

ART AS A SEMIOTIC DEVICE FOR THE SOCIALIZATION OF EMOTION

Darío PAEZ, Juanjo IGARTUA & José Antonio ADRIÁN

The Basque Country University

In this chapter we will globally analyse Vygotski's view of emotions, and more specifically, his view on the work of art as a semiotic device that allows a person's affective-cognitive development to take place. We will briefly state Vygotski's criticisms towards art as a form of transmitting knowledge and to the formalist and psychoanalytic conception of art's action. We will mention the semiotic mechanisms posited by Vygotski, and they will be analyzed in view of recent studies conducted on the affective and cognitive impact of the work of art. Our aim is to offer an integrated view of the work of art as a semiotic instrument, its mechanisms, the postulated effects and those that have an empirical basis. We will thus be able to envisage the current heuristic value of Vygotski's vision on the psychosocial effects of a work of art.

1. Vygotski's criticisms to James-Lange and Cannon's theories

Although Vygotski is best known as a theorist engaged in cognitive processes, he also wrote about emotions, especially during his early years when he wrote *The Psychology of Art* (1925), and his essay on Spinoza (Vygotski, 1972). In this last essay he presented a metatheoretical vision on the theories on emotion that were being studied at the time. He specifically criticizes James-Lange's theory for being too physiologist. This is also the reason for criticizing Cannon's talmic or centralist approach.

Vygotski's criticisms towards Cannon are still apt nowadays as the following remark extracted from Leventhal (1980) suggests: "(Cannon's) theory had little influence in psychological research (...) because Cannon failed to specify the mental structures involved in eliciting and processing the emotion..." (Leventhal, 1980: 146). As we can see Leventhal agrees with Vygotski's criticisms more than 45 years after the latter posited them.

With regard to the James-Lange theory, Vygotski's main criticisms are that it is similar to Descartes' dualist theory on emotions, specifically to the centripetal theory. Descartes thought that there were centrifuge emotions which originate in the "soul" (in other words in mental processes) and centripetal emotions which start in "bodily" changes. James-Lange's theory on emotions would correspond with the abovementioned centripetal theory. Both suggest that the emotion originates in bodily changes that the subject passively perceives from the sensory organ to the pineal gland, which is where the body interacts with the soul. For Vygotski both these approaches present a series of problems. First of all, if certain basic or primitive emotions are based solely on bodily changes these are not only innate but also immutable. Bodily processes are the same for a child and an adult, and in certain levels for a human being and a primate. For

Descartes, the inferior emotions (those which are bodily based) either decrease and weaken under the control of the will and the soul, or are maintained in their original state. In no way may they develop into superior, more refined emotions. But nevertheless, Vygotski has no doubts whatsoever that the basic emotions develop and change, and are more complex in an adult than in a child (Van der Veer, 1987; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

Secondly, an adult's more complex emotions in comparison with a child, or a human being's in comparison with an animal either do not exist or an ideal source is accepted (the soul). It is both Descartes and James who will explicitly postulate the existence of purely mental "aesthetic emotions" with no bodily sensation support (Leventhal, 1980). A purely bodily theory on emotions will indirectly lead us, or is associated with, a dualist mind-body approach that divides affectivity into higher emotions of the cultural type and lower emotions of the natural type. Vygotski rejects this dualist approach and under the influence of Spinoza, presents a monist and determinist theory on emotions.

2. Vygotski's approach towards emotions

Sadly that part of the manuscript in which Vygotski developed how Spinoza's ideas could contribute to a perspective that would surpass the dualism encountered in those theories on emotions found during the first decades of the XXth century has been lost or has disappeared. The text is incomplete (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Nevertheless, some of these elements may be found in his essay *The Psychology of Art* (1925/1972) and others may be inferred from Vygotski's complete works.

First of all, in *The Psychology of Art* Vygotski states that an emotion is a total reaction of our organism, in which central and peripheric elements simultaneously intervene. Although they are not necessarily convergent. This approach suggests that all emotions have representational and bodily (motor-expressive and physiological) elements. In fact when analyzing the aesthetic affective reactions (or in other terms, the "higher" reactions), Vygotski stressed the importance of the expressive-motor and respiratory dimensions that are generated in the emotional reactions, together with the ideational or representational dimension. Ten years later Vygotski will reaffirm his faith in this idea in his work on the theories of emotion (Van der Veer, 1987; Vygotski, 1972).

Secondly, Vygotski sees emotions as a quick evaluative reaction produced by one's organism to one's own behavior, as an internal organizer of one's behavior (Vygotski, 1925/1991, p. 55). Towards the end of his life Vygotski, influenced by Lewin, will view emotions and motivation as causal factors or instances of thought (Leontiev, 1991; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

A third element is Vygotski's rejection of both a mechanistic or a purely biological explanation of emotions. He also casts doubts on an hermeneutic, intentional or ideal explanation of complex emotions. Vygotski takes up Socrates and his *Fedon* when he criticizes a mechanistic view of the world. When one asks him/herself why is Socrates lying in his cell awaiting his execution, it would be inadequate to answer that

because his body is material and his muscles are relaxed; Socrates is where he is because the people of Athens have sentenced him and he thought that he should stand and face this sentence (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). The second type of causal explanation is a biological one. This explanation refers to the organism's adaptative capacity, to selection, to the organism's functions, etc. This type of reasoning would have a clearly Darwinist shade that Vygotski uses to explain the lower or natural psychological processes. Vygotski rejects a third possibility: that of replacing a causal explanation for a hermeneutic (non causal) explanation of the sense and cultural meaning of an affective phenomenon, "free" of physical and biological links or causes. Vygotski's alternative is a historical-cultural causal explanation of complex emotions which integrates and surpasses lower emotions.

3. Socio-cultural theory and emotions

If we apply Vygotski's emergent interactionist approach to the realm of affectivity it would stress that in emotion's ontogenesis there is a convergence and fusion of a natural-biological line and a socio-cultural one. Both lines converge and are mixed from the first phases of the ontogenesis. More complex systems will emerge on the basis of the innate systems, of social interaction and of the emergence of the symbolic capacity. These systems will be marked by social history. The explanatory principles of these psychological processes or systems may be derived from those other biological and socio-cultural explanatory principles, but cannot be isolatedly reduced to them (Wertsch, 1985). Emotions will develop from innate systems and processes that may be biologically explained. But from the start the "social" will intermingle with the "natural". The development of complex emotional processes on the basis of the innate and of socialization may not be explained only by social or natural factors. A "social history" will develop surrounding a strong nucleus of "natural history", which has a hereditary origin, and is an association between certain stimula and physiological reactions. This social history will model the perception of emotional symptoms, their expression, the open emotional behavior, verbalization and the use of linguistic labels on these emotional experiences. It will even influence the central experience of the emotion, although always on the basis of innate associations between certain stimula and reactions. The frequency and intensity of these stimula are at the same time determined by the social structure, and their evaluation depends on the dominant ideological norms. These natural and socio-cultural dimensions are integrated in some theories on emotions such as the motor-procedural, although there is a lack of empirical researches to confirm their development and organization.

Secondly, from a Vygotskian perspective we may apply to emotions the difference between lower and higher psychological processes. For example, in theory we have a type of natural affective response of fear-flight and of anger-struggle which comprise our basic emotional system. These reactions would be involuntary, automatic, orientated towards the subject's adaptation to the environment and do not use signs. Subsequently, in our evolution as a species, we have endowed ourselves with

more complex emotional reactions or responses such as the anger and fear reactions which use external signs (such as weapons, sticks, sirens, etc.) and also internal ones (i.e. normative evaluations of the emotional causes and reactions, self-control scripts and internalized forms of coping such as for example praying to the Gods; reject, repress or minimize a situation, etc.). The gradual acquisition of self-control resources and of the emotional management of fear and anger in order to retain and regulate the "natural" affective stimulus-response relationship will complicate and socialize the emotional life.

Vygotski's idea stressing that the higher processes are retarded reactions mediated by psychological instruments of a symbolic nature which allow us to regulate social conduct, may be applied to the emotions. A first aspect would be to check how cognitive development and language interact with social knowledge and the affective experience. There is a whole line of thought that tries to relate cognitive development with emotional life (Harris, 1989). A second aspect, which is the main interest of this chapter, was explored by Vygotski in his *Psychology of the Art*, and is devoted to confirming how symbolic instruments such as the works of art, induce emotions, retain them and provoke the complexity of both thought and affective life.

Vygotski stresses the idea that the symbolic instruments play a central role in the development of the psychological processes. In this case, art would be to feeling what calculus, language, etc. are to thought. In other words, the narrative work of art (child stories, adult's novels and short stories, theater, films, T.V. series, etc.) is the "prosthesis" or external instrument which society lends the individual so that s/he may develop their higher emotions. But we should underline the fact that the social instrument *par excellence*, including that of emotions, is language.

Finally, from a Vygotskian perspective we may see the development of emotions as the transformation of the social into individual, as the internalization of interaction patterns in psychological processes. This last point refers to the fact of how art is an important social instrument of the emotions. It somewhat posits this following idea: when a social knowledge kept in the form of a scenario is re-lived by the spectator of a work of art it will transmit the person the experience of historical and other people's traditions. On the other hand, the relationships with other people, by means of a symbolic instrument such as language, will also contribute to emotional socialization.

