



Educação e Pesquisa

ISSN: 1517-9702

ISSN: 1678-4634

Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de São Paulo

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O “jovem” Vygótski: inéditos sobre arte e o papel da criação artística no desenvolvimento infantil 1
Educação e Pesquisa, vol. 44, e183267, 2018
Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de São Paulo

DOI: 10.1590/S1678-4634201844183267

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“Young” Vygotsky: unpublished works about art and the role of artistic creation in child development¹

Priscila Nascimento Marques²

Abstract

The paper presents some results of a research about L. S. Vygotsky's writings up to the year 1923, that is, before the more well-known works in the fields of psychology and education. It is a large number of texts, mostly theatrical reviews (published in Gomel local newspapers), some literary criticism and essays about drama and visual arts. The analysis of these material can shed light to the understanding of his two more acknowledged works about art: The tragedy of Hamlet, prince of Denmark and Psychology of Art. The paper aims firstly to present an overview of the researched corpus, the context of their publication in Vygotsky's biography and in the Russian context, as well as to provide the translation of “On Children's Theater”, written in 1923, followed by a commentary that seeks to establish connections between this short article and ulterior works, particularly “Aesthetic Education” (book chapter in Educational Psychology, 1926), Imagination and Creativity in Childhood (1930); The play and its role in the child's psychological development (1933).

Keywords

L. S. Vygotsky – Theater – Education – Art and childhood.

Introduction

The present article has the objective of presenting a new area in Vygotskian studies, that is, his writings on art and his activity as a theatrical critic, a field that has been globally expanding in the last few years with archival research, new translations and findings that uncover unknown facets in the career of Lev Semenovitch Vygotsky (1896-1934).

The focus of the broader research that underlies this paper is Vygotsky's initial writings, a corpus that is still little known by researchers and which consists in a series of texts – mostly newspaper articles – about art and theater written up to 1923. Initially, this production will be briefly contextualized and described. Then, a translation of

1- Translated by the author.

The present paper presents some of the results of a doctoral research supported by Capes (MARQUES, 2015), and an ongoing post-doctoral research (Fapesp 2015/17830 -1).

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634201844183267>

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one unpublished article – “On Children’s Theater”, written in 1923, will be presented, followed by a commentary that traces connections between the article’s content and ulterior texts, particularly “Aesthetic Education” (book chapter in *Educational Psychology*, 1926), *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* (1930); *The play and its role in the child’s psychological development* (1933).

Known as one of the most prominent Soviet psychologists, Vygotsky has in his short lifetime developed several activities in different fields of knowledge. In his description, Levitin (1990, p. 8) lists some of the characteristics of this multifaceted author: “Refined psychologist, erudite art connoisseur, talented pedagogue, great expert in literature, brilliant stylist, attentive defectologist, ingenious experimenter, profound scholar... Yes, he was all that. But, above all, Vygotsky was a thinker”. For Vygotsky’s friend Dobkin, he was not just a thinker, but a historian-thinker. The historical bias is present in his worldview since very early, seeing that in his teenage years Vygotsky led a study group on Jewish history (DOBKIN, 2000).

Notwithstanding such broad scope of interests, the initial reception of Vygotsky’s work both in Brazilian and international context, was concentrated among Psychology and Pedagogy scholars, more specifically researchers of human development and learning processes. Besides that, it was a late reception due to the isolation of the Soviet Union and the ban of his texts under Stalin³. Only after the publication of his works in the United States, translations appeared in Brazil, made from English.

Thus, as it has been attested by several Vygotskian researchers, his role as a cultural leader in Gomel between 1917 and 1924, particularly in the very productive initial phase of his career in the fields of theater and literature, has remained virtually unexplored for many decades. Still in 1990, Van der Veer and Valsiner (1996, p. 21 [1991, p. 9]) mention the “enormous and intriguing gap” verified in his bibliographic production. Later, the biography written by Vygotskaia and Lifanova (1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d) would bring to light a more complete and thorough list of his works.

