behaviours, which could not be explained or understood by the earthly laws.

In the context of the cultural shifts of the early 20th century, the strong mystical references and the Ghost's central role in the plot gave the tragedy yet another significance. Spirituality, morality, and mystical faith had been a significant part of the Russian culture of the past. The turn of the century, however, was characterised by a strong sense of disenchantment. This disenchantment described the sense of disillusionment which was the product of both the industrial revolution and the failure of the 1905 upheaval; but it also signified the loss of ideals, of commonly accepted images for the meaning of life, and of faith towards something bigger than humanity—and with all that, it stressed the feeling of being lost (Steinberg, 2008). It was, thus, natural that *Hamlet*, a tragedy that places so much meaning on its metaphysical references and forms an attack on the political intrigues, became for many of the Russians a point of reference in relation to the lost, "secret history of 'Holy Russia'" (Golub, 1994, p. 175).

Indeed, the stagings of *Hamlet* that stressed its mystical dimension became part of a much bigger movement between artists and critics of the time who, battling the emotional crisis brought by the rapid cultural developments, sought in art—and, in particular, theatre—a way into spirituality. The popularity of Anthroposophy, a movement to which Chekhov subscribed to at the time of his staging of *Hamlet*, also stresses the Russian's yearning to reclaim and redefine their lost spirituality. All the while, the increased focus on the emotional and psychological life and the attention

to the inner truth of existence gave rise to movements like Impressionism, Symbolism, and even Realism, which promoted principles such as subjectivism, psychologism, and often mysticism (see Chapter Four).

Vygotsky's first essay on *Hamlet*, which advocated the advantages of subjective, impressionistic analysis, was influenced by such schools of thought. In fact, Vygotsky's work, at that stage, was directly influenced by the beliefs of his teacher, Aikhenvald, who, besides his Impressionistic approach to criticism, was an upholder of the idea that connected the generalised sense of melancholy with the time of Modernism. Equally influenced by these movements was Vygotsky's understanding of Hamlet as "a mystic" (Vygodskij, 1986, p. 424), standing at the threshold of two worlds, one metaphysical, dark, and unexplained, and one plain, earthly, and full of political intrigues.

The image of Hamlet as standing on the brink of worlds was indeed essential in both Vygotsky's approaches to the tragedy. Whether aesthetically (that is, regarding its artistic structure) or contextually (that is, regarding the tragedy's story) the notion of in-betweenness, the existence under the direct influence of two contrasting dimensions of being, contained, for Vygotsky, the very essence of *Hamlet*. This same notion was highlighted in all Russian productions of *Hamlet* during the early 20th century. Whether spiritually, metaphysically, or socio-historically speaking, Hamlet always appeared to struggle under the clash of two worlds—the established tradition, and the new rising epoch. In the years before the Revolution, the phenomenon of Hamletism came to represent the tragic conundrums faced by the intelligentsia in the time of social unrest. The Craig-Stanislavsky production attributed to *Hamlet* another symbol—the hope for a better future. The writer Marietta Shaginyan, after attending the production at the Moscow Art Theatre, commented on how Hamlet:

personified for us the connection and the struggle of two mysteries: of love and hate, of acceptance and renunciation. And if he did not manage to do what he must, it was precisely because he came to us to bloom; he came to show us, to guide us, to make us think. So that the fruit will come from the earth. (Shaginyan in Stroeve, 1973, p. 286)¹²⁴

Chekhov's post-Revolutionary interpretation of *Hamlet* appeared more pessimistic than its predecessor. However, the division of the stage to 'whites' and 'blacks' highlighted the rupture between the new epoch and the established regime. All the while, the subliminal presence of the Ghost, constantly pressing for the overthrow of the King and his people, acted as the undying voice of the Revolution (Axline &

124 The translation is my own.

Symons, 2001). The sociological narrative of Hamlet on the threshold of two different epochs was even more stressed in the productions of Akimov and Radlov. Under the influence of Socialist Realism, though very different stylistically, both productions depicted Hamlet “as a solitary champion for humanist values in a repressive and evil age” (Rowe, 1976, p. 132).

A similar image was further developed by Pasternak (1984), in the opening poem of his *Zhivago* cycle, ‘Hamlet’. In the poem, Hamlet appears inactive, caught in a threshold that symbolises the passage into a new historical era. In Pasternak’s work, Hamlet’s “contemplative transgression of the threshold is a stance, a listening pose before a window or door, in which consciousness seeps out into the surrounding space, anticipating aesthetically the decisive step” (Pettus, 2013, p. 565). Truly, this image evoked by Vygotsky, Pasternak,¹²⁵ and other artists—that of a man in between two worlds often unable to lead himself out of his contemplative inaction—could well describe a crucial aspect of the mental state of Russians during Modernism. Living in the threshold between the old Russian values, among which was a heightened spirituality and respect to the metaphysical, and the emerging ideologies concerning the political changes and the technological progress, it is likely that the Russians of the time felt equally suspended in an in-betweenness.

According to Steinberg, this sense of suspension between the political and mystical, between the future and the past, along with a feeling of immobility, was responsible for evoking among the Russians a sense of the tragic [tragizm]. This feeling, which accompanied the awareness of the crisis that had engulfed life in Modernist Russia, described the sense of living an arrested life, or worse, of “life in infernal stasis” (Steinberg, 2008, p. 822). This description reflects yet another image from Vygotsky’s first reading of *Hamlet*, where the whole tragedy is described as suspended in time in the moment of the meeting of two opposing worlds: “This is the exposition of the tragedy: two worlds have collided, the time has come out of its grooves” (Vygodskij, 1986, pp. 408-9).

Furthermore, it is conceivable that the leap forward into a new social, political, and economic era, required of the member of the Russian society by the historical circumstances, overwhelmed them with emotions of anxiety and nervousness. For that matter, the generalised dread that characterised life in Russia in the first years of the 20th century was also connected to a fear of the unknown. Indeed, “the darkness of melancholy was also epistemological. The absence of ‘clarity’ (iasnost’, iarkost’) was repeatedly observed, always with alarm” (Steinberg, 2008, p. 823). This absence of lucidity and transparency was greatly stressed by

125 And, as I argued earlier, by Lacan.

Vygotsky, in his analyses of *Hamlet* as he considered obscurity to be an inherent element of the play:

We stand before Hamlet and his tragedy as if we were standing before a curtain. We expect the curtain to rise and reveal the image, but we discover that the image concealed is none other than the curtain itself. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 168)

For this reason, Vygotsky deemed any attempt at shedding light onto the darkness of *Hamlet* as fruitless and catastrophic for the very essence of the tragedy.

Nonetheless, all four major staged visions of *Hamlet*, that are discussed in this thesis, attributed some meaning to the tragedy's darkness, the character of which changed along with the historical shifts of the time. Staged in the turbulent years between the 1905 and the 1917 Revolutions, Craig and Stanislavsky's *Hamlet* painted a rather obscure picture of Elsinore. The degeneracy of Elsinore was reflected in the tarnished gold of the court's costumes, while Hamlet's aversion toward this corrupt world drove him in the shadows. Yet, in the tragedy's essence, lay the hope for a brighter future. This hope became the driving force behind the tragedy and manifested itself in the finale, where the banners carried by Fortinbras' men filled the stage victoriously. "The silver glow of the victorious Fortinbras" as Volkonskij commented, shined like "the eternal youth of tomorrow" (Volkonskij in Bachelis, 1983, p. 303).

By 1924, when Chekhov incarnated his Hamlet on the stage of the Second Moscow Art Theatre, the climate in Russia had transformed. The Revolution had swept over the country demanding fighting and sacrifices; the Civil War that succeeded it had marked the souls of Russians with the sense of an ongoing battle. Within this climate Hamlet appeared as a warrior, dressed in leather armour, ready to sacrifice himself for the advancement of the world, under the constant guidance of the Ghost—which came to represent the voice of the Revolution. As the critic Pavel Markov commented: "Chekhov stands before the spectator and tells him about the man who has lived through our time" (Markov in Senelick, 2015, p.153). In the Second Moscow Art Theatre, the inherent obscurity of *Hamlet*, the 'curtain' of Vygotsky's analysis, was raised to reveal the clear image of the Revolutionary battles.

Akimov's and Radlov's productions followed a similar path. Like their predecessor, the 1932 *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre and the 1938 production in Radlov's theatre based their interpretations of the tragedy on the sociopolitical narrative of the solitary hero fighting against a corrupt world. Yet, where Radlov allowed for the tragedy's original mystical elements to prevail, Akimov approached

the tragedy through a very narrow lens that left absolutely no room for obscurity. The elimination of the Ghost and the reduction of Hamlet's motives and dilemmas to a struggle for power not only 'lifted the curtain' but upturned all expectations in the staging of classics. Under Akimov's treatment, as the critics of the time asserted, *Hamlet* hardly classified as a tragedy (see Beskin, 1932 and Zagorskij, 1932)—a fact that was further supported by Akimov's use of lively, theatrical, and comedic elements.

In the context of the living circumstances of his time—that is, the years before and immediate after the Revolution—it is possible to understand Vygotsky's embracing of *Hamlet's* ambiguity as his sensing in the darkness of the play the obscurity of his own world's future, the uncertainty and incapacity of his fellow Russians to see with clarity the dawning era. In fact, it is in this very ambiguity that Vygotsky found the essence and the value of *Hamlet's* effect on its audiences. Saylor suggested that "to the Russian, the theatre is rather a microcosmos, a concentration and an explanation of life. If life cannot be explained at least its inexplicability can be faced" (Saylor, 1920, pp. 7-8). Therefore, by refraining from painting a rationalised picture of the world, and by offering a view into the very darkness and obscurity of it, the Shakespearean tragedy, at least as it is presented through Vygotsky's analysis, could have provided the Russians with a sincere representation of the emotional obscurity of life in Modernist Russia.

Given the difficult nature of the emotional life in Russia, at the time, it is not surprising that the very same characteristics of *Hamlet* that led Vygotsky, as well as several artists and critics, to embrace the tragedy as an echo of their time, led others to adopt a somewhat sceptical or even hostile stance against the drama. Notably, the main criticism that the tragedy of *Hamlet* received across the whole first half of the 20th century concerned its possible effect on the society. The movement against Hamletism, and the melancholic disposition that it promoted among the intelligentsia had begun with Turgenev's and Tolstoy's vociferous opposition to the Shakespearean tragedy and it lasted through the first decades of the 20th century. In the years of a passionate Revolutionary reform of all aspects of life the sense of melancholy propagated by Hamletism was seen as a sign of the decadent bourgeoisie and was declared "a dangerous popular epidemic" (Steinberg, 2008, p. 814).

The increasing attention to the emotional landscape of the society and the search for the meaning of the times in the subjective, psychological experience of the world, was contrary to the excitement over the formation of a shared ideological scope, and the development of a new, communal worldview. In this context, a play

that glorified unproductive introspection, procrastination, and submission to grief and melancholy naturally fell in disagreement with the philosophical agenda of the Revolution. Chekhov's passionate warrior, Akimov's gluttonous and cheery machinator, and Radlov's solitary idealist were all attempts at dressing Hamlet with a Revolutionary garment. In all three cases, Hamlet appeared as a strong and capable character, eager to jump into action, while any signs of delays were attributed to matters external to the character. These versions of the Shakespearean hero contradicted the traditional image established by Hamletism intentionally, as the cultural-political pressures of the time would hardly allow for a production founded on a more traditional characterisation. In contrast, the compelling demand was to write Hamlet into the zeitgeist of the time. Surprisingly, at least in the case of Chekhov and Akimov, the choices concerning Hamlet's character that complied with this demand became the source of great controversy in the two productions' reception. According to a significant portion of the critics, the elimination of the philosophical and submissive dimension of Hamlet's introspection acted destructively for the whole tragedy (see Beskin, 1932 and Zagorskij, 1932 and Senelick, 2015).