4. Vygotski's psychology of art

Vygotski's text on the *Psychology of Art* was written between 1916 and 1924. He presented it as his doctoral dissertation in the Psychology Institute of Moscow in 1925 (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). This text was based on his previous work in the field of literary criticism, as an art essayist, and on an extensive manuscript on the meaning of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The *Psychology of Art* is a text written during Vygotski's youth, before writing his best known works such as *Thought and Language* or *The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. It was not published during his lifetime although he had already signed a

contract with a publisher. This fact suggests that the reason the book was not published was not that the author found it to be an unfinished and unsatisfactory text, but in fact was really due to the many "unorthodox" quotes in his book in a context of increasing Stalinization in the USSR. Both marxists who opposed Stalin such as Trotsky, and those who were in exile such as Bunin were amply cited in the text (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Years later an abridged version was first published in Russian in 1965, and a complete version in 1968 (Kozulin, 1990; Wertsch, 1988; Leontiev, 1972). This last version was translated into English in 1971. It is a text which has not enjoyed a wide circulation, and with a null impact on the aesthetic science (Kozulin, 1990). For example in Morawski's (a marxist author who specializes in aesthetics) book (1977), Vygotski is only briefly mentioned and it is in a context that assimilates him to other contemporary semiotic authors.

In its complete version *The Psychology of Art* consists of four parts. The first part is composed of only one chapter ("The psychological problem of Art") in which the author meta-theoretically revises different approaches to the psychology of art. The second part criticizes the concept of art as another form of social knowledge with an educational function in the same way as we see science or moral (chapter 2). His criticism is aimed towards art seen only as a formal procedure which inspires emotions (chapter 3), finally casting doubts on the arbitrary interpretative nature of the psychoanalytic approach towards art, although accepting the importance of the unconscious processes. The third part approaches the importance of the analysis of the aesthetic reaction and tries to exemplify how the induction of opposite emotions by means of the contradiction between the "form" and the "content" of art takes place in fable (chapters 5 and 6), short stories (chapter 7) and theatrical tragedy (using *Hamlet* as a paradigm). The fourth part is the richest in implications for a psychological-social theory of emotions and consists of presenting art as a source of emotional catharsis (chapter 9). In chapter 10 the author suggests that the central mechanism in the reception of the works of art (theater and novel) is the affective reminiscence detached from the spectator or reader. Chapter 11 presents art as the instrument or social technology of feeling *par excellence*, stating as its biological function the discharge of non used energy and as its social functions the channelling of tensions in given critical moments, and also the organization-reorganization of the affective life and preparing oneself for new action perspectives.

When Vygotski finished this book, he had already been studying for some time the physiological reaction towards the work of art from a reflexological but nevertheless holistic perspective. His own interest led him to study how a part of a physiological reaction transformed itself into another in which a complex response dominated. This led Vygotski to approach Kornilov's work, an author who coopted him to the Psychology Institute in Moscow. During these same years, Vygotski was enthusiastically, although critically, reading Freud's works. Marxism's influence was already important during this intellectual period, the same as Hegel's dialectical and historicist perspective, an influence which would continue during his whole life and is clearly found in his book (Kozulin, 1990; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). It is important to note that

following the historical periods posited by Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991), his historical-cultural approach to the psychological phenomena was only developed during the years 1928-1932, and his interest in education, development, the "Zone of Proximal Development" and the semiotic structure of conscience during the years 1932-1934. What we find in *The Psychology of Art* are some dispersed elements of his subsequent approach.

5. Art as a social instrument of feeling

Vygotski stressed that art was a social instrument of feeling. He took up different elements which were very much favoured by the marxist *intelligentsia* of the 1920's. In his Essay on marxist sociology Bujarin (1921/1974) stated that art systematizes feelings and transforms them in an artistic way. It is quite probable that Vygotski knew and reproduced this idea of art as a way of socializing feelings and emotions.

In order to study the aesthetic reaction both objectively and socially, Vygotski postulates two elements which would later on appear in his subsequent developments:

1.- He compares art's action with science and technology's action (art as an instrument). Vygotski stresses that art is a social instrument of learning, complexity and regulation of affective life:

"The recasting of emotions which are extrinsic to us is carried out by the social feeling, which appears objectified, as taken out of us, materialized and fixed in the external objects of art, transformed into society's instruments. One of man's special features, which differentiates him from an animal, is that he brings and separates from his body both the apparatus of technology and the apparatus of scientific knowledge, which both turn into a kind of instruments of society. In the same way, art represents a social technique of feeling, an instrument of society, by means of which it incorporates into social life the more intimate and personal aspects of our self".
(Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 305).

Art would not only reproduce life, but in fact would create it because it introduces new perspectives and possibilities. Vygotski thought that the work of art was neither intrinsically good or bad. In this sense, Vygotski moves away from that approach which views art as a transmission or socialization of moral values.

2.- Vygotski tried to develop an objective study of art, as an ensemble of semiotic stimuli which may be studied in themselves (immanent). The same as the formalists of his time, and of those found in present days, Vygotski thought that to understand a work of art it was essential to study its formal mechanisms. Nevertheless, on the contrary of what the formalists do or think, he was interested in the relationship between form and content. He was also interested in studying the cognitive psychological effects (not only emotional) of the formal mechanisms and structures of the narrative work of art.

The dominant force in the USSR in the realm of literary criticism and linguistics in 1925 was Russian formalism. These

authors stated that in order to study what was literary, in other words, what makes a certain work a piece of literature, we should identify and examine the linguistic mechanisms and the notions which define it. They were interested in the objective study of how linguistic forms are used in poetry, fables and novels. In other words, they catalogued and analysed the semiotic mechanisms used in literature (Propp, 1981; Voloshinov, 1992). For Vygotski understanding the semiotic mechanisms as they were being analysed by the Russian formalists, was a useful tool in order to guarantee an objective analysis, and to study the psychological effects of art. To achieve this goal Vygotski proposed the use of the "Objective Analytical Method" which states that we should not take either the author or the spectator as the basis, the basis should be the work of art. This is due to the fact that if we analyse the structure of the stimula this will allow us to reconstruct the structure of the reaction (Wertsch, 1988).

It is true that by itself the work of art is not the object of psychology. Nevertheless, we should remember the position a historian who studies the French Revolution is in. S/he uses references in which the objects of study are not given or included. S/he rests on the study of indirect references such as personal letters or documents from this era, without being able to directly tap the experience of those people who actually lived the event. This is exactly the same as what happens in law studies. A crime investigation is based on indirect evidences such as fingerprints or testimonies. As we can see, many sciences need to previously recreate the object which they are trying to study using indirect or reconstructive methods, in other words, analytical methods.

TABLE 1.- The Objective Analytical Method.

REALM	OBJECT OF STUDY	METHOD OF STUDY
	Objects which are not directly accessible to the researcher	On the basis of these indirect methods we reconstruct the object of study
History	Past events. Social evolution	Documents, letters and diaries
Judicial research	Crimes	Fingerprints and witnesses reports
Psychology of art	Aesthetic reaction	Works of art, technical procedures and resources

Any psychological research on art must start with the selfsame work of art. For example studying the literary work instead of the author or the reader. Nevertheless the study of the work of art must not be simplified by just building a catalogue of the technical resources employed. This "anatomical" analysis has to be completed with the study of the "physiology" of the work of art. In other words, we must decipher the functional roles that each resource and artistic technique is fulfilling (Kozulin, 1990). On the other hand, a psychologist's

real interest should be that of understanding the relationship between semiotic mechanisms and psychological phenomena (Wertsch, 1988). This is exactly the point which Vygotski was most interested in. Due to the fact that his view stressed the effects on the spectator, Vygotski's approach is of a social semiotic nature. An approach that studies the functions of signs in a social interaction, and the psychosociological functions and effects they have.

Although Vygotski states that the central issue in order to understand the aesthetic reaction is to study the structure of the work of art, all the argumentation found in his book will mainly focus on the effects which this structure provoke in the spectator or reader who assimilates it. Vygotski's idea was that although there are individual differences, when the subject receives the structure it will generate a dominant series of affective and cognitive reactions. It is from this point of view that Vygotski develops an aesthetic of the reception.

6. The work of art as a sign

Modern semiotics conceive the work of art as a complex sign composed of a structure or chain of signs (Yllera, 1986). Another coincidence with Vygotski is that modern semiotics, although using a different approach, insists that the analysis of the work of narrative art implies working only with this work, just this work of art, and with nothing that may be alien to it (Coquet, 1986).

Russian formalists stated that in the work of art the real focus of attention was the sign itself and not the transmission of information. For them, this poetic function of the work of art was associated to the "defamiliarity" of language. A contemporary semiotic author such as Umberto Eco sees the work of art, in a similar vein as the formalists did, as an ambiguous and self-reflexive sign. The work of art's message deviates from the norm, both on the level of formal expression and of content. For Eco the artistic message is ambiguous in its content and since it is semantically presented as ambiguous it imposes an interpretative attention which renders it self-reflexive (Eco, 1985). For example a classical Spanish sonet states the following: "Mother, a gentlemen of those who kill bulls without being killed by them". With this periphrasis the author is referring to a bullfighter. We can see how instead of using the familiar word ("bullfighter") the author uses a formally "strange" language. Nevertheless, from a content point of view he insists on the idea of death, defining this concept in a partial, indirect and suggested way (bullfighters can die). These form and content mechanisms, which are in some ways far apart from everyday language, incite the person who is listening or reading to pay attention and reflex on the poem itself (Yllera, 1986, Eco, 1985; Fokkema & Ibsch, 1988).