Many commentators of Vygotsky’s life and work mention his interest in theater and literature and highlight his erudition and polyvalent talents, which can be attested by the fact that he has worked as a theatrical critic, teacher and researcher. In the intersection of his interest in art and psychology is the field of human emotions. Art was an important source for the refinement of his ideas about emotions, so that the first phase of his intellectual activity, which is closer to aesthetics, can be considered as an important step in his formations as a scientist, as stated Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991, p. 35 [1996, p. 47]):

By moving from art to psychology, Vygotsky could test his theoretical constructions derived from one complex domain on another. His work in art enabled him to tackle complex psychological problems and – the present authors would like to claim – far more rigorously than investigators trained as psychologists *per se*, in his time or ours. It was to Vygotsky’s benefit – rather than detriment – that he moved to psychology from literary criticism and education. It is no doubt

3- A good overview of this period is made by Prestes (2010) in the chapters *The days and the century* and *The intention is memory* of her doctoral thesis.

a tribute to that background that this eloquent, even if sometimes mystical, ideas continue to fascinate us in our search for our own synthesis of ideas.

Therefore, the works of *young Vygotsky* can shed light into his formation as an author, particularly if we take into account his constant concern about the cultural and symbolical dimension for human psychology. The investigation of the initial phase of the career of a well-known author also enables the questioning the stereotyped *young* versus *mature author*, where the later writings are seen as more relevant and refined. Only an accurate analysis of the early phase can enlighten the continuities and discontinuities of one's thoughts and put to proof the widespread view that undervalues initial works as embryony, less important and immature.

For Veresov (1999, p. 49), for instance, in the first works it is possible to find the origin of Vygotsky's certain scientific ideas, "in particular, the problem of consciousness as a central problem of psychology and the idea of identification of the psychology with the terms of drama". The same author verifies that this material stands halfway between literature and psychology: "Observing Vygotsky's first texts we can say that they were, on the whole, the examples of literary but not psychological analysis. On the other hand, these texts are important form the point of view of the evolution of Vygotsky's future psychological ideas" (VERESOV, 1999, p. 56).

Nevertheless, a significant gap in the publication of his work is an obstacle to the proper understanding and assessment of earlier phases and, as a consequence, to the acknowledgement of its implications to Vygotsky's later works. Yaroshevsky (1998, 2013), for instance, sustains that Vygotsky's writings before the Revolution did not serve as basis for *Psychology of Art*, they were rather radically reviewed. Leontiev, in his turn, stated that *Psychology of art* summarizes the works written from 1915 to 1922 (YAROSHEVSKY, 1998). This type of disagreement derives directly from the fact that almost the entirety of Vygotsky's works written between the essay on *Hamlet* (1915) and *Psychology of Art* (1925) was up to very recently virtually unknown and unpublished even in Russian. The 1915 essay and the 1925 book are in fact linked by an intermediate production, as Vygotsky himself recognizes, affirming that *Psychology of Art* was "a result of minor and some major studies in the areas of art and psychology" and that his analyses were based on three unpublished essays (about Krylov's fables, *Hamlet* and a short story) and "a number of articles and notes published in various periodicals" (VYGOTSKY, 1971, p. 3 [VIGOTSKI, 2001, p. 1]).

Some important steps have been made to overcome this bibliographical gap. One is the archival research carried out by Zavershneva (2010, p. 15), which intended to "conduct a full inventory of the archive, to search for unknown manuscripts, to restore the authentic texts of Vygotsky's already published works, and to compile an outline of his complete collected works". There is also the *PsyAnima Complete Vygotsky* project, that gather researchers from all over the world for the publication of Vygotsky's complete work (YASNITSKY, 2012). Two recent publications are specially meaningful in this process: the first volume of Vygotsky's complete works (2015b) in Russian, that presents all texts about dramaturgy and theater accompanied by extremely elucidative and thoroughly

commentary annotations by the editor, Sobkin; the second is volume with selected extracts of Vygotsky's notebooks organized by Zavershneva and Van der Veer, published in Russian and English languages, a result of the competent archival work mentioned earlier (VYGÓTSKI, 2017; VYGOTSKY, 2018).