One other characteristic of *Hamlet* that prompted conflicts in its reception during the Russian Modernist times was its distinct element of mysticism. Though the theatrical endeavours of the Futurists allowed for free experimentation with the element of spirituality—which varied from highlighting it to radically eradicating it—the emerging political mindset and the developing beliefs of the LEF appeared to be disturbed by the inherent mysticism of the Shakespearean tragedy. The Revolutionary ideology saw spirituality and mysticism as regressive elements of the past that stood in the way of the social, political, and ideological progress. Consequently, in the years that followed the October Revolution, the condemnation of all mystical and metaphysical references intensified and productions that stressed the otherworldly dimension of the drama were targeted and negatively criticised. Characteristic was the pressure placed on Chekhov for his production of *Hamlet*, who was summoned by the official censorship body and asked to “kill the pervasive influence of other worldliness,’ [...] to avoid dangerous mystical moods and come closer to the workers’ factory” (Senelick, 2015, p. 154).

In his first essay on *Hamlet*, Vygotsky illustrated how the mystical dimension of Hamlet's world is reflected in his alleged madness and his ever-present melancholy, and as such, it worries and even scares the other dramatis personae (Vygotskij, 1986). It can be argued that a similar dynamic was present between the tragedy and the political leaders. *Hamlet* evoked for the Russians the generalised

pessimistic mood that characterised the time and that, according to the Bolsheviks stood in the way of sociocultural progress (Steinberg, 2008). *Hamlet*, in this context, was a mirror reflecting the very aspect of the society that the Bolsheviks strived to eradicate. The same dynamic appeared to be at play even in those cases where *Hamlet* was staged as a parable for the Revolution, such as in Chekhov's production. As Axline asserts, "the problem with most revolutions [...] is that once they are successful, they no longer desire to see revolutionary sentiment that might alter the new status quo—their own" (Axline & Symons, 2001, p. 145). In all cases, *Hamlet* seemed to fall 'too close to home' for the Russians of this still turbulent time, a fact that, like in the years before the Revolution, made the tragedy highly relevant, but also deeply problematic for the Russian stage. It is, thus, not surprising that the October Revolution brought a decline in the interest in the Shakespearean drama and a sense of apprehension towards the tragedy that escalated during the Stalinist years. Though Stalin's notorious ban of *Hamlet* has no historical evidence, it is clear that during his regime any talk of *Hamlet* was performed with cautiousness and an effort to avoid any connotations to the melancholic image of Hamletism's Hamlet.

It is evident that in early Soviet Russia, *Hamlet* represented those elements of the inner and social life that were deemed as catastrophic for the progress of the society. Under this light, the political leaders and the artists that shared in the enthusiasm over the changes promised by the Revolution strived to either change the dominant image of *Hamlet* or completely eradicate the tragedy. The concerns that led to such a stance regarded the effect of the Shakespearean drama on the changing Russian society. As I discuss in Chapter Five, these concerns belonged to a more generalised movement of the time, which turned against the classics and advocated the creation of a theatre that positively promotes the ideals of the Revolution. The most radical doctrines, which brought this trend to its extreme, deemed any texts that were written under the influence of values from the past dangerous for the society. Furthermore, the theoretical premises that underlay the hostility towards *Hamlet* are similar to those employed by the advocates of the artist's moral obligations towards the community. Examples of such beliefs are found in Tolstoy's texts on art as well as Eisenstein's questioning of art's legitimacy (see Chapter Six). In both cases, art was seen as a powerful means of moral education and was thus expected to promote positive and progressive rather than problematic social traits. In this context, *Hamlet's* representation of the latent, social, psychological situation and all those emotional traits that would stand in the way of the desired cultural and social revolution was deemed problematic and potentially harmful.

The place of *Hamlet* within the Russian culture of the time proved indeed to be a very complex issue. Yet, the tragedy continued to attract the attention of artists and critics who faced the question of how to stage a socially purposeful *Hamlet*. The re-interpretation of the myth of *Hamlet* under a socio-political lens was a powerful attempt to fulfil that goal. Equally significant was the stylisation of the tragedy by the Russian directors in accordance with the Avant-garde movement. As Chapter Six discusses, the Russian Avant-garde subscribed to the movement of theatricalisation of theatre and employed the element of stylisation as an agent of social change. Whether seeking to 'free' theatre from the text—thus breaking contact with the cultural past, or aiming at creating a new lens that could transform the dramatic texts of the past into tools for the creation of a new culture, Vygotsky's contemporaries envisioned a theatre where the theatrical form could facilitate the creation of the new human being. In this light, the theatre makers turned to the tools of theatricality in their attempted to modernise the Shakespearean tragedy—that is, find the solution to the problem of *Hamlet* on the Modern Russian stage.

The stylistic treatment of *Hamlet* on the Russian Modern stage, from Craig's and Stanislavsky's 1911/12 production to Akimov's staging in the Vakhtangov Theatre, took various forms and was conducted with an experimental spirit. Some productions introduced theatrical innovations that intensified the aspects of the tragedy that Vygotsky found to be essential for its aesthetic effect. Craig's design for the Moscow Art Theatre with its ability to isolate the protagonist from the tarnished world of the court and define clear boundaries between the earthly life and the dark, yet authentic metaphysical world, was an excellent illustration of Vygotsky's points regarding the binary nature of Hamlet's world. Craig's screens and his symbolic use of lighting caused some debates in the production's reception, puzzling some of the more conservative critics who were used to a rich set and a descriptive scenic architecture. However, all who attended the performance experienced a profound sense of Hamlet's internal battle. As the critic N. Ehfros wrote: "The external material wealth of the tragedy is impoverished, but that expands the tragedy of Hamlet. This tragedy encompasses the entire world that surrounds him, while we see this world through Hamlet's perception" (Ehfros, 1911). In this aspect, the modernisation of *Hamlet* through Craig's stylistic treatment freed the tragedy from the superfluous, decorative elements of its traditional staging and facilitated its aesthetic reception by the Modern Russians.

Nonetheless, not all of Craig's choices were conducive to this effect. In accordance with his views on the ideal actor, Craig attempted to submit Kachalov to the universality manifested in his design. The aim was to remove all traces of

individual psychology from the actor so that he can be used almost as an element of design. In ideological and methodological contrast, Stanislavsky's work with Kachalov aimed at allowing the actor to indulge in his individual psychology to the point that his subjectivity could begin to approach a universal plane. This contradiction in the approach to acting became crucial in the disputes between the two directors and was also present in the final production, where the highly stylised design clashed with Kachalov's deeply psychological acting. The reception was controversial: all critics appear affected by the sorrow that burdened the protagonist's soul. Some praised Kachalov for his controlled and temperate acting, relieved to see a Hamlet that resembled the everyday Russian. Others were appalled by the slow rhythm of his speech and movement and the complete lack of heroism in his manners. Lastly, a few recognised in this Hamlet the epitome of a human living through the Modern times. Yet, all witnessed in Kachalov's performance the great and deep sorrow of a highly moral person in times that required violent sacrifices.¹²⁶

Examined under the Vygotskian lens, such identification of the audience with Kachalov's Hamlet was made possible due to Stanislavsky's voice prevailing over Craig's demands for an emotion-less actor. As Vygotsky argued, the actor's pool of emotional experience, that conducts the form of their engagement with the emotional content of their role and the form of its expression in their performance, is a product of their socio-historical time. Therefore, Kachalov's approach to Hamlet through his individual psychology, as Stanislavsky's system implied, created a character that bore within them an aspect of the socially shared life in Russia, at the time. Considering the production's reviews, this aspect seems to be centred around the moral pain produced by the clash of hope with the fear of the unknown—a psychological condition that is fitting to a people awaiting a Revolutionary change. Though we have no definitive understanding of what aesthetic result Craig's choice would have yielded, Stanislavsky's approach led Kachalov's emotion to become part of a greater social system, thus facilitating the social-psychological aesthetic effect of the performance.

A similar effect was achieved by Michael Chekhov's performance at the Second Moscow Art Theatre. The production rose great controversy due to both the radical cuts to the text and its high stylisation. Yet, "even those who disliked the expressionistic style of the overall production singled out Chekhov as the justification for the experiment, the lodestone for 'truth'" (Senelick, 2015, p.153).

126 For a juxtaposition of the various reviewers' comments on Kachalov's performance see Bachelis, 1983.

Though stylised, Chekhov's acting approach, like Kachalov's, involved a deep emotional engagement with the role. Yet, unlike Kachalov's, Chekhov's emotion was ferocious, urging for justice, caught in the fiery excitement of the battle while the tragedy of the character lay in the pain that arose from the clash between his will to take action and the violent nature of his duty. Staged in 1924—after the experience of the 1917 Revolution and the warfare of the Civil War—these emotions seemed to be shared between Chekhov and his contemporaries. In Zagorsky's words, Hamlet was portrayed as “a modern city-dweller whose nerves could not endure the turbulence of the time.” (Zagorsky in Axline & Symons, 2001, p. 144).

The overall style of the production was designed to frame and extenuate the urgency and the forcefulness of Hamlet's emotion, while the profound mystical atmosphere that was created on stage acted not as a counterweight to the haste of the rhythm, but as the ticking clock of an explosive device. The high theatricality in this production served to reveal and emphasise a crossing point between Hamlet and an aspect of the post-Revolutionary social psychological state of Russians. Nonetheless, the focus of all theatrical elements on this one plane of interpretation created, in Vygotsky's view, a shallow aesthetic effect. Allowing no room for the tragedy's inherent factor of obscurity and ambiguity, the production lost its depth, missing on the opportunity to transform the classic text into a work of art with a significant psychological aesthetic effect for the Modern Russian audience member.

Akimov's experiment with the Shakespearean play in his 1932 production fell into a similar trap. It created a restrictive interpretation of the tragedy's plot that limited the internal motives of the tragedy to a political machination. This approach responded to a commonly advocated demand for a socio-historical approach to the tragedy, that would “cleanse” Hamlet off Hamletism, “liberating him from the conventional dismal colours of mysticism, abstractness, and vague idealism” (Litovskij, 1932, p. 3). Akimov dressed his attempt in heightened and lively theatricality, where the music, the design, the use of objects, and the acting techniques employed by the comedian Anatoly Goryunov in the role of Hamlet aimed at the exposure of the political motif of the tragedy, as well as at amusing the audience. The production resulted in an “entertaining, intriguing presentation of the struggle for the Danish throne” (Litovskij, 1932, p. 3). The members of the audience responded positively to the comedic and satiric elements of the production and were impressed by the performance's dramatic and spectacular moments. Yet, as the general position of the critics suggests, Akimov's approach to *Hamlet* remained superficial: “You cannot discern his ideas. And without ideas, the images are empty, the artistic language—empty”, wrote Beskin (1932, p.4). Akimov's use of

theatricality, paired with the superimposed narrative of the political intrigue, blanketed the tragedy's complexity, leaving many with the question of why would someone bend a play so much, when they could have written a new one (see, for example, Zagorski, 1932).

Akimov's theatricalisation of *Hamlet* equaled the stance adopted by the more extreme leftist visions that sought to eradicate the cultural patterns of the past and establish new ones, representative of the dawning sociopolitical epoch. Yet, as some of the above examples evidence, the eradication of the cultural wealth hidden in the tradition and the imposing of a new ideological norm through means of interpretation and theatrical innovation, result in a mere representation of the director's intent, barren of deeper psychological meaning—thus, unable to affect the audience on a social psychological level. In direct opposition to this practice, stands the Vygotskian approach to theatricality as a structural reimagining of the content that leads to a dialectical synthesis of new culture, through the transformation, and not eradication, of the past.

Applied to the staging of *Hamlet*, a Vygotskian treatment of the content would imply the interpretation of the tragedy through one's own emotional engagement with its content, that neither avoids nor follows its traditional connotations. Such an approach allows for new connections to form between the psychology of the artists involved and the structural and symbolic elements of the play—connections that synthesise a novel and significant in terms of the socio-historical time interpretation. This means that the mere stylisation of the drama, however representative of the contemporary artistic trends, is not sufficient for the synthesis of a new culture that would facilitate the creation of a new human being. It is through the contemporary artists' deeper psychological engagement with the tragedy that such a transformation can occur.