In this frame, what characterizes the work of art, again taking up the ideas posited by Vygotski in *Thought and Language* (1934/1987) would be the following: A work of art is an ensemble of signs with a communicative function (the main role of a work of art would be to transmit a human and social experience with strong affective resonances). But with the peculiarity that the meaning will be very complex and polisemic, the formal elements

will determine, contradict or innovate the semantic content and in this group of signs sense will predominate over meaning. Due to all these characteristics, also including emotional activation, the work of art will be a major cause of the intellectual function or thought.

7. Art as knowledge

As Vygotski states (1925/1972) rendering art an educational function is an old pretense. He synthesized the idea of art as knowledge in the following way:

" In this way, it results that poetry or art represent a particular form of thought, which will in the end lead to where scientific knowledge does (explaining jealousy in Shakespeare), but using a different road. Art differs from science only in its method, or in other words due to the nature of its experiences, that is, psychologically".
(Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 50).

Vygotski rejects this idea of art as a way of transmitting knowledge. He criticizes the approach which states that art is knowledge because he thinks it neglects the fact that in art not only the content which is presented but also the form is important. To destroy the form in a work of art means to destroy it altogether. A certain emotion produced by the form is a necessary condition for artistic expression. The form of the work of art imposes a distortion which does not allow any realistic lecture of it.

8. Freud and the reception of the narrative work of art

When Vygotski wrote *The Psychology of Art*, he had already read Freud's aesthetic essays and had a partially positive opinion on them. Due to the fact that Vygotski also recovers the identification mechanism as one of the explanatory mechanisms of the impact of a work of art, we will now briefly synthesize Freud's ideas on the psychological mechanisms of a work of art (Freud, 1972; 1985; Paraiso, 1994).

Freud supports a "pleasure-catharsis" theory. An approach whose origins go back to Aristotele. Freud states that there is an important reason which drives the reader or spectator towards a literary work, this reason is taste. Psychoanalytically formulated as pleasure. Psychoanalysis differentiates between a literary "pleasure of the form" and a deeper kind of pleasure: catharsis, which is the discharge of tensions and the concomitant sexual stimulation. The basic psychological mechanism needed so that cathartic pleasure may appear is identification. Identification is defined as the illusion process by which the spectator imagines that s/he is the represented character. This allows the reader or spectator to vicariously participate in the character's fate. Identification is a necessary process if the positive literary reception is to take place; if there is no identification the reader will reject the work, s/he will find it boring, implausible and unbearable. But there is another mechanism involved in the reception process: distancing, which is to consider the literary work as fiction. Distance is the

objectifying, rational capacity of considering the work of art as an artistic artefact. Of facing a literary product and not real life.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the aesthetic illusion comprises these two antithetic elements, but which are both necessary if the aesthetic pleasure is to emerge: the identification or emotional adhesion to the main character in the work, and distancing or realizing that we are facing fiction. This duality identification/distancing will condition the aesthetic response to the dramatic work because it is necessary to experience two simultaneous thoughts: that was is being shown is a fable, and also that it is real.

The representation of a dramatic work gives the spectator the opportunity of feeling like a hero because s/he identifies with the main character. Moreover, this identification provokes a double pleasure because it saves the spectator from having to suffer the hero's perils. The aesthetic illusion allows the spectator to enjoy the identification without having to suffer the danger of being the hero (it is another person who is acting and suffering on stage. It is only fiction), and so s/he is not ashamed or feels guilty for re-living in the literary work his/her own internal conflicts (whose origins are to be found in childhood impressions) because s/he experiences them as something alien.

We must note that the pleasure-catharsis theory is the most known and elaborated in Freud's works, but it is not the only one. This author also propounded a second theory called "plurality of lives" in which he suggested that literature is a substitute for what has been lost or has not been achieved in life, and so we could live with each character a new history and "live multiple lives in one" (Paraíso, 1994).

9. A criticism of the aesthetic reaction mechanism proposed by Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis would state that the action mechanism of the work of art is to cause conscious affects coupled with unconscious ones which generally are stronger and contradictory. The paradigmatic case would be Oedipus Rex in which the plot would re-evoke in the spectators their past love for their mothers, and at the same time the jealousy and hate felt towards their fathers. This re-evocation of a previous childhood feeling by means of artistic representations would allow the discharge and satisfaction of phantasy (Green, 1986). Vygotski questions two elements in the psychoanalytic approach: the reduction of psychological impulses only to sexual ones, and the priority given to first childhood. Moreover he also rejects the arbitrary interpretation of the meanings of the work of art by use of a-historical and transcultural sexual symbols which are applied in any given context.

Another of Vygotski's main criticisms is that psychoanalysis does not explain the psychological effect of the form. It limits itself to the induction of previous pleasure and the distortion (condensation and displacement) of the conflictive content.

For Vygotski both form and content are important and art is not seen either as only a transmission of information or a discharge of emotions. Vygotski will state that the main

mechanism of the aesthetic reaction is the contradiction between form and content.

10. The contradiction between form and content as an aesthetic law

Vygotski, the same as the Russian formalists, used the concepts of "form" (plot) and "material" (content or fable) when analysing the structure of the artistic narrative. All that pre-exists the work of art, all that which the author used and which existed before the story (words, sounds, cliches, characters, stories, events, etc.) and that may exist independently of the story belong to the material of a work of art. Form is the way in which the material is distributed, ordered, structured. This structuring is considered a technique or artistic resource.

"The way this material is distributed and structured is referred to as the form of the artistic work (...). Form is any artistic disposition of the existing elements such that they produce a certain aesthetic effect. This is called artistic procedure. In this way, any relation between the materials in the work of art would constitute the form or procedure" (Vygotski, 1972, p. 74).

The plot is the generative principle involved in any literary text, in which the way the elements are composed is as important as the order of the sounds in the melody or the way words are arranged in a phrase. We may say that the plot (the form or how a story is told) has the same relationship with the story (the material) than a verse has with respect to the words which constitute it, and a melody in relation to the notes which create it.

When we use the concept of "form" we must not see it only in the sense of the external, sonorous, visual or any other form which may appear before us. In this case form does little to remind us of the external wrapping. Form is revealed as the active principle in the elaboration and improvement of the material in its most rutinary and simple characteristics. With regard to short stories or novels, if we identify the event which was the basis for a certain story we will obtain the material of that story. If on the other hand, we refer to the order and disposition of the parts in which the material is given to the reader or spectator, how the event is told, then we have the form of the story.

Although Vygotski analyses the "form" in the sense of order and structuring of the material or plot, he also states that there are other very important artistic procedures. Among others he mentioned the following: the narrative style the author uses, choosing a certain type of language, the tone in which the phrases are said, selecting different characters (their psychology), etc.. In the work of art a modification in the formal structures implies a deep modification in all of the discourse's meaning.

"We have mentioned only one procedure of literary editing, the most significant and clear, the plot composition; but we understand that in the elaboration of the impression we receive of the events, an elaboration which we think contains the essence of the effect that art produces in us,

not only does the plot composition play a role, but also another series of moments. In the way in which the author narrates the events, in the language, in the tone, in the selection of words, in the building up of phrases, in the fact that the scenes are described or their results are simply shown, in that the character's dialogues or diaries are cited, or that we are only informed of the events. It is in all this that the artistic elaboration of the theme is also reflected. This possesses the same value as the procedure we have talked about and studied." (Vygotski, 1972, pp. 202-203).

Vygotski seeks to confirm, analyzing fable, short stories and tragedy, the idea that art's form is in contradiction with the story's content. What Vygotski suggests is that it is quite possible that the work of art's "secret" to provoke certain emotional and cognitive complexity is to be found in the contrast or contradiction in the presentation of form-content.

The chapter on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* allows him to show the contradiction between form and content, and even between contents in a higher artistic form such as theater. *Hamlet's* story is clear, and in his saga all is clear and easy to understand. The psychological motives for his acts and the way these develop is quite logical.

Hamlet's father is killed by his uncle helped by his own spouse (*Hamlet's* mother). At the end of the play *Hamlet* kills his father's assassin. Nevertheless this script or story of anger and vengeance in the family saga is not lineally told in Shakespeare's tragedy. Although he knows his father has been killed, *Hamlet* does not kill his uncle straight away. The plot keeps twisting until we reach the final conclusion. There is a contradiction between the story and the discourse, between fable and argument, characters and fable. The pensive prince *Hamlet* has a strong will and is capable of killing others. He is not a weak and doubtful character who coherently delays his acts. So, we can not see *Hamlet* as an aesthetic treaty in psychology (many times in the play we find absurd and scandalous common sense disparities between the hero's character and his acts). Moreover, the death of the assassin seems plausible because there are no external obstacles which may impede it. Finally, *Hamlet* kills his uncle nearly out of sheer luck, in an action which has no direct relationship with the cause of vengeance. The tragedy is a detour in the straight line of the anger scenario. The implausible nature of the discourse or plot must be artistically hidden. This is done by resorting to delirium, the other world and dramatization inside a scene (the assassination of *Hamlet's* father is reproduced by some comedians in the same scene in which the act has taken place). The tragedy reaches its climax when a poisoned *Hamlet* uses his last dying breath to kill his father's assassin. That which moved the scenario away from its resolution (*Hamlet's* doubts, his imminent death) in the end is precisely what provokes it.