Within the scope of initiatives aimed at uncovering Vygotsky's initial work, there is the doctoral research *The unknown Vygotsky: writings about art* (1915-1926) (MARQUES, 2015), which had as objectives to: survey Vygotsky's texts about art in the period of 1915 to 1926, provide translations of selected texts; organize the corpus chronologically and thematically; comment the texts in order to map the themes; uncover the paths followed by Vygotsky in the field of art criticism and his understanding of the role of the critic; establish the connections between these texts to the most well-known ones – the Hamlet essay (VIGOTSKI, 1999) and *The Psychology of Art* (VYGOTSKY, 1971 [VIGOTSKI, 2001]), which are the initial and final links of this cycle of writings about art; and finally to contextualize this production in Russia's artistic and intellectual environment between the Silver Age and the revolutionary period.

By entering this little explored field, the study sought to present new sources to vygotskian studies. Besides contributing to further research on the relations between art and psychology, this corpus offers input for the research of Russia's fertile cultural environment of the first decades of the 20th century. Even a brief scan of the titles indicate Vygotsky's diversity of themes and interests. Being mostly theater reviews of guest ensembles that were on tour in Gomel, it is also possible to get an overview of the rich cultural life of the time.

Finally, it must be highlighted the uniqueness of the historical moment when these texts were written. Russian culture and Vygotsky's thought in early 20th century were intensively marked by Silver Age, that is, by the symbolist philosophy of art. The 1917 Revolution and the advent of avant-garde art and thought (with Futurism in visual arts and poetry, and Formalism in the field of literary criticism) reconfigure the cultural environment. It is possible to observe how Vygotsky was an attentive interlocutor to these changes, turning both to classics and to emerging art theories and forms. The comparison between the essay on *Hamlet* and *Psychology of Art* itself is a highly significant sample of the transition of Silver Age to the soviet period. The first is patently influenced by the ideas of Russian Symbolism, it is a critique of impressionistic nature and strongly marked by a consideration of the mystical aspect of existence that resembles the phenomenological philosophy (see MARQUES, 2012). In the second work, Vygotsky debates with Formalism, psychoanalysis and Potebnya's art theory. Therefore, the study of the production in-between these two poles has the potential of uncovering the existing debates and their possible continuities and discontinuities, that is, a true microcosm of the fertile Russian culture of the first decades of the 20th century.

Vygotsky's texts about art

The bibliography presented by Vygodskaia and Lifanova (1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d) and the first volume of the complete works (VYGOTSKY, 2015b) show a vast production in theatrical and literary criticism developed by the author between 1915 and

1926. Even before this period, that is, before starting his university studies in Moscow, Vygotsky wrote an essay about anti-Semitism in Dostoevsky's literature (FEIGENBERG, 2000)⁴. It is noteworthy that Judaism was a major interest for Vygotsky, as discussed by Kotik-Friedgut (2012) and Friedgut (2008) and confirmed by his activities in youth years, such as the fact that at the age of 15 he led a study group about Jewish philosophy of history. This group was dedicated to questions such as: what makes a certain group become a nation; what is history (is it art or science?); what is the role of the individual in history (DOBKIN, 2000). Also in the wake of the Jewish thematic, Vygotsky published between 1916 and 1917 a couple of literary reviews about Lermontov, Bely, Vyacheslav Ivanov in the journal *Novy Put*, where he worked as a technical secretary. According to Kotik-Friedgut and Friedgut (2008, p. 23), this publication "reflected secular Jewish culture presented in the Russian language as a part of Russian and world culture and encouraged Jews to participate in the public life of Russia as citizens striving for full equality". At the same time, Vygotsky also published reviews at *Letopis*. Before a non-strictly Jewish audience, his texts were no longer about Judaism or anti-Semitism.