This process of transforming the tragedy into a cultural element that is significant for the contemporary world is present in all phases of the theatrical treatment, from laying the directorial foundations, to designing the set, and from choosing an approach to acting to the composition of the music. The successful elements of a production, according to this vision, would work towards triggering in the audience's minds emotional and intuitive connections between their psychology and the world of the drama, similar to those that inspired the artists, thus leading their psychology through the transformative process of aesthetic reception. Hence, a successful production of *Hamlet*, according to Vygotsky's theory, would transform the classic drama into an experience with significant aesthetic-psychological effect.

What is more, according to Vygotsky's theory of artistic catharsis, it is the

very analogy between Hamlet's grief and the generalised emotional distress of the Russian people of the time that would pave the way for the tragedy's psychological-cathartic effect. Though the background and the story of *Hamlet* bore no resemblance to the contemporary life, the dynamic between the protagonist and his world would prompt, for the modern Russian reader, a unconscious recognition of his emotional state. Hamlet appears to suffer from a pain that belongs not to himself, but to the world beyond him; he has no understanding of its origin, cannot see it clearly; thus, he cannot relieve himself from it. Hamlet has no choice but submitting himself to those dark forces and let them lead him to his distraction. Similarly, a Russian living under the strong emotional influences of Modernity would find themselves infected by a sense of dread, not consciously aware of its source but concerned about its consequences.

When reading or spectating *Hamlet*, according to Vygotsky's beliefs, the reader would be led by the artistic structure of the play in re-experiencing their own underlying daily feelings of dread in a concentrated and heightened degree. Because, as Vygotsky argued:

By forcing our feelings to alternate continuously to the opposite extremes of the emotional range, by deceiving them, splitting them and piling obstacles in their way, the tragedy can obtain powerful emotional effect. When we see Hamlet, we feel as if we have lived the lives of thousands of persons in one night; indeed, we have experienced more than we would have in years of common, everyday life. (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 194)

These feelings, in Vygotsky's view would be artfully manipulated by the structure of the tragedy—as it is embedded in the dramatic text and as it is formed by the the use of theatricality—in a process resulting in the release of the individual's emotional charge and the cathartic relief from any of its psychological by-products. Such a process, in Vygotsky's view, would have a significant effect on the individual's mental well-being. What is more, by addressing the generalised social, emotional state, and by providing the individual with an outlet for the emotional frustration that it could cause, the artistic/cathartic process would help promote the general social welfare.

But most importantly, according to Vygotsky's understanding of the dialectical processes of mental development, a work of art such as *Hamlet* would offer the individual the necessary means of cultural mediation in order to develop their emotions into a higher state that lies in accordance with the cultural and social needs of the time. By exposing the Russian public to a mirror of their inner self, *Hamlet*, as a genuine work of art, would help them overcome their emotional

difficulties and transform their inner feelings into new, progressive states of mind. This means that the exposure to the Shakespearean tragedy of the Russian public of the time would prompt, for Vygotsky, a rapid advancement in their individual mental life, a benefit that, due to the social nature of theatre, would be enjoyed by the community and would be reflected back to the culture as a whole in a positive manner. In essence, the aesthetic experience offered by the reading or auditing of this classic tragedy would, in contrast to the Leftist beliefs, facilitate the social change and development that the Revolution predicted.

The benefits from the aesthetic experience of *Hamlet*, according to Vygotsky's views, are also significant in respect to the deeper content of the tragedy—that is, the ways in which the tragedy relates to the common, fundamental experiences of human existence:

After all, it is not the collision itself, but what underlies it, the foundational cause of the hero's tragic state. It reveals something deeper than the accidental and the ephemeral, something that underlies every dramatic collision. It reveals the universal and the eternal because we look at the tragedy from the bottom up: it stands above us, it is the focal point that has concentrated the authentic, the eternal, and the everlasting aspects of our life. In every tragedy behind the mad whirlpool of human passions, vulnerabilities, love, and hate, behind the pictures of passionate aspirations and misunderstandings, we hear the distant echoes of a mystical symphony that speaks of the ancient, the familiar, and the dear. We are cut off from the circle, as once the land was torn off. In this eternal separation lies grief, in the "I" itself, in that I am not you, not everything around me, that everything—both man and stone, and the planets—are alone in the great silence of the eternal night. (Vygotskij, 1986, p. 487)

For Vygotsky, *Hamlet* reflected the tragedy of existential loneliness deeply and profoundly. In a transitioning time from the era of individualism to that of collectivism, from the celebration of selfhood—as propagated by the school of psychoanalysis—to the submission of the individual to the community—called for by the grand sociopolitical changes of the time—Vygotsky, with his visions of Hamlet, drew attention to the pain of universal isolation, the agony of the human living in the godless world of Modernism.

In such manner, Vygotsky urged his culture to embrace the tragedy that pointed to the inner pain and dread shared by many Russians due to their common sociocultural condition, believing that it is only by facing those difficulties that his society could truly grow to enter a new era. During the Russian Modernist years, *Hamlet* acquired many traits: it was seen as a portrayal of the life in his era, a reminder of mysticism's role in life, an illustration of those characters and emotions

that are particularly problematic for the social welfare, or a representation of the human psychopathology. For Vygotsky, however, *Hamlet* surpassed all the above functions and was envisioned as the medium to the holistic sociocultural development towards a brighter future.

Conclusions, Points of Criticism, and Future Perspectives

The examination of Vygotsky's first period of work as a theory of aesthetics, presented in this thesis, has yielded a series of important conclusions. First and foremost, this analysis has revealed the depth of Vygotsky's theory on art as one that combines within its frame notions from philosophy, psychology, sociology, and aesthetics. As such, though fragmented and incomplete, Vygotsky's aesthetic thought appears as rich as his later and much more popular work and invites our attention as a separate subject of study. This thesis has engaged with this distinct topic, clarifying and defining its components to arrive at a complete and reconstructed theory of Vygotsky's aesthetics. As a result, it can now provide the reader with a comprehensive summary of Vygotsky's aesthetic thought.

In the heart of Vygotsky's stance towards art, lie his ontological deductions. That is, his belief that art is not only a unique and indispensable part of the human societal life, but that it bears a highly significant social purpose. This purpose, according to Vygotsky, is found in art's psychological function, which manifests in the transformation of the individual's emotional world, but affects the whole society, by creating in its member a commonly shared ground for psychological change. More specifically, Vygotsky concluded that art engages with those elements of the inner individual life that are caused by the psychological tensions that derive from the state of life in a culture at a given time, and can be deemed as catastrophic for the progress of the society; it, then, helps the individuals overcome the difficulty caused by this conflict, by transforming these difficult feelings into new, progressive states of mind. Therefore, art is defined as a culturally acquired medium that bridges the individual and social psychology and acts as a means of cultural mediation for the evolution of the society as a whole. To arrive at these conclusions, Vygotsky proposed a methodological stance that incorporated the findings of the psychological science of his time in the philosophical discussion regarding art's function and purpose. He also systematised his philosophical analysis by focusing on the shared structural characteristics of artworks and by discussing them with respect to their effect on the recipient's psychology. Through this study, Vygotsky arrived at a structural scheme for the psychologically active elements of an artwork, which places the form and the content in a dialectical process of antithesis and synthesis. According to Vygotsky, this interplay of form and content leads to the transformation of the work of art into a device with a profound psychological effect that surpasses the individual psychology and mediates change on the societal level.

The detailed inquiry of this thesis into Vygotsky's early works has painted his

theoretical approach to the study of art as a bridge that connects the inner psychological world of the individual with the outer shared experience of the social life. What is more, it has revealed Vygotsky's conviction in the centrality of theatre's role in the psychological development of his nation in his specific historical time. Most importantly, this project has highlighted Vygotsky's unique and highly dynamic amalgamation of humanism, Marxism, and objectivism present in his aesthetic thought, which provided him with a wide view into the internal life experienced by the people of his time and on how art, and more specifically theatre, could mediate the psychological transformations required by the times.

In its totality, this project has proven the strong connections that tie Vygotsky's early work to the artistic, scientific, and theoretical frame of his time and has written his ideas into the feverish discussions regarding art's role in the development of the new era's humanity. It is through this dialogue that Vygotsky's notions have gained depth and perspective¹²⁷ and have revealed their true value: their capacity to synthesise within their meaning values of often opposing points of view. The influences that contributed to Vygotsky's early work cover the passage from the ideas of the Russian Silver Age to the excitement of the Avant-garde and to this enthusiasm's final dissolution with the establishment of Socialist Realism. Yet, Vygotsky's thought on the matter of aesthetics did not follow this developmental line, demolishing its first premises to construct its later beliefs. On the contrary, it retained and combined elements from conflicting perspectives, synthesising a unique approach that honoured equally the past and the future of artistic criticism. The synthesis of such contrasting elements became essential in Vygotsky's understanding of the social psychological function of theatre, which illustrated its capacity to aid the traditional psyche transition to the new era of the future¹²⁸—a matter of great importance in the cultural developments that characterised Russian Modernism.

Criticism

However connected to his time, Vygotsky's thought appeared vulnerable to

127 This is also true in reverse: by examining Russian Modernism through Vygotsky's writings, we have gained a valuable perspective into the importance of the conflicts and arguments that characterised the period's artistic and critical thought.

128 A characteristic example is Vygotsky's approach to *Hamlet*, in which he demonstrated how a tragedy with strong spiritual and metaphysical connotations can facilitate the passage to an era that aspired to erase spiritualism, at least in its traditional forms.

criticism by his contemporaries, who found his ideological standpoint too ambiguous, in a time when the ideological compliance of a theory appeared more valuable than its actual content (Van der Veer, 2002). Equally vulnerable to criticism was Vygotsky's methodological approach, which, at this early stage of his career, relied on reductionist theories of psychology. This latter weakness was spotted by Vygotsky himself, who in the last stage of his career turned against all kinds of dualistic perspectives in psychology and called out a series of inconsistencies in psychological methodologies, such as reactology, that had formed the theoretical foundations of his psychology of art. Yet, Vygotsky's alliance with such schools of thought remains to this day the main flaw in his aesthetic theory and has led contemporary scholars to "dismiss him as an historical figure whose obsolete ideas now have little relevance" (Van der Veer, 1991, p. 373). The overwhelming majority of these critiques come from the field of psychology. It is natural, therefore, that they focus on the scientific/psychological component of Vygotsky's early writings—a component that arguably requires to be updated. However, it is unfortunate that these critiques have undermined the philosophical component of Vygotsky's theory—one that, as this thesis has argued, is rather sound. Equally unfortunate is the regard of Vygotsky's association with the prevailing philosophical ideas of his time—such as Marxism—as cultural blinders. Such critiques have also focused on the incomplete, partial, and fragmented nature of Vygotsky's early ideas, which have left us with a theory that is hard to summarise and apply.

In contrast to dismissing Vygotsky's aesthetics on the above premises, this thesis, was inspired by the rich and suggestive nature of his writings on theatre, and aspired to re-articulate Vygotsky's outlook on aesthetics, providing the reader with targeted and constructive criticism on the topic. Under this lens, the particular pairing of scientific method with philosophical reasoning, found in Vygotsky's works was celebrated, as it became apparent that this is the source of Vygotsky's particular conclusions and his unique perspective to the question of the function and purpose of art. All the while, the rather reductive nature of his psychological premises was remedied through the integration of Vygotsky's later views into the context of his early writings. Finally, the association of Vygotsky's aesthetics with the cultural and theatrical developments of his time has been addressed as a dynamic dialogue that sheds a better light into his ideas, while the study of this dialogue has revealed the ways in which Vygotsky surpassed the prevalent ideas of his time, rather than being blinded by them. As a result, this thesis presented an unparalleled revisionist character: while the field of Vygotsky studies re-examines his connections to the work of his contemporaries in order to re-evaluate the traditional claim of

Vygotsky's genius, this project followed the same path but with an opposite aim: to validate a part of Vygotsky's work that has been traditionally overlooked. In this capacity, this project has highlighted the extraordinary nature of Vygotsky's analytic outlook, which synthesised a dynamic understanding of humanity's experience in the turbulent times of Russian Modernism. All things considered, this thesis has shown that, speaking of Vygotsky's aesthetics, we need not invoke his genius in order to appreciate the value of his theories.