11. The extreme interdependence between form and content

Due to the importance attached to form, which influences and sometimes contradicts and destroys the content, we would say,

using Vygotski's own terms, that the work of art as a symbol is characterized by the extreme interdependence between form and content.

Goodman (1984) states that the work of art is characterized by its repleteness and by its exemplifying nature (singularizing properties into something concrete without representing it). We could say that Hamlet exemplifies the mystery of life and death, even for the powerful ones such as the prince of Denmark. But this exemplification does not especially seek to represent the prince's doubts in a given moment. The "repleteness" Goodman is talking about is similar to hermeneutic componsibility: a change in a part affects the whole. If we change Hamlet's sex we change the whole meaning of the play, at least in view of the dominant ideological frame present in Shakespear's time (which can be found even in present days). A feminine Hamlet would not act with the same direct violence as a masculine Hamlet does, and her doubtful attitude would be explained using different cues.

As Goodman stated referring to one of Vygotski's *leit motives*: "In a literary work what normally counts is not only the story that is being told, but how it is being told" (Goodman, 1984, p. 135). In *Thought and Language* Vygotski develops the idea that word and thought are mutually presupposed, but they are differentiated and interact in very complex ways. The same could be said about Vygotski's ideas in relation to the work of art in which the content (thought or the work of art's meaning) and the form (resources and literary and poetic forms) interweave in an intimate and complex way. This is what we could define as a complementary opposition. Vygotski will develop this idea under the form that the thought grammar (internal content) and language grammar (external form specified in vocal and/or written signs) are interdependent. In *The Psychology of Art* Vygotski will stress the dependency that the work of art has on its grammatical form. One of the examples cited by Vygotski is the fable of the Ant and the Cicada:

"In his fable "the Dragonfly and the Ant", Krylov has replaced La Fontaines's Cicada for a Dragonfly, giving it the epitet "dancer" which cannot be applied to it. In French Cicada is feminine, and so it can adequately symbolize a carefree and frivolous attitude. This nuance would be lost in a literal translation because in Russian Cicade is masculine. When substituting this word for that of Dragonfly, which in Russian is feminine, Krylov ignored the literal meaning in favor of the required grammatical form in order to express La Fontaine's thoughts: the Cicade was tranformed into a Dragonfly while still keeping the former's characteristics (dancer, singer, although the Dragonfly cannot dance or sing). In order to restitute in an adequate form the whole meaning it was absolutely necessary to maintain the feminine character of the personage in the fable" (Vygotski, 1985, p.334).

From what has been stated until now, we may conclude that the work of art takes to its extreme the interdependence between thought (meaning) and language (significant), content and form. In the case of the aesthetic symbol, at least of a narrative type, the changes in the formal and grammatical structures imply a deep change in the complete meaning of the discourse.

12. The predominance of sense over meaning

As we have seen before, the complexity of meaning and of reference symbolically characterize the work of art. This complexity would demand and facilitate the attribution of sense (of individual contextual meanings based on personal experience). Vygotski suggests that in the dramatic work of art "sense" (the meaning the concept acquires in different contexts) predominates over "meaning" (which represents that which is stable in a concept, regardless of contexts; a dictionary definition of the concept). For instance in Vygotski's example of the fable "the Cicade and the Ant", the idea of "dancing" is coupled with that of "death". To dance would have a "dictionary definition" (meaning) expressed by the body's motor act of following a given rhythm. Nevertheless, in this context this normal, habitual meaning is altered, changed or displaced acquiring a new meaning whose sense is "dance and die". Vygotski's main idea, which has been taken up by many authors such as Eco (1985), is that the complexity of meanings which the work of art imposes on a concept allows its expansion, and as a consequence the polisemia of its significant.

Establishing a comparison between Vygotski's idea and the psychoanalytic conception of symbolic elements, we could say that what the work of art implies is a very distant displacement of the original meaning (in the abovementioned example, "to dance" is displaced to a distant semantic content such as "to die"). This same idea may be found in a great deal of examples of contemporary literature and films. For example the film *They shoot horses, don't they?* is about a couple who during the 1929 depression in the United States have to take part in a dancing marathon in order to win some money so they can eat. This meaning covers up the original content or message, which is only revealed at the end of the movie when the male character kills its couple and compares her death to that of a horse sacrificed when he "breaks up" during a race. It is then that we understand the film's true message: that of the exploitation which human beings suffer in the hands of other human beings. Their life is compared to that of the beasts, in this case horses, who fulfil their animal role in society. Those couples who took part in the dancing marathon were only an enjoyment, amusement and flee from the crude reality of depression for those people who were slightly better off.

Vygotski states that in the work of art sense predominates over meaning. This generates radically new meanings, expanding the subject's conceptual and affective horizon.

In other words, the work of art would be a complex symbol that activates thought, and what Vygotski called the subject's internal speech, to the maximum, and that "(...) the word absorbs the sense of the preceding and subsequent words, expanding nearly unlimitedly its meaning (Vygotski in Wertsch, 1988, p. 138).

This idea of Vygotski is quite similar to the approach envisaged by a contemporary social semiotic called Lotman, who suggests that the self-reference nature of the aesthetic sign, its autonomous secondary modelization or symbolization nature, introduce an exceptional periphery zone which accompanies the conventional meaning of the significant or signs which have been used (García & Hernández, 1988).

13. The catastrophe

Apart from the contradiction form-content, from the extreme interdependence of form and content, and of the predominance of sense over meaning, Vygotski stated that another semiotic mechanism of the work of art is the catastrophe or conclusion. This mechanism sheds light, gives a new insight and realigns previous contradictions.

The affective contradiction between two elements in the work of art develops until it reaches a catastrophe point in which this contradiction culminates and is overcome by means of the dialectic between elements, between form and content, and the aesthetic reaction emerges.

A work of art is conflictive and activates affective emotions and contradictions. These are resolved in what Vygotski calls the catastrophe and conflict resolution (for example, when Hamlet, who is dying, kills his father's assassin). Vygotski thinks that this catastrophe and resolution realigns previous contradictions, and proposes what he calls "the dominant", a kind of global innovative meaning which gives the ensemble of previous elements a sense (for instance, this is what happens in the fable "the Cicade and the Ant" which Vygotski analysed).

In a decisive moment, a moment of catastrophe, both elements are fused, weared out and resolved:

"The same happens in the fable "the Cicade and the Ant", when in the final remark "Now go and dance" the short-circuit of the frivolity takes place. Expressed in the same verse are care-free and fickle, dancer and amusing, and the most absolute deseperation. We have already mentioned that in the word "dance", with the simultaneous meaning of "die" and "have fun", we face this catastrophe, this short-circuit, which we have constantly referred to". (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 182)

14. The dominant

The fifth and final semiotic element to which Vygotski refers to is fact that in every narrative work of art there is a "dominant", a main element of meaning, which condenses and dominates the significant structure of the work of art. For example in *Don Quixote*, it is the tragic-comical clash between a person who has very high expectations and reality (what is known as "Quixotism").

In the work of art there will be an infusion of sense: a single word contains the sense of the whole work of art. This is especially clear in the case of the titles of the artistic works. The title reveals the main theme, represents the dominant meaning in the work of art and shows art's emotional work. Titles such as *Don Quixote*, *Hamlet*, *Anna Karenina* are clearly an example of this; the whole meaning of the work is contained in a name (Wertsch, 1988; Vygotski, 1934/1987). Let us see how Vygotski exemplifies this phenomenon using Gogol's text *Dead Souls*:

"Another excellent example (of the influence of meaning) is Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Originally the title referred to the dead serves, whose names had not been yet removed from the official lists and could be bought and sold as if they were

still alive. It is with this sense that the title was used in the book, which is built around this traffic with the dead. But due to their intimate relationships with the whole of the work, these words acquire a new meaning and a more ample sense. When we reach the end of the book the title "Dead Souls" means for us not so much the dead serves but the characters in the story who are physically alive but spiritually dead" (Vygotski, 1934/1987, pp. 190-191)

15. The work of art as a semiotic device: today's conceptions

Although we have seen that Vygotski examines objective semiotic devices, his analysis is different from that undertaken by today's semiotics. Authors such as Greimas and others seek to catalogue and typologize the abstract structures underlying the symbolic systems which allow communicative exchanges (Coquet, 1986), whilst Vygotski stresses the psychological-social effect of the work of art.

There are some remarks we should now mention with regard to the semiotic elements mentioned by Vygotski. This author grounds his statements in the analysis of dramatic works of art from the standpoint of a well read person, but without intersubjectively validating his analysis. This could be seen as a certain epistemological flaw in his theory.

The first semiotic mechanism proposed by Vygotski refers to the different level contradictions that occur inside the narration (violation of social conventions, contradiction between the personage's character and his/her actions, etc.). Vygotski thinks that the most important of these contradictions is that which takes place between the story and the narration (what is being told versus how it is being told). For Vygotski these contradictions induce a cognitive-affective conflict.

It is quite obvious that many works of art do not pose this mixture, contradiction or "conflict" between positive and negative factors. Moreover, in general works of art present few contradictions and are in many ways "simple". In other words, they only induce one type of affect (for example positive affect in the case of comedy), or if they induce some kind of contradiction it is a minor one and not very complex. It is only in some works of art or films in which this idea of a contradiction has been taken up again. For example the Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa (1990) has stated in his autobiography how in his films he prefers to play with the opposition or contrast in messages between scenes and soundtrack.

In relation to the predominance of sense over meaning and the "dominant", there are many similarities between Freud and Vygotski. The idea that sense predominates over meaning is quite similar to the idea Freud uses in his displacement concept, one thing means another thing in a certain context due to a chain of associations.

The "dominant" is similar to Freud's condensation concept. Although strictly speaking we cannot state that the similarities with Freud's ideas are due to the fact that Vygotski makes these ideas his (he had read Freud's work on the joke and its relationship with the unconscious), or simply that he reached these conclusions all by himself. Obviously all these elements have yet to be tested.

Another important criticism to Vygotski's theory referring to the catastrophe as a semiotic device, is that his view depends very much on classical Aristotelic narrative, in which there is a clear plot (narrative structure): an antecedent, a conflict, a crisis, an ending and a resolution. Nevertheless, many contemporary literature as for example Virginia Wolff's *The Waves* are very linear narratives: they describe a mood, a moment, there is practically no action, no resolution, etc.

16. Identification and distancing

Vygotski agreed with the psychoanalyst authors that the identification with the hero is a central process in tragedy. He stated the following:

"Psychoanalysts are completely right when they state that the essence of the psychological ascendent of tragedy rests in our identification with the hero. (...) the hero is a point in the tragedy on the basis of which the author forces us to see the rest of the characters and all the events. This point is that which gathers all our attention, serving as a fulcrum of our sensibility, which if it did not have, would disperse, separating as *infinitum* in its appreciations, in its worries for each of the characters" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 234).

The hero is seen as an anchoring point of the story, s/he is "the one who renders perspective" from which to judge, predict or await, remember past personal events or feel a certain way.

Vygotski states that every work of art activates a complex combination of emotions, and divides these types of emotions elicited from an artistic stimulus into two groups: a) the "emotional reaction which is typical to the spectator" when s/he witnesses a dramatic stimulus, and is equivalent to the reaction towards the narrated events; b) the "co-affects" which are the emotional experiences that emerge when we share with the characters the same experience and feel what they feel. Both types of emotions will play an important role in the identification process.

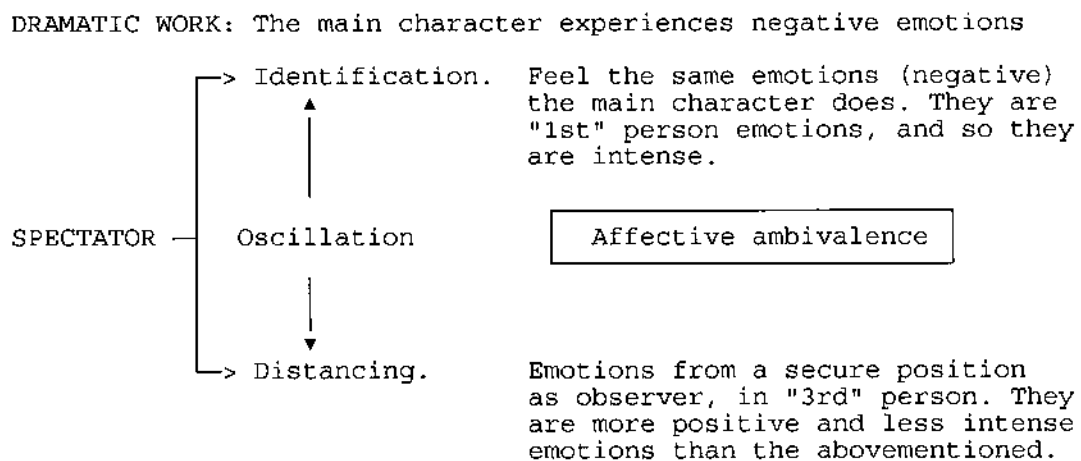
"The work of art causes in us two types of affects. If I live with Othello his pain, jealousy and tortures, or Macbeth's terror when discovering Banquo's spectre, this is a co-affect. If I am afraid for what may happen to Desdemona when she still ignores the dangers that she faces, then ~~is~~ is an affect of the spectator, an affect which must be differentiated from the co-affect" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 256).

The importance of the identification with the actors, be it for situating oneself in an actor's point of view, or because of a closer cultural nexus, rests in the fact that as this increases, the affective impact of the work of art also increases. This dynamic mechanism, between spectator and work of art, is another central and innovating element in Vygotski's theory.

On the other hand, what Vygostky is stating is that the spectator oscilates his/her position between identification and distancing with relation to the characters: we see tragedy with

the eyes of the hero and with our own eyes. The identification with the hero or heroes and distancing or separating oneself from the characters, adopting the point of view of a mere observer, also plays an important role in inducing different emotions. The identification with the main character in a dramatic play makes us feel the same emotions s/he is experiencing (such as sadness or anger). At the same time from our vantage position as spectators we can distance ourselves from the plot and live less intense and more positive emotions (such as sympathy or compassion). This is why there is a dialectic relationship between identification and distancing which will be associated with the experience of ambivalent emotions. So, the spectator will live a simultaneous duality: s/he him/herself is the main character (s/he identifies with the hero and feels his/her emotions), and at the same time, s/he observes the dramatic work of art from a distance, looking in from the outside and watching the main character's acts and the situation as a whole.

TABLE 2.- The oscillation between identification and distancing



17. Art as catharsis and artistic representation

In the ninth chapter of his book, Vygotski again takes up the old Aristotelic idea of the work of art as a source of catharsis (Vygotski, 1925/1972). The term *catharsis* is Greek and means purification, purgence. It is a type of cleansing or depuration, or even a transformation, of feelings by means of art. Nevertheless Vygotski does not posit a view of catharsis as a vicarious discharge of a specific emotion. His idea is that the dramatic catharsis is more complex.

While taking up Aristotle's view on the catharsis, Vygotski also presents his approach towards emotions in general, and the aesthetic emotional reaction in particular. This conceptualization will allow us to understand what Vygostky understands by catharsis.

1.- The law of the double expression of emotions. In every emotion there is a motor-expressive-peripheric response, and a

central or existential response:

"All our emotions possess not only a bodily expression but also a mood expression (...). So, the emotion is expressed not only in the mimic, pantomime, secret and somatic reactions of our organism, it also needs a certain expression through our phantasy. (...) every emotion uses imagination and is reflected in a series of phantastic representations and images, which play the part of a second expression. It is with more reason that we could say that the emotion apart from its peripheric action also possesses a central action..." (Vygotski, 1925/1972, pp. 257-258)

2.- The law of the reality of feelings. By way of this law we confirm that our emotions may originate from our phantasy, from a belief or evaluation of a situation, they could even be suscribed on the basis of an erroneous evaluation of reality. In other words, the importance of the central aspect, of phantasy in order to understand emotions is stressed (the excitatory role of the central component):

"... if at night in a room I mistake a hanged coat for a man, my error is clear because my experience is false and does not correspond with any real content. But the fear I experience in this case is real. In this way all our phantastic and unreal experiences are developed on a completely real emotional basis. As a consequence of this, feeling and phantasy are not two isolated processes, but in fact represent the same process, and we have the right to consider phantasy as a central expression of the emotional reaction" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 258).

3.-The law of the unipolar expenditure of energy and the strengthening of the cognitive-representational component of the aesthetic emotion. Vygotski states that a high central (mood) activation, would be accompanied by a low activation and viceversa. In the emotion the expenditure of nervous energy takes place fundamentally in one of the poles (either on a central or peripheric level), and an increase in activity in one of the poles will provoke the attenuation of the other.

"...as phantasy is reinforced as the central moment of the emotional reaction, its peripheric aspect is retained and loses intensity. (...) nervous energy tends to be spent in one pole, in the center or in the periphery; all increase in the energy expenditure in one pole brings about an immediate weakening in the other" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 259).

Vygotski states that what is typical of the emotional reaction of an aesthetic nature is that it retains the open and direct expression, it does not lead to action and has no peripheric expression. This reinforces the central moment, which for Vygotski is phantasy's activity.

4.- The existence of ambivalent or hybrid emotions. One of the main characteristics of art is that it operates with hybrid feelings, with ambivalent or contradictory emotions.

Vygotski suggests two processes that will induce emotional ambivalence. First of all, the stimulation of hybrid emotions may be explained by the work of art's own structure, especially by

the contradiction between "form" and "content". The activation produced by the meeting of the form of the work of art (which produces a type of emotion), with the content of the work of art (which produces an emotion of the opposite sign) will produce the development, and at the same time, from a representational level, the affective annulment. In works of art many universal themes with a clearly negative content are mentioned (i.e. death, falling out of love, treason, etc., which would produce in our normal life great discomfort), but they are developed in a "way" such that the impression they produce on us is not so negative, it is more of an ambivalent bittersweet, more complex and complete feeling which locates us in a different perspective. For Vygotski this would explain how the "pleasure of suffering" is produced when facing dramatic works of art.

Secondly, as we have mentioned before, the oscillation between identification and distancing produced in the spectator would be another process that could explain the experience of hybrid emotions.