The unique perspective that this project adopted—one which focuses on the relevance of Vygotsky's writings to the scholarship of theatre—allowed it to overcome some issues that the scholars of psychology have highlighted and to appreciate its significance as a theory of aesthetics. It has also paved the way for Vygotsky's aesthetics—as they have been defined, here—to enter today's discourse in theatre studies.

Future Perspectives

This project—the reconstruction of Vygotsky's aesthetics—was founded upon my belief in the relevance of Vygotsky's early works to contemporary theatre practice and theory and was, thus, conducted with its future perspectives in mind; that is, the integration of Vygotsky's theory into the scholarship of theatre studies and its application in the practice of theatre artists and dramaturgs. Therefore, it seems important to highlight some significant connections between Vygotsky's aesthetics and contemporary scholarship. The following overview shall demonstrate the range of different discussions that can be informed through Vygotsky's perspective, as well as point to the possible future perspectives in the study of Vygotsky's early writings.

As it has been discussed already, the major weakness of Vygotsky psychology of art lies in the outdated nature of the psychological theories on which it was founded. Current studies in psychology and neuroscience are still investigating phenomena that lie in the centre of Vygotsky's theories, such as emotion, imagination, perception, and meaning making, and many have made great strides since Vygotsky's time. All the while, other studies have since confirmed the fundamental notions in Vygotsky's worldview, such as our brain's plasticity and the importance of the social experience in the construction of our minds (Mesquita, 2012). A specialised study that focuses on updating Vygotsky's aesthetics through such contemporary discoveries may serve as the necessary means to bring his

theories into dialogue with the current discussions on the effect of theatre on the human mind. Such a study would lie in line with Vygotsky's own spirit, as he himself seemed to wish to update his understanding of the human mind by incorporating the medical sciences. This is evident by the fact that near the end of his life Vygotsky sought to get official medical training (Yasnitsky, 2018). What is more, connecting Vygotsky's perspective with the research currently performed under the umbrella of cognitive theatre—a field that emerged recently from the junction of neuroscience and theatre studies—may help the text-based perspective of Vygotsky tackle the specific issues of performance and performativity—another obscure part in Vygotsky's work.

Nonetheless, Vygotsky's theory stands already very close to such studies. Vygotsky and the scholars of cognitive theatre share a methodological standpoint. In Bruce McConachie's words: "cognitive studies provides a valid framework for understanding the potential truth value of many theories and practices that we presently deploy in theatre and performance studies" (McConachie & Hart, 2006, p. ix-x). The search of scientific/empirical evidence in order to formulate an understanding of theatre's effect on the individual and society, or the reliance of such evidence in order to provide empirical justification for the various notions examined under a theory of aesthetics, was one of Vygotsky's primary methodological concerns in the creation of *The Psychology of Art*. This is a fundamental convergence between his work and the field of cognitive studies that testifies to Vygotsky's anticipation of a trend that was to be established in the theatrical scholarship close to a century after his death.

This methodological convergence is also responsible for several other points of agreement between Vygotsky and contemporary cognitive theatre scholars regarding some fundamental notions of aesthetics. Many of those points relate to Vygotsky's premises regarding the effect of art on its recipient, which have now been proven through the field of cognitive science and interpreted for theatre by the theatre scholars. Amongst these are the centrality of emotion in the meaning-making process, the unconscious as a crucial component in the process of artistic reception, and his monistic approach to the body-mind question (see McConachie & Hart, 2006). Yet, a most crucial point of consensus is the one regarding the interplay of natural/biological and cultural effect on the formation of the human mind, and the ways in which art partakes in that process. Cognitive theatre studies employ the term of *mind-embodiment* to discuss the mediation between the "unchanging, cross-cultural, perhaps even universal structures" of the mind and the culturally driven formation of the brain's structure (McConachie & Hart, 2006, p. 8-9), thus stressing

the effective impact of culture on the human biology. Similar studies borrow the term *image schemas* from the cognitive sciences to describe the fundamental knowledge frames that are created either through the individual's physical or social interaction with the world (see Nellhaus in McConachie & Hart, 2006). In theatre studies, the concept of image schemas is discussed in relation to theatricality and the interaction between the conceptual and formal characteristics of a drama or a performance and the socially acquired common structures of the human brain, in a specific society and time period. These concepts clearly mirror Vygotsky's understanding of the cultural formation of the human mind and art's role in that process and point to a promising further study of Vygotsky's aesthetics under the prism of cognitive theatre.

Another important conjunction between Vygotsky's theory and the work of contemporary theatre scholars is found in the regard of the process of mental evolution through the exposure to antithetical or conflicting elements. Cognitive theatre studies borrow the term *conceptual-blending* from the theories of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner to discuss the inherent doubleness of the theatrical experience: the perception of the events on stage as existing simultaneously in a real and a fictional time and space. This duplicity of the theatrical condition, according to the aforementioned theories, creates a fertile ground for new concepts to emerge in the perceiver's mind (Kemp & McConachie, 2018). This idea appears highly similar to the dialectical synthesis of Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie*. John Lutterbie expands this principle further, connecting it with Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* and Jacques Rancière's view of the sensible (Lutterbie in Kemp & McConachie, 2018). In his study, Lutterbie explains a process of re-calibration of the mind that takes place during an aesthetic experience, which is triggered by what Rancière would call the disruption of the sensible; that is, through the creation of a tension between what is expected, based on one's dominant image schemas and what is in reality perceived. In Lutterbie's words: "Moments of ambiguity in the aesthetic experience create a disfluency that requires reflection and the construction of representations outside of normative expectations, allowing for the emergence of structures of meaning that attest to the relevance of the disruption" (Lutterbie in Kemp & McConachie, 2018, p. 252). The similarity between this definition and Vygotsky's understanding of the psychological function of art is remarkable, as it encompasses the dialectical scheme that he observed in the artworks' structure, its immediate effect on the human mind and its long-term effect, as a vehicle for cultural mediation. A comprehensive analysis of the juxtaposition of such studies with Vygotsky's aesthetics can add more depth to both perspectives, while evidencing the high relevancy of Vygotsky's early works to today's developments in

the field.

The above discussion also draws our attention to the connections that lie between Vygotsky and philosophical approaches to art, such as the works of Rancière. Although, according to Rancière, Vygotsky belongs to a very different era of thought, both thinkers share a foundation: like Vygotsky, Rancière is admittedly (Deranty, 2014) influenced by Hegel and Marx—however critical he appears of their work. The two, thus, share a common grounding in dialectics and bestow on art a common intention: they both discuss art as a medium with a sociopolitical dimension, the ultimate purpose of which lies in its capacity to effect change. Not unlike Vygotsky, Rancière places this power to emerge from the structural features of art (Deranty, 2010); he thus views the artwork as a distinct device that exists separate from the creator and spectator and bears the necessary conditions to fulfil its true purpose:

It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect. (Rancière, 2011).

With that, Rancière challenges the traditional approaches to artistic criticism that regards art as a medium of transmission of a message from the artist to the reader or the spectator. Several decades before Rancière wrote his critique, Vygotsky had already challenged these established views, urging for the separation between any personal intentions of the artist with the true function of art and identifying this function within the structural characteristics of the artwork.

Considering the convergence of Vygotsky's and Rancière's premises, it is of no surprise to observe that both arrived at similar conclusions regarding the nature of artistic reception and its political significance. An important part of Rancière's critique of the traditional view of art concerns the passive role of the artistic recipient. He argues that spectatorship is a state naturally characterised by both passivity and action, as the process of internal interpretation and meaning-making of the perceived reality requires active and creative forces. Vygotsky's aesthetics presupposed the active involvement of the reader or the spectator through the enablement of their emotion, their imagination, and their forces of creativity, while his psychological theories have shed light on the intricacies of this process and on their impact in the individual's mental and social development. Yet, the convergence between the two thinkers runs even deeper. Rancière argues that this type of active interpretation of the world results in the transformation or reconfiguration of it (Rancière, 2011). Employing the term *emancipation*, he discusses the pivotal role

that art plays in the empowerment of the reader or the spectator, who, triggered by the structural and contextual nature of the artwork that they experience, employs their own creative mental devices in order to transcend their pre-existing state of being. Rancière views this process as an act of political emancipation and examines artforms from various eras, pointing to the emancipatory elements found in the dominant, or progressive, artworks of each era. Vygotsky's aesthetic theory, as it has been presented in this thesis, lies in perfect agreement with this view. Vygotsky argued for the formative effect of art on the individual by acting as a powerful tool of cultural mediation that affects their mental state and their future behaviour. What is more, in light of the demand for politically constructive art that dominated his time period, Vygotsky defined the development triggered by artistic mediation as an act of sociopolitical evolution.

Several strands of contemporary theatre studies and practice, today, are highly concerned with the positive impact of theatre on the society. Impact studies, for example, focus on assessing the influence of theatrical events in relation to their emancipatory effects (Bala in Bleeker et al., 2019). Similarly, theatrical practices under the umbrella term of applied theatre are actively utilising the potential that lies within theatrical techniques to stimulate personal development and social emancipation. Self-empowerment as well as positive change in the ways that members of the society interact with each other and with the world are often the end goals of theatrical interventions of applied theatre (Prentki & Preston, 2009). Vygotsky's understanding of the intricacies involved in theatre's psychological and developmental effect on the individual and their society could become a valuable source for the discussions raised by applied theatre practitioners and theorists.

Educational drama, a field that lies very close to that of applied theatre, has already employed Vygotsky's theories as a foundation for its discipline. The vast majority of such discussions refer to Vygotsky's more mature works in psychology and education—rather than his early thought. However, the interpretation of Vygotsky's psychology by the various scholars of educational drama lies very close to the core of his aesthetics. Grounding their views in Vygotsky's psychology—and, more importantly, his cultural-historical theory—these scholars defend the idea that, through their engagement with drama, the students gain a profound experience of themselves within the world and gain the opportunity to expand on their possibilities of relating with the world, thus growing on a personal and a social manner (Daniels & Downes, 2018). Likewise, scholars argue that several techniques applied by practitioners of educational drama embody the core principles of Vygotsky's theories of art and play. Two great examples are the techniques of process drama—the

application of dramatic tools and forms for the exploration of human experience without the aim of creating performance—and dramatic play—a joint imaginative play between a teacher and a child, where the teacher makes inputs based on their experience and the child contributes their imagination and creativity. Both practices employ dramatic techniques as a tool of self-reflection about the student's place within the world and simultaneously as a medium for development and growth (Davis et al. in Davis et al., 2014).

The examples from educational drama evidence one dimension of the possible applications of Vygotsky's aesthetics in the practice and theory of applied theatre. Another such dimension concerns the study of the impact of the theatrical events. As Vygotsky's theory integrates the study of the content, the form, and the recipient of the performance—or in applied theatre's case, the intervention—it lends itself to the theories of poetics of applied theatre (Prentki in Prentki & Preston, 2009). What is more, by providing psychological contextualisation for the above notions, Vygotsky's work can broaden and provide depth to these theories, as well as to any theoretical approach to impact studies. In this manner, Vygotsky's aesthetics could help respond to Sruti Bala's request for a reconsideration of the assessment criteria regarding impact "in order to be able to pay attention to subtle, ambiguous and delicate indicators, which may not make sense in a cost-and-benefit or utilitarian terms" (Bala in Bleeker et al., 2019).