5.- The inhibition of the motor-expressive discharge because of the simultaneous activation of two emotions. Another characteristic of the aesthetic type emotional reaction is that there is going to be a stimulation of the central moment, of phantasy, and a retention of the motor and expressive aspect. In fact, when faced with a dramatic stimulus we may experience a high intensity emotional reaction, but that has no concrete manifestation. Here we can see one of the main differences between real or everyday emotion and that which is experienced through art. The latter are in some sense "partial" because they do not tend to "move" into action, there is no need for an external expression.

"In this way, the distinct symptom of an aesthetic emotion is precisely the retention of its external manifestation, while at the same time it retains an extraordinary strength. We could show that art represents a central emotion, or an emotion that is primarily resolved in the brain cortex. Art's emotions are intelligent emotions. Instead of showing themselves by means of clenching fists, and fits, they are mainly resolved through phantasy's images" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 260).

Vygotski explains the activation of contradictory emotions without a motor-expressive manifestation, through Darwin's "antithesis principle". This principle states that every emotion activates a series of specific muscular groups, so that the simultaneous activation of two contradictory emotions would also provoke the stimulation of those muscles, leading to an "internal fight" which would be resolved through inexpression and retention. This is the reason why the aesthetic reaction is not manifested at a motor-expressive level, and that it constitutes an emotion based on phantasy.

6.- The conclusion or resolution as a moment of stimulation and annulment of emotions. On the basis of Vygotski's analysis of *Hamlet*, we see that the perception of the initial event activates a expectancy on how the story will develop or end: the death of the villain, he who killed Hamlet's father, is a "happy end" (at least from the hero's point of view) linked to a positive

emotion. At the same time we are aware that we are facing an "anger" scenario. An emotion which would be attributed to the main character, although the spectator will also experience it. Nevertheless, the detours that are found in the plot activate a series of negative emotions: tension and anxiety due to the lack of response, a lack of will and delay in Hamlet's response, and feeling unsatisfied because of the non achievement of the activated expectancy. The contradiction between fable and plot will be a central element in the aesthetic reaction. As Vygotski stated, the tragedy will have acted as an element that provokes opposite and simultaneous emotions:

"The spectator has been cheated. All he had considered as a detour in the road has led him to where he wanted to go all the time, and when he reaches this final spot, he does not recognize it as the aim of the pilgrimage. Contradictions have not only converged, they have also changed roles, and for the spectator this catastrophic revelation of the contradictions is blended into the hero's experience, because ultimately he only accepts as his these experiences. And the spectator does not experience either satisfaction or relief following the King's death; his tense feelings do not find a simple and trival solution" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 240-241).

In sum, we can see that the structural elements of form and content, plot and fable, are linked to different emotions that are going to be set against each other and stimulate the experience of affective ambivalence. In this sense, the activation of opposite emotions, from a motor standpoint, will lead to their inhibition in expression. This state implies the double induction of negative and positive affects, and leads to an increase in the internal tension. A tension which instead of being peripherically discharged (expressive-motor discharge), leads the spectator, during the conclusion, to experience a catharsis, a discharge and transformation of affects and emotions. The most important effect of this catharsis is an extension of phantasy that restructures the spectator's global internal experience.

The mechanism through which the artistic representation takes place would be the following:

"We could state that the basis of the aesthetic reaction is formed by the affects stirred up by art, experienced by us in all their reality and strength, but which find their discharge in that phantasy activity which every artistic perception demands of us. Due to this central discharge, the external motor aspect of affect is retained and repressed, and we start to think we live only illusory emotions. All art is based on this unity of feeling and phantasy. Its most noteworthy peculiarity is that when causing in us affects that are developed in opposite directions, it only retains thanks to the antithesis principle, the motor expression of the emotions, and, by confronting impulses of an opposite nature, destroys the affects of content and form, leading to an explosion, a discharge of nervous energy. In this transformation of affects, in their spontaneous combustion, in the explosive reaction that leads to the discharge of those emotions that were stirred up just there, in all this lies the catharsis of the aesthetic reaction" (Vygotski,

In this sense, Vygotski's true originality rests on the fact that he suggested that the cognitive complexity of the subject, the same as can be observed in the emotional realm, starts from a simultaneous activation of positive and negative affectivity in a representational and expressive-motor level. This activation is due to the abovementioned contradiction between form and content in a work of art, which causes opposite emotions.

In other words, Vygotski states that the work of art not only presents a conflict of senses and meanings, it also produces an affective activation. What Vygotski implicitly is suggesting is a very important, valid and current problem in social psychology devoted to the study of emotions: when a person is remembering something, in order to recodify or understand a part of reality or the outside world, we need a certain degree of affective activation to render this recodification effective. All this just underlines the relationship between cognition and affect, an idea already stated by Vygotski.

We personally believe that the Hegelian nature of this approach to the aesthetic reaction is quite clear. By the way in which Vygotski conceives the catharsis produced by the intersection of opposites, which are really complementary, we can see that Vygotski had carefully read Engels' *Dialectic of Nature* (Thesis-Antithesis-----Synthesis), in which this marxist author develops Hegel's ideas. The influence that both the German philosopher and Engels had on Vygotski's idea of the reaction towards the aesthetic and on great deal of his following psychological and pedagogical theory is unquestionable (Kozulin, 1990; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991).

18. The classical theories on the paradox of art and the place of Vygotski's catharsis theory

Another form of evaluating Vygotski's theory is to compare it with classical explanations on art's actions: the paradox of drama. Ever since Aristotele different authors have written about the paradox of drama (of comedy and tragedy). Both artistic forms imply that the positive experiencing of negative emotions and its artistic value would be attributed, at least in part, to their capacity for simultaneously producing positive and negative emotions. In tragedy, sadness and aggressive scenarios are experienced with pleasure, whilst in comedy we achieve, in Aristotele's terms, a happy feeling of non painful absurdity (García & Hernández, 1988; Packer, 1989).

Historically different explanations for the paradox of drama have been proposed. First of all came Aristotele's catharsis. Art allows the discharge of repressed emotions. Due to the fact that repressing emotions is negative (here we see that Aristotele was a forrunner of Freudian ideas), the aesthetic catharsis allows the spectator's purification of his/her capacity for experiencing emotions, compassion and fear in particular, and is a pleasurable experience (Paskow, 1983; Packer, 1989). The idea that the cathartic discharge may be understood both in a medical-physiological sense ("the discharge of bile that allows us to maintain an equilibrium between the body's humors"), or in a

moral-cognitive sense, in which the emotions produced by art allow us to appropriate ourselves of the right knowledge on reality, learning by imitation. There has been an enormous amount of debate on the exact meaning of the term catharsis, both in a purely cognitive or affective sense. The most inclusive, which can be based on Aristotele's text on the benefits of music, is that art has educational effects, of intellectual pleasure and catharsis (Paskow, 1983). The Aristotelic catharsis has been seen as an acquisition of mediating emotional resistance, as a "to harden and inure oneself in the passions of compassion and fear", or as a transformation of the passions into virtuous dispositions (Domínguez, 1991).

Aristotele's text is very obscure and has been subject of an intense debate, as Vygotski already noted. Nevertheless, without any doubt, Vygotski's approach must be seen as an attempt to make explicit the underlying mechanism in Aristotele's cathartic theory. The meaning of the term cathartic in Vygotski is not too clear, although he does suggest that the essence of catharsis is the transmutation of feelings, induced by the contradictory nature of the work of art. Catharsis as moral learning (conversion of the passions into virtuous dispositions), as the passage from displeasure to pleasure, as purification in the sense of physiological discharge, and as a sedation all seem to Vygotski to be too partial. In this sense, Vygotski's approach to the art's action is closer to an integrative perspective of all the previous processes into a cognitive-affective phenomenon, and postulating an explanatory mechanism. Although there is also the idea of the need of an affective discharge, as a biological function of art, which partially links it with one of the most simple conceptions of Aristotelic catharsis.

A second explanation of the paradox of dramatic art, of the pleasurable experience of negative emotions, is linked to Hume and is the so called "conversion theory". This approach states that emotional hurt is partially transformed in pleasure by means of the aesthetic pleasure allowed and induced by the artistic techniques of representation. This theory has many flaws because if Hume's theory was to be correct, the spectator of the work of art would have to abandon the site of representation, or the reading of a work of art only feeling positive emotions or pleasure, which does not correspond with reality (Packer, 1989).

Confirming Vygotski's idea on the ambivalent nature of a work of art, Packer (1989) stresses that what is specific of the experience of a dramatic work of art are that the two types of affects, a positive and a negative one, are simultaneously experienced. Nevertheless, the explanation of the conversion is somewhat taken up again in Vygostky's argumentation when this author states that the affects develop and change under the influence of the mechanisms of the work of art.

A third explanation, also linked with Hume, stresses the controllable nature of the dramatic emotional experience. The knowledge of what happens is fictitious, it allows the spectator to experience negative emotions without these emotions overflowing him/her, and knowing that in any given moment s/he may abandon them, because the spectator is neither responsible or feels vitally involved in the tragedy. This idea has been taken up under the form of the "aesthetic distance" produced by the works of art, which allows there to be an affective work. It

has also been taken up, although only as a second level issue, in Vygotski's argumentation. Although this author stresses the emotional regulation by simultaneous activation and the subsequent annulment of opposite affects. The explanation of the pleasurable nature of the experience of negative emotions in the work of art, due to the controllable nature of the experience, is also open to criticism. Not only do the spectators sometimes lose control over their emotions, but also a work of art that does not generate spontaneously and surprisingly emotional experiences, or in other words, that does not exert an affective influence in a relatively uncontrollable way, doubtfully will be evaluated as aesthetically pleasurable (Packer, 1989).

The last classical historic explanation we shall see regarding the action of the work of art will be the one suggested by L'Abbé Dubos: the change from calmness to emotional activation as a necessity. This author states that the absence of feelings and activity is a displeasurable experience that the human being tries to avoid. In order to avoid this displeasurable state of languid calm, most people try to entertain themselves in activities which may intensify everyday emotions such as works of art (novels, soap operas, etc.) (Packer, 1989). Current aesthetic and motivational theories propose a need for stimulation, and this explanation is very much accepted nowadays (Berlyne, 1968; Packer, 1989). Vygotski also partially acknowledge this view.

Vygotskian theory on the action of the work art partially integrates different classical theories, although it is situated in an Aristotelic catharsis approach. Catharsis is seen as a change in thought, cognition, affect and physiology. It is not only the simultaneous experience of opposite emotions, or the simple discharge of these and the state of calm which follows. It is an emotional response that develops under the aesthetic control of the work of art, and which culminates in the fact that the spectator has new and more adequate cognitive information on his/her emotional reactions. The work of art induces in an "artificial" way an emotional conflict and resolves it, leaving the spectator with new and richer thought expectancies (see Pakow, 1983 for a similar interpretation of Aristotele's work).

Nevertheless, we must state that the accumulation-discharge hydraulic type emotional and motivational models have been open to criticism. Nowadays, those theories which state that emotions accumulate and must be discharged, and that what the organism seeks is a state of calm are somewhat discredited. Motivation is not only directed towards the discharge, there are also other reasons which seek an increase in tension, for example curiosity and the need to explore (Berkowitz, 1968; Reykowski, 1982). In this sense, of all the classical theories mentioned it is L'Abbé Dubos's one referring to the need of stimulation which finds support.

19. Empirical aspects

In the following pages we will study the theoretical and empirical support we have found in recent studies aimed at refuting or corroborating the Vygotskian model.

19.1 the work of art as an instrument that induces emotions

To our knowledge, there is a confirmation, in a general sense, of the affective and emotional nature of the works of art when they evoke some level of affective reactions.

Empirical data supporting the capacity of art as a technique of emotion induction has been found in many researches. This data stresses that by using different artistic stimulus we may induce emotional changes and also changes in mood. For instance seeing films (Isen, 1987), listening to music (Martin, 1990) or reading texts (Salovey & Rodin, 1985) are adequate procedures in order to induce moods.

19.2 The ambivalent nature of aesthetic emotions

Nevertheless, we do not have clear evidences on mixed or ambivalent emotions, although there is no doubt that people frequently experience mixed emotions (for instance the "bittersweet" feeling of melancholy). Diener & Iran-Nejad (1986) saw that subjects mentioned moderate levels of positive and negative affects, although they thought that only rarely were both types of emotions intensely experienced at the same time. Anyway, we personally believe that it would seem congruent and according to common sense to state the relationship of the works of art with what we have termed mixed emotions of a complex nature. For example, our studies have shown that seeing a dramatic film on delinquency that has a level of contradiction between story and argument, and in the presentation of the characters, induced affective ambivalence, in the sense that the positive and negative affectivity scores were positively associated in the post-test ($.54, p < .001, n = 78$), but not in the pre-test ($r = -.00, p > .20$) (Igartua & Paez, 1995).

An argumentation that would reinforce Vygotski's idea is Solomon's theory on the opposite process of emotions (Reeve, 1994). This author believes that an emotional experience hedonistically opposite substitutes the original emotion immediately after the stimulus that has elicited the emotion has disappeared. It is the opposing emotional experience and not the original emotion which slowly disappears. For instance, the spectator feels anxiety and sadness when facing tragedy, and happiness when it finishes. It is happiness and not anxiety-sadness which finally disappears. Although Solomon's explanation is physiological and it rests on somewhat fragile pillars, we can say that a main problem is that it does not explain hybrid affective states. Vygotski's explanation is more externalized; it is not alleged internal homeostatic processes that explain the process, but the stimulus characteristics and the development of the work of art which will provoke the process of emotional ambivalence.

19.3. Relationships between the representational and motor-expressive dimensions in the artistic emotion

One of Vygotski's ideas was that the representations or the cognitive-subjective dimension of emotion could reinforce the motor and physiological reaction of the emotion. Reaffirming this idea, Lang's studies (1987) have shown that subjects who have a good imagination and subjects who were trained to imagine their reaction towards affective situations increase their peripheric

response. It has also been found that the "rumination" or repetition of thoughts on a stressful situation reinforces the affective disturbance. The effectiveness of the imagination to induce peripheric and physiological responses has been amply tested (Wagner, 1989; McNaughton, 1989; Frijda, 1986).

Nevertheless, Vygotski's main tenant, which he had borrowed from Kornilov, was that a stronger motor or physiological activation would lead to a diminish of the subjective dimension of emotion because the energy that was peripherically spent was "subtracted" from the central reaction, from the subjective representation. This idea, although it has been the focus of debate, has been questioned by current research. Expressive reactions play a role of excitatory not inhibitory feedback. If we have more expression which is congruent with the emotion, we have more subjective intensity and more physiological reaction (Manstead, 1988). At least some peripheric dimensions can play a role of reverberation and not discharge. On the other hand, research conducted on the topic of aggression has shown that its behavioral discharge also increases the subjective intensity (Leyens, 1982). Both elements do not support a relationship of simple discharge in the affective reaction.

Other data also shows that subjects that have more facial expressiveness have less physiological reaction. In the same sense, we must remember that there are certain subjects (the so called repressors) who function under the hydraulic model: a low subjective reaction is associated with a high physiological and motor-expressive response (Weinberger, 1990).

Vygotski's semi-hydraulic model must be seen as correct in its view of the central processes, but valid only for some subjects in the law of the discharge of unique energy, which implies that non discharging one pole reinforces the other, or that the discharge of one pole weakens the other.

A third idea posited by Vygotski was the inverse relationship between complexity of the cognitive representation and the motor-physiological emotional reaction. This idea was also associated with the idea of energy discharge; what is spent in one pole, in this case making the cognitive representation more complex, implies a weakening of the other, in this case the motor and behavioral reaction. This hydraulic conception of emotion (what is discharged is eliminated from a container) is open to criticism on various grounds.

First of all, the relationship between the subjective, physiological and behavioral levels of the emotional response are low. Associations reach a maximum of 0.3 (Frijda, 1986; Lang, 1988). The idea that there is an undifferentiated emotional activation of the organism is somewhat questionable, due to the fact that the indexes of physiological activation do not correlate very well between them, and seem to respond to different rhythms and functions (Cacioppo, Petty & Shapiro, 1983; McNaughton, 1989). With this semi-independence of the emotional activation it is quite difficult to think that a discharge or inhibition in one pole will automatically reinforce the other.

Secondly, an individual's capacity to adequately perceive and centrally represent to him/herself the peripheric changes is limited. Due to this, the perception, at least a conscious one, of the peripheric changes is doubtful (Cacioppo, Petty & Shapiro, 1983).

In general, it has been found that those subjects that have

more cognitive complexity show more mitigated affective reactions towards positive and negative events (Linville, 1985). In the same sense, it has been found that subjects that use more varied and complex coping strategies show a better affective fit, with a better control over negative emotions (Taylor, 1990).

We could say that Vygotski's ideas may help us conceive the global relationship between cognitive complexity and emotional regulation in a more general level, and not necessarily to conceive the direct relationship between the representation of the situation and the emotional response.

In spite of these previous relativizations, what has been amply tested is that the inhibition of excitatory action and thought produces a physiological activation (Pennebaker, 1989), and that this physiological activation may be transferred towards other emotional reactions that are congruent with the stimuli which cause this activation (Zillman, 1983). Nevertheless, there is no proof that the physiological activation directly influences the intensity of the affective response (Paez, Echebarria & Villarreal, 1989; Bellelli, 1989). In other words, this would reaffirm Vygotski's idea that the inhibition of the central representation reinforces the physiological reaction and that at the same time this may reinforce subsequent psychological reactions.

19.4. Contradictions in the work of art and aesthetic pleasure

Vygotski suggests that there is a positive relationship between the level of contradiction, or the level of complexity of a work of art, and the aesthetic pleasure. From his point of view, when works of art are more complex they have more possibilities of inducing different emotions and a deep aesthetic feeling, although we must not forget that the spectator who sees, reads or listens to a work of art must have some qualities and formation (Francés, 1985). Research on experimental aesthetics partially confirms this idea: a positive association between phenomonic complexity and aesthetic pleasure is a highly consistent empirical result (Berlyne, 1968; Corraliza, 1987).