The concern around the effect of theatre on the individual, the collective, and the society as a whole is, of course, a rather wide-ranging discussion. It has been broadly embraced by theatre practitioners in the last century, who shared the goal of using their art in order to stimulate emotional, intellectual, or ideological transformation in the audience's minds. Following Shklovsky's works, in Russia, Bertolt Brecht, and later on Erwin Piscator, developed their theories on the emotional dissociation as a perceptual attitude for the audience, and the practice of what was named epic theatre, which aimed at productions that would promote social change by provoking critical thought on crucial social issues for both the actors and the audience. The same concerns on the social function of theatre drove Alfred Jarry to develop his revolutionary writing style, which affected artistic movements such as Dadaism and Futurism. They also lead Antonin Artaud to the creation of his theatre of cruelty, a theatrical style that would attack and offend not only the traditional standards but also its very own audience.

The common ground among these diverse practices was a desire to disrupt the audience's expectations regarding the theatrical experience in order to bring them to a fertile state of re-examination and re-structuring of their pre-existing states

of mind. Yet, many of these practices—not unlike works of Meyerhold and Eisenstein—attempted to control the process of re-structuring of the audience’s mind, directing it towards a specific, ideological or political revelation. In this respect, theatre was still seen as a project of enlightenment and cultural education. Nowadays, as Rancière (2011) has argued, the paradigm that placed the theatre-maker in the position of an educator and viewed the audience as a passive recipient has shifted. Theatre’s mechanism of affecting change, while still based on the disruption of expectations, is now aimed at the emotional-psychological level, as opposed to the ideological.

Hans-Thies Lehmann has termed this concept *aesthetics of risk* and has described it as “a practice in and with signifying material, which does not create orders of power but introduces chaos and novelty into the ordered, ordering perception” (Lehmann, 2006, p. 179). Quoting Lessing and Brecht, Lehmann argues that theatre introduces disorder to provide a type of emotional training for its audience, and argues that the theatrical experience acts as a form of preparation for emotional endurance in life and as a vehicle for the development of feelings (Lehmann, 2006). Discussing tragedy in the contemporary world, in particular, Lehmann stipulates that theatre is able to provide a “cure” from the shared psychological difficulties caused by the sociocultural circumstances of our epoch (Lehmann, 2016). Though there is a considerable divergence between Lehmann’s focus on the performance and Vygotsky’s text-based perspective, the two theorists appear to agree on the fundamental psychological effect and the social function of tragedy. For both theorists, it is a force that upsets the emotional homeostasis of the individuals in order to address the underlying crisis brought by the psychological social condition of our lives, thus, facilitating a reorganisation of the mind on the individual and the social level alike.

According to Lehmann, to achieve this distinct, yet complex, function, theatre places its audience in a state of self-reflection: “Tragic experience is not simply a matter of reflection; it is also a *pause* in reflection – it is sensory, ‘blind’ (so to speak), and affect-laden all at once; otherwise, it amounts to nothing at all” (Lehmann, 2016, p. 10). This concept was also described by John Lutterbie in his analysis of Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* and Rancière’s term of emancipation under the lens of the cognitive sciences and features in many contemporary discussions. Maaïke Bleeker adopts the term *liminality* from the anthropologist Victor Turner to describe the experience of the theatrical audience which is characterised by a threshold between the reality of the perception and the unreal, imaginative world of the performance. The extended existence within this threshold, according to

Bleeker, has a transformative effect over the audience, which allows them to return to their real life with a fresh perspective (Bleeker et al., 2019). What Bleeker, Lutterbie, and Lehmann describe is a dialectic form of theatrical reception that closely mirrors Vygotsky's stance. That is a holistic view of the theatrical reception that takes place in a middle ground between the Aristotelian (or Freudian) identification and Shklovsky's (or Brecht's) distancing effect and surpasses both views, as it dictates an intimate—thus strong—involvement with the material without incapacitating the critical mental mechanisms. What is more, all theorists agree that the synthesis of these two lines of reception, as Vygotsky stipulated, have a profound, transformative effect both over the performance's material and over the audience members.

This effect is rooted in the simultaneous similarity and difference of the theatrical action to life, which leads the audience members to immerse themselves in the experience while retaining an awareness of the artificiality of the experienced events. The characteristic of theatre that supports the distinction between reality and the performance is often discussed as theatricality. Yet, as Adrian Kear points out, the significance of theatre lies not in its ability to separate itself from life, but in its practice of blurring the lines between reality and theatricality bringing both dimensions in a “mode of their co-appearance and interrelation - which ‘redefines’ the boundaries between subject and object, self and other, presence and representation” (Kear in Bleeker et al., 2019). It is this aspect of theatricality that lies in the heart of contemporary theatre (Lehmann, 2016) and has redefined the relationship of the artist and the audience member, as well as the function of theatre within the society.

The above developments in the theoretical outlook towards theatre have a profound effect on the practical philosophy that directs theatrical creation, much of which is concentrated in the work of a dramaturg. This has brought a significant shift from the traditional ‘one-way’ dramaturgy, which focuses on the analysis of the text and the semantic interpretation of the narrative, to a dramaturgy that is preoccupied with the effect of the total of production on the spectator, as well as the elements that comprise it (Zvada in Romanska, 2014). This alternative approach to dramaturgy—which Milan Zvada calls ‘interactive’ and Peter Boenisch ‘relational’ dramaturgy—gives significance to the process of theatrical reception, as well as the structural elements of the performance that regulate it. It sees the theatrical event as a complex interactive process with a particular effect and not as a representation of meaning (Lawrence in Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014). Under this approach, the dramaturg focuses their work on the understanding of the sense generated by the

performance, which “frames the audience’s encounter with the dramatic text and establishes coordinates for our experience of the situation of watching theatre” (Boenisch in Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014, p. 202). All this coincides substantially with Vygotsky’s aesthetic theory, which, though written under very different artistic and cultural premises, could be adapted to enter the contemporary discourse in theatricalisation and postdramatic theatre.

Indeed, the above discussions concerning the shifts in our understanding of the nature and function of theatre, today, demonstrate the relevance of Vygotsky’s beliefs regarding theatre’s psychological function and the significance of theatricalisation, as a mechanism to facilitate psychological growth for its audience. What is more, the aforementioned explorations can become a fertile ground for the practical application of Vygotsky’s aesthetics. This is due to the fact that Vygotsky’s theory regarding the structural nature and psychological function of an artwork may provide the contemporary dramaturg with a tool for the analysis and interpretation of the structural characteristics of the performance’s text, in relation to their effect on the spectator. In all cases, Vygotsky’s aesthetics, as it has been defined and appreciated in this thesis, has a true potential to meet the interest of the contemporary theatre scholar, dramaturg, and theatre practitioner and I hope to see his perspective discussed among those fields soon.

Afterword

The multifaceted crisis associated with the Covid-19 pandemic that began a few months before the submission of this thesis reveals an additional dimension of the topics discussed in it: the relevance of Vygotsky's aesthetic psychology to today's transition into a new social normalcy. Indeed, this thesis has highlighted Vygotsky's belief that art responds to the internal psychological needs that arise from any type of crisis and acts as a highly effective cultural mediator in the processes of personal and social psychological growth. What is more, it has stressed Vygotsky's view that art may serve as a means for a society to work out its most problematic and challenging aspects of mental life, thus, facilitating a holistic sociocultural development towards an unknown future. In today's world, where the public is asked to adapt to new—physically distanced—ways of navigating life, where artists of all kinds are faced with the task of reinventing their artforms, and the art critics seek to adjust their criteria of appreciation, Vygotsky's beliefs give depth and urgency to the question of art's role in today's society.

Indeed, in these times when the global attention is fixed on politics, the medical science, and the economy, causing the culture and the arts to fall behind, this thesis may act as a reminder for the indispensable role of art in times of great socio-historical changes. Focusing on Vygotsky's views, combined with the artistic upheaval of the Russian Avant-garde, the arguments presented here have evidenced art's capacity to embody and reveal the deepest essence of a crisis and —on a psychological level—help society overcome it. Read under the light of the current historical developments, these same arguments may illustrate the importance of the nascent art, emerging from the quarantined houses of the artists, and offer the critics new parameters for artistic appreciation.

Therefore, it is my hope that the research presented here may inspire the contemporary artists, critics, and scholars to view the emerging art as a place where the social individuals can process the psychological toil caused by the new, unknown, and anxiety provoking circumstances of life and appreciate the artistic activity of today as an aid for the transition of the whole human society to a new type of normalcy. It is also my aspiration that this thesis joins a much larger movement of reexamination of the function of art in times of social crisis, supporting the conviction that the art that is born out of a social psychological crisis may not only portray it but also help overcome it.

Bibliography

- Akimov, N. (1978). O Postanovke *Gamleta* v Teatre Im. Vahtangova. *Teatral'noe nasledie*, 2, 119-154. <https://oleg-devyatkin.livejournal.com/84477.html>
- Alekseev, M., & Institut Russkoj Literatiry. (1965). *Shekspir i Russkaya Kul'tura*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Artinian, A. (2013). *Soviet Marxism Reconsidered: Dialectical Method in the Thought of Lev Vygotsky*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Assay, M. (2015). Akimov and Shostakovich's *Hamlet*: A Soviet 'Shakesperiment'. *Actes Des Congrès De La Société Française Shakespeare*, (33). doi: 10.4000/shakespeare.3329
- Assay, M. (2016). *Hamlet in the Stalin Era and Beyond: Stage and Score*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses - UK & Ireland.
- Assay, M. (2017). What Did Hamlet (Not) Do to Offend Stalin?. *Actes Des Congrès De La Société Française Shakespeare*, 35. doi: 10.4000/shakespeare.3840
- Axline, K., & Symons, J.M. (2001). "Through a Glass Darkly": *The Ghosts of Hamlet on the 20c Russian Stage*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Bachelis, T. (1983). *Shekspir i Kre ȓ*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (2014). Bakhtin on Shakespeare: Excerpt from "Additions and Changes to 'Rabelais'" (Sandler, S., Trans.). *PMLA*, 129(3), 522-537.
- Bakshy, A. (1916). *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage: And Other Essays*, London: C. Palmer & Hayward.
- Bartlett, R. (1995). *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayanova L.F. (2013). Vygotsky's Hamlet: The dialectic Method and Personality Psychology. *Psychology in Russia: State of Art*, 6(1), 35-42.
- Beskin, M. (1932, June 16). Gamlet spisannyj so schyota. *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, p. 4. <https://dlib-eastview-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/browse/doc/27464557>
- Bibliography of the Writings of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. (1999). *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 37(5), 79-101. doi: 10.2753/rpo1061-0405370579
- Bleeker, M., Kear, A., Kelleher, J., & Roms, H. (2019). *Thinking through theatre and performance*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Boer, R. (2014). Religion and Socialism: A. V. Lunacharsky and the God-Builders. *Political Theology*, 15(2), 188-209.

- Bowlit, J. (2016). The Theatre of the Russian Avant-garde. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 36(3), 209-218.
- Braun, E. (1979). *The Theatre of Meyerhold*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bulgakova, O. (2007). Teoriya kak Utopicheskogo Proekta. <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2007/6/teoriya-kak-utopicheskij-proekt.html>
- Burian, J. (2007). Designing *Hamlet* with Screens and Panels. *Theatre Design & Technology*, 43(2), 16-26.
- Butcher, J. (2014). *Recovering and Reconstructing Leftist Shakespeares*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1525824285?accountid=10673>
- Bystrov, V., & Kamnev, V. (2019). Vulgar Sociologism: The History of the Concept. *Sociologicheskoe Obozrenie*, 18(3), 286–308. <https://doi.org/10.17323/1728-192x-2019-3-286-308>
- Carr, L., Iacoboni, M., Dubeau, M., Mazziotta, J., & Lenzi, G. (2003), Neural Mechanisms of Empathy in Humans: A Relay from Neural Systems for Imitation to Limbic Areas, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 9, p. 5497.
- Chances, E. (2001). The Super uous Man in Russian Literature. In N. Cornwell, *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature* (pp. 111-122). Routledge.
- Chemers, M. M. (2010). *Ghost light : An introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Chernysheva, D. (2017). Transplacing Ophelia: Woman and Nation in the Earliest Russian Hamlets. *Comparative Drama*, 51(2), 188-214.
- Cimbal, C. (1938, June 4). Muzhestvo Gamleta; O Spektakle Teatra pod ruk. S. Eh. Radlova. *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, p.3. <https://dlib-eastview-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/browse/doc/39335333>
- Clark, K. (1985). *The Soviet Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clark, K. (1995). *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.
- Clayton, J. (1993). *Pierrot in Petrograd: The Commedia dell' Arte/Balagan in Twentieth-Century Russian Theatre and Drama*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Cole, M., Daniels, H., & Wertsch, J. (2007). *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky* (Cambridge Companions Complete Collection). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cornejo, C. (2015). Searching for the Microcosm: A Glimpse into the Roots of Vygotsky's Holism. *History of the Human Sciences*, 28(2), 72-92.

- Dafermos, M. (2016). Critical Reflection on the Reception of Vygotsky's Theory in the International Academic Communities. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 12(3), 27-46. doi: 10.17759/chp.2016120303
- Damasio, A. (2000). *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. New York: Harcourt.
- Daniels, H. (1996). *An Introduction to Vygotsky*. London: Routledge.
- Daniels, H. (2008). *Vygotsky and Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Daniels, H., & Downes, E. (2018). A Vygotskian Argument for Teaching Drama in Secondary Schools. In Burgoyne, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Creativity in Theatre* (pp. 153-168). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Davis, S. (2015). Perezhivanie and the Experience of Drama, Metaxis and Meaning Making. *Education*, 39(1), 63-75.
- Davis, S., Ferholt, B., Clemson, H. Grainger, J., Satu-Mari, & Marjanovic-Shane, A. (2014). *Dramatic Interactions in Education*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Dawson, K. (2018). Performative Embodiment as Learning Catalyst: Exploring the Use of Drama/Theatre Practices in an Arts Integration Course for Non-Majors. In Burgoyne, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Creativity in Theatre* (pp. 67-87). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Deranty, J. (2010). *Jacques Rancie re Key Concepts* Durham: Acumen.
- Doise, W., & Mugny, G. (1981). *The Social Development of Intelligence*. Paris: Intereditions.
- Duggan, M., & Grainger, R. (1997). *Imagination, Identification and Catharsis in Theatre and Therapy*. London: Kingsley.
- Dzhebrailov, A., & Porter, C. (1991). The King is Dead. Long Live the King! Post-Revolutionary and Stalinist Shakespeare. *History Workshop*, 0(32), 1.
- Ehfros, N. (1911, December 24). "Gamlet" v Xudozhestvennom Teatre. *Rech*.
- Eisenstein, S. (2013). The Psychology of Art. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 51(5-6), 192-199.
- Eisenstein, S. (1974). Montage of Attractions: For "Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman". (Gerould, D., Trans.). *The Drama Review* 18(1), 77-85. doi:10.2307/1144865
- Eisenstein, S. (1949). *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. (Leyda, J., Trans.). New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Erlich, V. (2012). *Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1515/9783110873375>

- Etkind, A. (1994). How Psychoanalysis Was Received in Russia, 1906–1936. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 39(2), 191-202.
- Evreinov, N. (1973). *Life as Theater*. (Collins, C., Trans). Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Farmer, F. (1991). *Dialogic Imitation: Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and the Internalization of Voice*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Feigenberg, I. (2000). *Ot Gomelya do Moskvy: Nachalo Tvorcheskogo Puti L'va Vygotskogo, Iz Vospominanii Semena Dobkina, Rannie stat'i L.S. Vygotskogo*. Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Felman, S. (1982). *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Fink, H. (1999). *Bergson and Russian Modernism*. Northwestern University.
- Fitzpatrick, S. (2002). *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Fleer, M., González R. F., & Veresov, N. (2017). *Perezhivanie, Emotions and Subjectivity* (Vol. 1, Perspectives in cultural-historical research). Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited.
- Franke, W. (2015). Involved Knowing: On the Poetic Epistemology of the Humanities. *Humanities*, 4(4). doi: 10.3390/h4040600
- Freebody, Balfour, M., Finneran, M., & Anderson, M. (2018). *Applied Theatre: Understanding Change edited by Kelly Freebody, Michael Balfour, Michael Finneran, Michael Anderson*. (1st ed. 2018.). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78178-5>
- Freedberg, D., & Gallese, V. (2007). Opinion: Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11, pp. 197-203, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, viewed 18 February 2015.
- Freud, S. (1897). Letter 712 Extracts from the Fliess Papers. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (Vol. I: 1886-1899: Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts pp. 263-266). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1900). The Interpretation of Dreams. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. IV: 1900: The Interpretation of Dreams: First Part, pp. ix-627). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1905a). Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund*

- Freud (Vol. VIII: 1905: Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, pp. 1-247). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1905b). On Psychotherapy (1905 [1904]). In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. VII: 1901-1905: A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works, pp. 255-268). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1906). Psychopathic Characters on the Stage (1942 [1905 or 1906]). In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. VII: 1901-1905: A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works, pp. 303-310). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1910). Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XI: 1910: Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works, pp. 57-138). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1913). The Theme of the Three Caskets. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XII: 1911-1913: The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works, pp. 289-302). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1914). The Moses of Michelangelo. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XIII: 1913-1914: Totem and Taboo and Other Works, pp. 209-238). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1919). The 'Uncanny'. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XVII: 1917-1919: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works, pp. 217-256). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1927). Humour. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XXI: 1927-1931: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, pp. 159-166). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1928). Dostoevsky and Parricide. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XXI: 1927-1931: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, pp. 173-194). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S. (1930). Civilization and its Discontents. In Strachey, J., & Freud, A. (Eds.). (1958). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XXI: 1927-1931: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, pp. 57-146). Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Freud, S., Person, E., Fonagy, P., & Figueira, S. (2013). *On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"*. London: Karnac in association with the International Psychoanalytical Association.
- Fróis, J. P. (2020). Lev S. Vygotsky on the Visual Arts Followed by a Translation of the Essay:

- The Graphic Art of Alexandr Bykhovsky. *Culture & Psychology*, 26(3), 454-468.
- Geldern, J. (1998). Putting the Masses in Mass Culture: Bolshevik Festivals, 1918–1920. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 31, 123-144. doi:10.1111/j.0022-3840.1998.3104_123.x
- Gibian, G. (1952). Shakespeare in Soviet Russia. *The Russian Review*, 11(1), 24-34.
- Gladkov, A., & Law, A. (1997). *Meyerhold Speaks: Meyerhold Rehearses* (Russian Theatre Archive; v. 11). Amsterdam: Harwood Academic.
- Goldman, H. (1975). *Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Work of Boris Pasternak and Other Modern Russian Poets (Aleksandr Blok, Anna Axmatova and Marina Cvetaeva)*. Indiana: Bloomington, Ind.
- Golub, S. (1994). *The Recurrence of Fate: Theatre & Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- González Rey, F. (2016). Vygotsky's Concept of Perekhivanie in *The Psychology of Art* and at the Final Moment of His Work: Advancing His Legacy. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 23(4), 305-314.
- Gonza lez Rey, F. L. (2018). Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*: A Foundational and Still Unexplored Text. *Estudos de Psicologia* (Campinas), 35(4), 339-350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-02752018000400002>
- Gordon, M. (1975). Radlov's Theatre of Popular Comedy. *The Drama Review*, 19(4), 113–116. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145025>
- Gordon, R. (1995). Sympathy, Simulation, and the Impartial Spectator, *Ethics*, 4, 727.
- Gorman. (2018). Russian Formalism. In Richter, D. (Ed.). (2018). *A Companion to Literary Theory* (pp. 36–47). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch3>
- Grady, H. (1991). *The Modernist Shakespeare: Critical Texts in a Material World*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Habron, J., & Van Der Merwe, L. (2017). A Conceptual Study of Spirituality in Selected Writings of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. *International Journal of Music Education*, 35(2), 175-188.
- Harris, M. (1979). *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. New York: Random House.
- Hartnoll, P. (1968). *A Concise History of the Theatre. (World of art library)*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Hirsch, E. (1967). *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Holland, P. (2000). 'More a Russian than a Dane': The Usefulness of *Hamlet* in Russia. In S. Chew & A. Stead (Eds.). (2000). *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics* (pp. 315-338). Liverpool University Press.

- Holzman, L. (2014). Practicing Method: Social Therapy as Practical–Critical Psychology. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 12(3), 176-184.
- Irons, D. (1895). Discussion: Recent Developments in Theory of Emotion. *Psychological Review* 2(3), 279-284.
- Irons, D. (1897a). The Nature of Emotion. *The Philosophical Review*, 6(3), 242-256. doi:10.2307/2175881.-
- Irons, D. (1897b). The Nature of Emotion II. *The Philosophical Review*, 6(5), 471-496. doi:10.2307/2175804.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ivanov, V. (1904). *Ehllinskaya Religiya Stradayushhego Boga*. Internet Archive: http://www.v-ivanov.it/prizhiznennye_izdaniya/ellinskaya_religiya_stradayuschego_boga
- Ivanov, V. (2013). The Grundproblem in the Theory of Art. (Shabad, S., Trans). *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 51(5-6), 179-191.
- Jaques-Dalcroze, E. (1913). *The Eurhythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze*. Small, Maynard and Company.
- Jestrovic, S. (2002). Theatricality as Estrangement of Art and Life in the Russian Avant-garde. *Substance*, 31(2-3), 42-56. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1353/sub.2002.0031>
- Jones, E. (1910). The Oedipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 21(1), 72-113.
- Jones, E. (1948). The Death of Hamlet's Father. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 29, 174.
- Jovanovi , G. (2015). Vygotsky in His, Our and Future Times. *History of the Human Sciences*, 28(2), 3-7.
- Kachurin, P. (2013). *Making Modernism Soviet: The Russian Avant-Garde in the Early Soviet Era, 1918-1928*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Kastler, L. (2017). Ehmocii v Sovremennom Teatral'nom Diskurse Cherez Prizmu Rabot Vygotskogo o Psixologii Iskusstva. In *Chelovek v Mire Neopredelyonnosti; Metodologiya Kul'turno-Istoricheskogo Poznaniya; Sbornik statei uchastnikov Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferenci*. (pp. 230-234). Moscow: Federal'nyj institut razvitiya obrazovaniya.
- Kellogg, D. (2011). Which is (More) Original, and Does Either Version Really Matter? (A comment on A. Yasnitsky's "The Vygotsky That We (Do Not) Know: Vygotsky's Main Works and the Chronology of their Composition"). *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 4. <http://www.psyanima.su/journal/2011/4/2011n4a2/2011n4a2.pdf>

- Kemp, R. (2012). *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Kemp, R., & McConachie, B. (2018). *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science*. Boca Raton, FL: Routledge.
- Khrenov, N., & Vserossijskoe Teatral'noe Obshestvo. Sovet i Kabinet Organizacii, Ekonomiki i Sociologii Teatra. (1978). *Sociologicheskie Issledovaniya Teatral'noj Zhizni: Sbornik Statej*. Moskva: VTO.
- Kirillov, A., & Chamberlain, F. (2013) Introduction to 'Rehearsal Protocols for Hamlet by William Shakespeare', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 4(2), 237-242. doi: 10.1080/19443927.2013.816082
- Kleberg, L., & Nilsson, N. (1984). *Theater and Literature in Russia 1900-1930: A Collection of Essays* (Stockholm studies in Russian literature). Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell international.
- Kleberg, L., & Semenenko, A. (2012). *Aksenov and the Environs: Aksenov i Okrestnosti* (1st ed., Södertörn Academic Studies). Huddinge: Södertörns högskola.
- Kolocotroni, V., Goldman, J., & Taxidou, O. (1998). *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kotik-Friedgut, B. (2012). Germinated Seeds: The Development of Vygotsky's Psychology of Art in His Early Journalistic Publications (1916-1923). *Education Circles*, (nov), 133-144. <http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Paper/earlyLSVreviews.pdf>>
- Kotik-Friedgut, B., & Friedgut, T. (2008). A Man of His Country and His time: Jewish Influences on Lev Semionovich Vygotsky's World View. *History of Psychology*, 11(1), 15-39. doi: 10.1037/1093-4510.11.1.15
- Kozulin, A. (1990). *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Kozulin, A. (1991). Lev Vygotsky and Contemporary Social Thought - Introduction. *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 42(2), 71-72.
- Larrain, A., & Haye, A. (2020). The Dialogical and Political Nature of Emotions: A Reading of Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*. *Theory & Psychology*, 30(6), 800–812.
- Law, A. (1977). "Hamlet" at the Vakhtangov. *The Drama Review*, 21(4), 100. doi: 10.2307/1145142
- Law, A. (1983). Chekhov's Russian "Hamlet" (1924). *The Drama Review*, 27(3), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145459>
- Law, A., & Gordon, M. (2012). *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia*. Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland & Company.
- Le Bon, G. (2001). *The Crowd*. Kitchener: Batoche Books.