On the other hand, in reference to the contradiction "positive form--negative content" and its positive affective impact, there is indirect evidence in two studies conducted by Locke & Keltner (1993) that supports Vygotski's idea. These authors tried to analyse under which conditions the appreciation of a work of art (a musical score or a poem) could contribute to an improvement in the subject's affective state, subjects who had previously been induced a negative mood. In order to achieve this a factorial design was created that manipulated the affective valence of the artistic stimulus (positive or incongruent versus negative or congruent with the subject's mood), and the instructions referring to the exposition or reception of this stimulus. A first group of subjects were told that they should pay attention to the formal aspects of the artistic stimulus such as rhythm and the combination of instruments (in the musical scores), or the words that were used and the structure of the phrases (in the poems). The aim of this procedure was to distract the subjects. A second group was asked to pay attention to the content or emotional tone of the music or poem. The aim was to make the subjects compare their own emotional state with the

work's emotional tone. The first type of instructions could also be seen as an induction of the focalization of attention on the "form" of the work of art, whilst in the second type the focus would be on its "content". In this way the following experimental conditions were created:

ALL SUBJECTS WERE INDUCED A NEGATIVE MOOD		INSTRUCTIONS OF FOCALIZING ON...	
		Content (Comparison)	Form (Distraction)
TYPES OF STIMULUS	Congruent or negative	"DOWNWARD" COMPARISON	CONGRUENT DISTRACTION
	Incongruent or positive	"UPWARD" COMPARISON	INCONGRUENT DISTRACTION

Results showed that the condition in which subjects had to focalize attention on the "form" of the happy work of art (the one that was incongruent with the subject's mood), and also the condition in which subject's focalized their attention on the "content" of the sad work of art (or congruent), provoked more affective satisfaction. The authors explained these results stating that focusing attention on the content makes sad subjects perform a downward comparison with a sad experience and improve their mood. An upward comparison or focusing attention on the happy content would provoke more affective displeasure. On the other hand, focusing on the happy form would serve as a distraction and would not allow the demoralizing action of the upward comparison (Locke & Keltner, 1993). Our own interpretation of these results is that the positive form of a work of art may play a distracting role, whilst the negative content of drama would provoke a positive effect of downward comparison. In this way, the simultaneous action of both (positive form and negative content), such as the one that takes place in the paradox of tragedy, would lead to the best affective-cognitive impact on the subject.

In concordance with the abovementioned, our studies seem to endorse this approach. In one study, the degree of contradiction between the content (dramatic or negative) of a series of film scenes and their form or musical soundtrack (positive or negative emotional tone) were manipulated. We established three conditions: original work, in which there was a certain degree of contradiction "form-content"; extreme contrast between both elements; and congruence (the musical soundtrack had the same affective tone than the content of the scene). We found that the exposition to the contrast condition with the best aesthetic condition (the original presentation of the film stimula) produced a lower activation of negative emotions, a fact which may be seen, in Vygotski's terms, as an induction of a cathartic response (Igartua, Álvarez, Adrián & Paez, 1994).

19.5. Identification-distancing and affective changes

Recent studies have confirmed that identification with the actors and re-evocation of personal experiences induce strong emotions.

Larsen & Lazlo (1990) have confirmed that subjects who were more historically-culturally nearer to a dramatic story (Hungarians reading a story on the Second World War) showed a higher level of personal resonance, more vivid, global and personal memories. Our studies on the reception of popular music have shown that subjects who felt closer to the content of the songs showed a more accentuated affective reaction and a more positive aesthetic appraisal (Adrián, Paez & Álvarez, 1995). We have also found similar results in the aesthetic appraisal of films on the Spanish Civil War: the induction of a negative mood by exposing the subject to dramatic films was associated with a stronger identification with the characters and more personal resonance (Igartua & Paez, 1995b).

On the other hand, results have shown that the empathic identification and the distancing or "objective" observation qualitatively change the felt emotion. Davis, Hull, Young & Warren (1987) have found that when subjects were instructed to objectively observe a series of scenes from dramatic films (*Who's afraid of Virginia Wolf?* and *Brian's song*) positive emotional responses were induced. In other words, the observation from the standpoint of a "third party" provoked positive emotional reactions. On the other hand, instructing subjects to empathically observe the narration (identifying oneself with the characters) mainly produced a negative emotional reaction. In sum, seeing works of art and alternating between an actor's and a spectator's perspective are affective mechanisms that induce mixed emotions, just as Vygotski had suggested.

Current authors such as Scheff (1983) have taken up and developed Vygotski's approach to art as a social form of managing emotional expression. Scheff, coinciding with the classical explanation on control, states that rituals of bereavement and treatment, certain child's games, and all kinds of dramatic representations will allow the expression and re-evocation of these emotions in a socially acceptable and less painful way for the subject. These socio-cultural devices will provide an aesthetic distance from the affective disturbance, that will allow the subjects to discharge these inhibited negative emotions and restore their equilibrium. This would allow a subject to gain the optimal distance between observing and participating in the affective disturbance. Although it is included in a critical stance towards the psychoanalytic approach to art, this idea was expressed in the following way by Vygotski:

"Pleasure only constitutes the simultaneous fusion of two opposite consciences: we see and live the tragedy, but that same instant we understand that that does not happen in reality, it only seems to. And in this step from one conscience to another lies the main source of pleasure" (Vygotski, 1925/1972, p. 107).

As we have already seen, a dialectic of distancing observer-experience as an actor, was already mentioned as an element of the aesthetic process of tragedy. Subjects would undergo a return

"trip" between remembering the personal past negative affective event, and currently "safely" seeing as a spectator a similar event.

In this same vein, that of evaluating the importance of the distancing induced by the artistic representation, it has been found that the presentation of a series of scenes as real (a film as if it was a news bulletin) provoked more aggressiveness. In other words, the more the scene is believed to be real, the stronger the intensity of the induced emotion will be. When the same scene is presented as a part of a work of fiction, a less intense mood was induced. Different researches have shown that the cognitive distancing from violent images attenuate their impact on the observer's mood and behavior (Denis, 1985). In sum, there is partial evidence in favor of the control theory. The importance of the aesthetic distance induced by the work of art for a controllable emotional experience, and probably because of this, pleasurable, is partially supported.

19.6. The Influence of affectivity in cognition

Nowadays many studies seem to confirm the influence that the different emotional states have on cognition. This data suggests that Vygotski's ideas on emotions and cognitive complexity are practically valid.

Results obtained in different researches that study the influence of positive affect point towards an association between this affect and creativity, flexibility and the more interrelated cognitive structures (Isen, 1987; Fiedler, 1988). As suggested by Vygotski, positive affect seems to be able to influence the cognitive organization. In other words, it may lead to a higher complexity and innovation. People with a negative mood show a higher level of analytic, conservative and "realistic" reasoning. Different studies conducted on the topic of persuasion have shown that those subjects who have been induced a negative mood before the exposition to a persuasive communication paid more attention to the quality of the persuasive arguments, and so it was more difficult to motivate a change of attitudes with messages that presented "low" quality arguments (Schwartz & Bless, 1991; Schwartz, Bless & Bohner, 1991). On the other hand, and stressing this point, it has been shown that emotional moods have a real influence on judgement and thought (Isen, 1987).

Our own empirical studies have confirmed that to deconstruct the action of the work of art diminishes its affective and cognitive impact. In one study, subjects were instructed to focus their attention on the "musical form" of love songs, or only on the "content", or told to simultaneously pay attention to both aspects. It was those subjects included in this last condition who were induced a stronger affective change, and who showed stronger agreement with the prototypical attributes of romantic love (a facet that was taken as criterium in order to evaluate the degree of affective complexity) (Paez, Adrián & Álvarez, 1995).

In another study, we found that, in comparison with a control group, those subjects who had seen a dramatic film on the topic of delinquency with a level of contradiction and a progressive message (delinquency was shown as a problem which had a socio-structural origin, and the repressive and police

solutions were rejected), showed a stronger disagreement than the control group with conservative explanations and police and penal measures in order to solve this problem. In other words, the subject's exposition to a film with a certain degree of ambivalence induced a more complex and understanding explanatory discourse of delinquency in comparison to those subjects included in an equivalent group who were not exposed to this artistic stimulus. Moreover, the identification with the characters was associated with a stronger rejection of the punitive attitude towards delinquency, and a stance in favor of rehabilitation and preventive measures.

Finally, we saw that negative affective change was associated with a stronger acceptance of the fact that delinquency is a problem that has its origins in inequality and unfavorable social circumstances, a stronger opposition towards police and penal measures and a stronger agreement with the preventive and rehabilitating option in order to resolve this problem. We could hypothesize that the higher acceptance of the "socio-understanding" beliefs with regard to delinquency in those subjects who were induced a negative mood would be due to the stimulation of a systematic processing of the "arguments" posited in the film with regard to delinquency (Igartua & Paez, 1995a; Bless, Bohner, Schwartz & Strack, 1990).

19.7. Conclusions

If we bear in mind all the abovementioned empirical data we would probably agree with the idea, pointed out by Vygotski, of art's capacity to induce ambivalent emotional feelings. This form of feeling emotions is, at the same time, a learning procedure. It allows subjects to experience emotions which would otherwise be out of their reach. A person is capable of re-evocating personal experiences from a distant point of view, from different points of view, and to penetrate inside the temporal-causal structure of affective life. It will allow a person to evaluate, under a different light, circumstances and reasons for their affective reactions. It would also allow a person to obtain more flexible emotional scripts or scenarios, allowing them to have more possibilities for self-control and different alternatives (Paez & Adrián, 1993).

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