- Leach, R. (1989). *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Directors in perspective). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, R. (2003). *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (Stage and Screen Studies; v. 3). Oxford: P. Lang.
- Leach, R. (2018). *Russian Futurist Theatre: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh Critical Studies in Modernism, Drama and Performance). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- LeDoux, J. (1999). *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. London: Phoenix.
- Lehmann, H. (2016). *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Lehmann, H. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. London: Routledge.
- Levenson, M. (2011). *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Second ed., Cambridge Companions Complete Collection). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levykh, M. (2008). *Personality, Emotions, and Behavioural Mastery in the Thought of Lev Vygotsky*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Lima, M. G. (1995) From Aesthetics to Psychology: Notes on Vygotsky's Psychology of Art. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 26(4), 410-424. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1995.26.4.05x1061u>
- Lindqvist, G. (2003). Vygotsky's Theory of Creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 15(2-3), 245-251.
- Litovskij, O. (1932, May 27). "Gamlet" ili "Bor'ba za Prestol". *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, p. 3. Retrieved from <https://dlib-eastview-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/browse/doc/38383027>
- Lunacharsky, A. (1908). Socializm i Iskusstvo. In "Teatr". *Kniga o Novom Teatre: Sbornik Statej*. (pp. 7-40). Shipovnik.
- Mal'cev, V. (2012). Teatr 1920-h Godov v Ocenke L.S.Vygotskogo, *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 3, 145-153. <http://psyanima.ru/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012n1a4.1.pdf>
- Malinowski, B., Thornton, R., Skalnik, P., & Krzyzanowski, L. (1993). *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marcuse, L. (1958). Freud's Aesthetics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 17(1), 1-21.
- Marques, P. (2012). L. S. Vygotsky's Reader's Critique. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 3, 113-143. <http://psyanima.ru/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012n3a5.3.pdf>
- Marques, P. (2018a). Introductory Note to "The King is Naked" by L. S. Vygotsky. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I*

Cheloveka "Dubna", 1, 112-114. <http://psyanima.ru/wp-content/uploads/issues/2013n1a5.2.pdf>

Marques, P. (2018b). "Young" Vygotsky: Unpublished Works About Art and the Role of Artistic Creation in Child Development. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 44, e183267. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/s1678-4634201844183267>

Marques, P. (2019). L.S. Vygotsky's Critique: Between Aesthetics, Publitsistika and Psychology. *Kul'turno-istoricheskaya Psixologiya*, 15(4), 25-34.

Marques, P. (2020). A Psychological Analysis of an Anti-Psychological Novel: Reading Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment with Vygotskian Spectacles. *Azyk I Tekst*, 7(1), 40-48.

Maziev, Y. (2011). *A Critique of Vygotskian Scholarship in Writing and Literacy Studies: The Role of Marxist Dialectics in the Discussions of Method*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

McConachie, B., & Hart, E. (2006). *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies; 4). London: Routledge.

Mead, G., & Morris, C. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Works of George Herbert Mead; v. 1). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Meineck, P. (2012). Combat Trauma and the Tragic Stage: "Restoration" by Cultural Catharsis. *Intertexts*, 16(1), 7-24.

Mejerxol'd, V., & Braun, E., & Pitches, J. (1998). *Meyerhold on Theatre* (Revised ed.). London: Methuen Drama.

Mesquita, G. (2012). Vygotsky and the Theories of Emotions: In Search of a Possible Dialogue. *Psicologia: Reflexão E Crítica*, 25(4), 809-816. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0102-79722012000400021>

Metlov, V. (2000). Dialectics in Contemporary Philosophy. *Nature, Society, and Thought*, 13(3), 369.

Métraux, A., & Jovanovi, G. (2015). Lev Vygotsky as Seen by Someone who Acted as a Go-Between Between Eastern and Western Europe. *History of The Human Sciences*, 28(2), 154-172.

Michelakis, P. (2010). Theater Festivals, Total Works of Art, and the Revival of Greek Tragedy on the Modern Stage. *Cultural Critique*, (74), 149.

Miller, M. (1998). *Freud and the Bolsheviks*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Milling, J., & Ley, G. (2001). *Modern Theories of Performance: From Stanislavski to Boal*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

- Minick, N. (1985). *L. S. Vygotsky and Soviet Activity Theory: New Perspectives on the Relationship Between Mind and Society*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Miringof, M. (1947). *Sovetskij Teatr i Sovremennost': Sbornik Materialov i Statej*. Moskva: Vserossijskoe obshchestvo.
- Murphy, A. (2011). "She Troubles Me Like a Passion": Shakespearean Echoes in Pushkin's Marina Mniszek. *Pushkin Review*, 14, 119.
- Nelson, C., & Grossberg, L. (1988). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Communications and Culture). Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.
- Newman, F., & Holzman, L. (1993). *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist* (Critical psychology). London: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. (1909). *The Birth of Tragedy, or, Hellenism and Pessimism* (Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844-1900. Works. English. 1909; v. 3). (Hausmann, W., Trans.). Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis.
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy). (Del Caro, A., Trans.). Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Olenina, A. (2012). *Psychomotor Aesthetics: Conceptions of Gesture and Affect in Russian and American Modernity, 1910's–1920's*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Osanai, K. (1968). Gordon Craig's Production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. (Tsubaki, A., Trans.). *Educational Theatre Journal*, 20(4), 586.
- Paraskeva, A. (2013). Beckett, Biomechanics and Eisenstein's Reading of Kleist's Marionettes. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 22(2), 161-179.
- Pasternak, B. (1984). *Doctor Zhivago*. (Hayward, M., & Harari, M., Trans.). London: Fontana.
- Pettus, M. (2013). Staging *Hamlet*: The Ethical and Aesthetic Dimensions of Space in Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago". *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 57(4), 561-580.
- Prentki, T., & Preston, S. (2009). *The Applied Theatre Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Preobrazhenskii, N. (2006). Little-Known Aspects of the Russian Revolution of 1905. *Critique*, 34(3), 293-314.
- Rancière, J. (2013). *The Politics of Aesthetics*. (Rockhill, G., Trans.). London: Bloomsbury.
- Rancière, J. (2011). *The Emancipated Spectator*, (Elliot, G., Trans.). London: Verso.
- Rice, J. (1993). *Freud's Russia: National Identity in the Evolution of Psychoanalysis* (History of ideas series). New Brunswick; London: Transaction.

- Robbins, D. (2005). Generalized Holographic Visions of Language in Vygotsky, Luria, Pribram, Eisenstein, and Voloshhinov. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 2(1), pp. 25-39. doi: 10.1515/iprg.2005.2.1.25
- Romanska, M. (Ed.). (2014). *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Rosenthal, B. (1986). *Nietzsche in Russia*. Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenthal, B. (2010). *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowe, E. (1976). *Hamlet: A Window on Russia* (New York University Studies in Comparative Literature; 7). New York: New York University Press.
- Rubtsova, O.V., & Daniels, H. (2016). The Concept of Drama in Vygotsky's Theory: Application in Research. *Kul'turno-istoricheskaya Psixologiya*, 12(3), 189-207.
- Rudnitsky, K., & Milne, L. (1988). *Russian & Soviet Theatre: Tradition & Avant-garde*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Sayler, O. (1920). *The Russian Theatre Under the Revolution*. Little, Brown, & Company.
- Scofield, M. (1980). *The Ghosts of Hamlet: The Play and Modern Writers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sedakova, O. (2001). "Sejatel' Ochej": Slovo o L.S.Vygotskom Proza. *Ol'ga Sedakova*. <http://www.olgasedakova.com/Poetica/1170>
- Semenenko, A. (2007). *Hamlet the Sign*. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Senelick, L. (1981). Moscow and Monodrama: The Meaning of the Craig-Stanislavsky *Hamlet*. *Theatre Research International*, 6(2), 109-124.
- Senelick, L. (1981). *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology* (University of Texas Press Slavic series; no. 5). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Senelick, L. (1982). *Gordon Craig's Moscow Hamlet: A Reconstruction* (Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies; no. 4). London: Greenwood.
- Senelick, L. (2004). Stanislavsky's Second Thoughts on *The Seagull*. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 20(2), 127-137.
- Senelick, L. (2015). Brief Encounters: Michael Chekhov and Shakespeare. In M. Autant Mathieu & Y. Meerzon (Eds.). (2015). *The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov*. (1st ed., pp. 141-60). London: Routledge.
- Sergay, T. (2005). Blizhe k Suti, k Miru Bloka: The Mise-en-scène of Boris Pasternak's *Hamlet* and Pasternak's Blokian-Christological Ideal. *Russian Review*, 64(3), 401-421.

- Shakespeare in Russia. (1855). *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, 33(7), 56.
- Shklovskij, V. (1991). *Theory of Prose*. (Second print. with corr.). (Sher, B., Trans.). Dalkey Archive Press.
- Sirotkina, I., & Smith, R. (2017). *The Sixth Sense of the Avant-garde. Dance, Kinaesthesia and the Arts in Revolutionary Russia*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2009). The Culture of Vygotsky. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(1), 85-95. doi: 10.1598/rrq.44.1.4
- Smagorinsky, P. (2011). Vygotsky's Stage Theory: The Psychology of Art and the Actor Under the Direction of Perekhivanie. *Mind, Culture, And Activity*, 18(4), 319-341. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2010.518300>
- Smagorinsky, P., Hansen, M., & Fink, L. (2013). What Does Vygotsky Provide for the 21st-Century Language Arts Teacher? *Language Arts*, 90(3), 192-204.
- Smith, A. (2010). Nikolai Evreinov and Edith Craig as Mediums of Modernist Sensibility. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 26(3), 203-216. doi:10.1017/S0266464X10000412
- Smith, A. (2018). The Transgressive Capacity of the Comic: A Merry Death as an Embodiment of Nikolai Evreinov's Vision of Theatricality. *The Modern Language Review*, 113(3), 583-609.
- Smith, L., & Fernyhough, C. (2002). Lev Vygotsky: Critical Assessments / Response. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 306.
- Sobkin, V. (2016). L.S. Vygotsky and the Theater: Delineation of a Sociocultural Context. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 53(3), 1-92.
- Sobkin, V. (2017). Problematika Psihologii Iskusstva v Rabotah Vygotskogo. In *Ch lovek v Mire Neopredelonnosti; Metodologija Kul'turno-Istoricheskogo Poznaniya; Sbornik Statej Uchastnikov Mezhdunarodnoj Nauchno-Prakticheskoi Konferencii*. (pp. 168-200). Moscow: Federal'nyj Institut Razvitija Obrazovanija.
- Sobkin, V. (Ed.). (2015). *Lev Semenovich Vygotskij: Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij* (Vol 1. Dramaturgiya i Teatr). Moscow.
- Sobkin, V., & Mazanova, V. (2014). What Lev Vygotsky's Gomel Heather Spoke About: A Reconstruction of Socio-Cultural Context. *Voprosy Psikhologii*, (6), 89.
- Sobkin, V.S, & Mazanova, V. (2015). Commentary on the Paper by L.S. Vygotsky "Theatre and Revolution". *Kul'turno-istoricheskaya Psixologiya*, 11(1), 91-113.
- Stanislavski, C. (2013). *An Actor Prepares*. (Raynolds Hapgood, E., Trans.). London: Bloomsbury.
- Stanislavski, C. (2014a). *Building a Character*. (Raynolds Hapgood, E., Trans.). London: Bloomsbury.

- Stanislavski, C. (2014b). *Creating a Role*. (Raynolds Hapgood, E., Ed. & Trans.). London: Bloomsbury.
- Stanislavsky, K. (1968). *Stanislavski's Legacy: A Collection of Comments on a Variety of Aspects of an Actor's Art and Life* (Revised and expanded ed.). (Raynolds Hapgood, E., Trans.). New York: Theatre Arts Books.
- Stanislavsky, K., & Magarshack, D. (1950). *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Stanislavsky, K. (1945). *My Life in Art*. (Fourth edition). (Robbins, J. Trans.). London: Geoffrey Bles.
- Steinberg, J., & Wolff, D. (2005). *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (History of warfare; 29, 40). Leiden: Brill.
- Steinberg, Mark D. (2008). Melancholy and Modernity: Emotions and Social Life in Russia between the Revolutions. *Journal of Social History*, 41(4), 813-841.
- Stroeveva, M. (1973). *Rezhisserskie Iskaniya Stanislavskogo: 1898 – 1917*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Styan. (1980). *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*. (Vol. 2, Symbolism, Surrealism, and the Absurd). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sukhanova, E., & Gerould, Daniel. (2001). *An Anxiety for Influence: Shakespearean Themes and Images through the Prism of Russian Modernism* (poetry of the Early XX Century). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Symons, J. (1971). *Meyerhold's Theatre of the Grotesque: The Post-Revolutionary Productions, 1920-1932* (Books of the theatre series; no. 8). Coral Gables.: University of Miami Press.
- Tabak, M. (2012). *Dialectics of Human Nature in Marx's Philosophy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tapper, J. (2014). Modalities or Surfaces. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 26(1), 56-67.
- Taxidou, O. (1998). *The Mask: A Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig*. (Contemporary Theatre Studies; v. 30). Amsterdam: Harwood Academic.
- Taxidou, O. (2016). 'Do Not Call Me a Dancer' (Isadora Duncan, 1929). In Bradshaw, D., Marcus, L., & Roach, R. (2016). *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, and Modernity*. Oxford University Press.
- Taxidou, O. (2017). The Dancer and the Übermarionette: Isadora Duncan and Edward Gordon Craig. *Mime Journal*, 26(1), 6-16.
- Taylor, G., & Whyman, Rose. (2004). François Delsarte, Prince Sergei Volkonsky and Mikhail Chekhov. *Mime Journal*, 23, 96-111.
- Toassa, G. (2015a). Is There a "Vygotskian Materialism"? Ontological and Epistemological

- Concerns for a Contemporary Marxist Psychology (Part I). *Dubna Psychological Journal*, 1, 46-57.
- Toassa, G. (2015b). Is there a “Vygotskian Materialism”? Ontological and Epistemological Concerns for a Contemporary Marxist Psychology (Part II). *Dubna Psychological Journal*, 3, 66-80.
- Toassa, G., & de Oliveira, F. (2018). Vygotsky’s Anomalous Spinozism. *Mind, Culture, And Activity*, 25(4), 378-390. doi: 10.1080/10749039.2018.1533980
- Todd, W., & Stanford University. (1978). *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Tolstoy, L. (1963). *Chto Takoe iskusstvo?: What Is Art?* (Russian plain texts). Letchworth: Bradda Books.
- Tolstoy, L., & Courtney, William. (1906). Tolstoy on Shakespeare and the Drama. *Fortnightly Review*, May 1865-June 1934, 80(480), 963-983.
- Torda, T. (1980). Tairov’s “Princess Brambilla”: A Fantastic, Phantasmagoric “Capriccio” at the Moscow Kamerny Theatre. *Theatre Journal*, 32(4), 488-498. doi:10.2307/3207410
- Toropova, A. (2017). Probing the Heart and Mind of the Viewer: Scientific Studies of Film and Theater Spectators in the Soviet Union, 1917–1936. *Slavic Review*, 76(4), 931-958.
- Trencsényi, K., & Cochrane, B. (Eds.). (2014). *New dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Trotsky, L. (2005). *Literature and Revolution*. (Strunsky, R. Trans.). Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Turgenev, I. (1892). Hamlet and Don Quixote. *Poet Lore*, 4, 169.
- Van der Veer, R. (2012). Cultural-Historical Psychology: Contributions of Lev Vygotsky. In Valsiner, J. (Ed.). (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*. (pp. 58-68). Oxford University Press.
- Valsiner, J., & Van der Veer, R. (1988). On the Social Nature of Human Cognition: An Analysis of the Shared Intellectual Roots of George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 18(1), 117-136.
- Van der Veer, R. (2000). Editor's Introduction Criticizing Vygotsky. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 38(6), 3-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/rpo1061-040538063>
- Van der Veer, R. (2015). Vygotsky, the Theater Critic. *History of the Human Sciences*, 28(2), 103-110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0952695114559531>
- Vassilieva, Julia, & Zavershneva, Ekaterina. (2020). Vygotsky’s “Height Psychology”: Reenvisioning General Psychology in Dialogue With the Humanities and the Arts. *Review of General Psychology*, 24(1), 18-30.

- Van der Veer, R. (2014). *Lev Vygotsky*. Bloomsbury Library of Educational Thought.
- Van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (1991). *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (Eds) (1994). *The Vygotsky Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Volkonskij, S.M. (1913) *Vyrazitel'nyj Chelovek: Scenicheskoe Vospitanie Zhesta (po Del'sartu)*. Saint Petersburg: Apollon.
- Vygodskii, L. (2013). The Tsar is Naked. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 1. <http://www.psyanima.ru>.
- Vygodskij, L. (1927). Sovremennaja Psihologija i Iskusstvo. *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, 8, 5-8.
- Vygodskij, L. (1928). Sovremennaja Psihologija i Iskusstvo. *Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, 1, 5-7.
- Vygodskij, L. (1986). Tragedija o Gamlete, Prince Datskom, U. Shekspira. In *Psihologija Iskusstva* (pp. 336-491). Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Vygodskij, L. (2008). *Psihologija Iskusstva*. Moscow: Labirint.
- Vygodskij, L. (2011). Rannie Raboty L.S. Vygotskogo: Literaturovedcheskie Zametki i Teatral'nye Recenzii v Gazete *Nash Ponedel'nik* (Gomel'), 1922 g. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 4. <http://www.psyanima.ru>.
- Vygodskij, L. (2012a). Rannie raboty L.S. Vygotskogo: Literaturovedcheskie Zametki i Teatral'nye Recenzii v Gazete *Poleskaja pravda* (Gomel'), 1923 g. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 3. <http://www.psyanima.ru>.
- Vygodskij, L. (2012b). Rannie raboty L.S. Vygotskogo: Literaturovedcheskie Zametki i Teatral'nye Recenzii v Gazete *Nash ponedel'nik* (Gomel'), 1923 g. *Psihologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo Universiteta Prirody, Obshhestva I Cheloveka "Dubna"*, 1. <http://www.psyanima.ru>.
- Vygotsky, L. (1971). *The Psychology of Art*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1987a). Lecture 1. Perception and Its Development in Childhood. In Rieber, R., & Carton A. (Eds.). (1987). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 1, pp. 289-300). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1987b) Lecture 4. Emotions and Their Development in Childhood. In Rieber, R., & Carton, A. (Eds.). (1987). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 1, pp. 325-338). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1987c) Lecture 5. Imagination and Its Development in Childhood. In Rieber, R., & Carton A. (Eds.). (1987). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 1, pp. 339-350). New York: Plenum Press.

- Vygotsky, L. (1997). The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation. In Rieber, R., & Carton A. (Eds.). (1997). *The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology: A Methodological Investigation* (Vol. 3, pp. 233-243). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1999a). The Teaching About Emotions: Historical-Psychological Studies. In Rieber, R., & Carton A. (Eds.). (1999). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 6 pp. 71-144). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1999b). On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work. In Rieber, R., & Carton A. (Eds.). (1999). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 6 pp. 237-244). New York: Plenum Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1992). *Educational Psychology* (Silverman, R., Trans.). Florida: St. Lucie Press. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1926/educational-psychology/index.htm>
- Vygotsky, L. (1994). Imagination and Creativity of the Adolescent. In Van der Veer, R., & Valsiner, J. (Eds.). (1994). *The Vygotsky reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Vygotsky, L. (2011). Contemporary Psychology and Art: Toward a Debate. (Frois, J. P., Trans.). *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1, 107.
- Vygotsky, L. (2012). The Science of Psychology. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 50(4), 85-106.
- Vygotsky, L. (2015). Theatre and Revolution. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 11(1), 86-90. doi: 10.17759/chp.2015110110
- Waldock, A. (1973). *Hamlet: A Study in Critical Method*. (Photographic reproduction of Cambridge, 1931 ed.). New York: AMS Press.
- Wertsch, J. (1985). *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.
- West, D. (1999). Lev Vygotsky's Psychology of Art and Literature. *Changing English*, 6(1), 47-55.
- West, D. (2001). Psychologies of Art and Literature: A comparison of the work of I.A. Richards and L.S. Vygotsky, *Changing English*, 8(1), 17-27.
- Whyman, R. (2016). Explanations and Implications of 'Psychophysical' Acting. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 32(2), 157-168.
- Wood, E. (2002). The Trial of Lenin: Legitimizing the Revolution through Political Theater, 1920–23. *Russian Review*, 61(2), 235-248.
- Worrall, N. (1973). Meyerhold's Production of "The Magnificent Cuckold". *The Drama Review*, 17(1), 14-34. doi:10.2307/1144789
- Yasnitskiy, A. (2011). "Kogda b Vy Znali, iz Kakogo Sora...": k Opredeleniyu Sostava i Xronologii Sozdaniya Osnovnyx Rabot Vygotskogo. *Psixologicheskij Zhurnal Mezhdunarodnogo*

Universiteta Prirody, Obshchestva i Cheloveka "Dubna", 4. <http://www.psyanima.ru/journal/2011/4/2011n4a1/2011n4a1.pdf>

- Yasnitsky, A. (2010). Archival Revolution in Vygotskian Studies. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 48(1), 3-13.
- Yasnitsky, A. (2011). Vygotsky Circle as a Personal Network of Scholars: Restoring Connections Between People and Ideas. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 45(4), 422-457.
- Yasnitsky, A., & Van der Veer, R. (Eds.). (2016). *Revisionist Revolution in Vygotsky Studies: The State of the Art*. Routledge. Chicago.
- Yasnitsky, A. (2018). *Vygotsky: An Intellectual Biography*. Florence: Routledge.
- Zagorskij, M. (1932, June 9). "Chto mne Gekuba?" *Ehpoxa Gamleta i Teatr Im. Vaxtangova. Sovetskoe Iskusstvo*, p. 3. Retrieved from <https://dlib-eastview-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/browse/doc/38383289>
- Zavershneva, E. (2010a). The Vygotsky Family Archive (1912-1934). *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 48(1), 14-33. doi: 10.2753/rpo1061-0405480101
- Zavershneva, E. (2010b). The Vygotsky Family Archive: New Findings. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 48(1), 34-60. doi: 10.2753/rpo1061-0405480102
- Zavershneva, E. (2012). "The Key to Human Psychology". *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 50(4), 16-41.
- Ziada, H. (2011). *Gregarious Space, Uncertain Grounds, Undisciplined Bodies: The Soviet Avant-garde and the 'Crowd' Design Problem*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (879410256). <https://search.proquest.com/docview/879410256?accountid=10673>