In the realm of literary criticism, the essay on Hamlet deserves special attention. It was written in 1915 and presented as undergraduate thesis at the Shaniavsky People's University. Vygotsky collected editions of *Hamlet*, which was probably the great fiction text of his life. According to Dobkin, his interest for this Shakespearian tragedy traces back to his school years, when he reportedly started writing the essay. Also according to Vygotsky's friend, "in 1915, that is, after seen *Hamlet* on stage, he finished writing the essay [...] It seems to me that to a great extent it is an autobiographical text; in it Lev Semenovitch expressed himself fully and openly" (DOBKIN, 2000, p. 20)⁵. For Yaroshevsky (1998), the essay emphasizes the subjective character of the understanding of a work and sees in it a path to self-consciousness. Veresov (1999, p. 58) in his turn considers that "the etude about *Hamlet* was in a certain sense the first attempt at a search of the foundation of the psychology of culture and the psychology of consciousness". As it can be seen, the essay allows assumptions of different natures, from the author's individuality to connections with his future work.

The years of 1918 and 1919 were hard for the Vygotsky family and to the city of Gomel, which was under German occupation from March 1918 to January 1919. During this period, after Vygotsky's return to Gomel from Moscow following the conclusion of his university studies, he moved to Kiev with his severely diseased brother and mother. In 1919 Vygotsky published in Kiev the book chapter "Theater and revolution" (VYGÓTSKI, 2015c), in the volume *Verse and Prose of the Russian Revolution*. In 1920, he publishes "The king is naked" in *Zhizn Iskusstva* (VIGODSKI, 2013; see also MARQUES, 2013) in which he reassesses Tolstoy's critique of Shakespeare.

4- Feigenberg (2000) sustains that the manuscript was written between 1912 and 1913. The archival researcher Zavershneva (2010) claims that it was written between 1914 and 1916.

5- Dobkin (2000, p. 49) also talks about the implications of the Shakespearian tragedy for Vygotsky's worldview: "[the essay on Hamlet] shows precisely how L. S. Vygotsky saw life, what he intended to understand through Hamlet. His worldview is, of course, tragic, but at the same time it did not make him stop at some tragic conclusion, but continue searching. Therefore, it would be natural for the ulterior direction of his spiritual quest to be in the field of philosophy. But I believe that Vygotsky was taken to psychology as something more concrete".

After the end of the German occupation, Vygotsky returns to Gomel and becomes an active participant in the reconstruction of the city. He works as a literature and psychology teacher in worker's high schools and in preparatory courses for teachers⁶. Besides his pedagogical activity, Vygotsky was named chief of the theatre subsection of the Department of Political Education of the Province. About his work in this position, the biographers Vygodskaya and Lifanova (1999a, p. 38) say:

L. S. Vygotsky became more closely acquainted with the theater, participated in the choice of repertory, and followed the staging of plays. The repertory of Gomel theaters was extremely varied. Since Gomel did not get a permanent theater group until 1924, Vygotsky would travel to various cities to invite guest speakers and theater work teams. We know definitely that he traveled to Moscow, Kiev, Saratov, and Petrograd for this purpose.

Between 1922 and 1923, he published dozens of theatrical reviews in the local newspaper *Nash Ponedelnik* (later renamed *Poleskaya Pravda*). These texts are praised by Dobkin (2000, p. 35), who describe them, citing Nekrasov, as “narrow words; broad thoughts”⁷. Vygodskaya and Lifanova (1999a, p. 41) claim that these texts “reveal a new facet of Vygotsky's creative works. Here he can be considered a subtle theater critic”. The reviews provide analysis of the stagings presented in the city and complete the picture of Vygotsky's intensive participation in the life of Gomel theatrical scene.

Parallelly, Vygotsky developed experimental studies in psychology and pedagogy in institutions of teacher's formation. The results of this work were presented in congresses. It was the beginning of his scientific activity. This fact is particularly relevant, since it reveals that it would not be correct to claim that his works on art were written prior to his works in psychology, what would imply in a sharp rupture in two different phases (one of aesthetic and one of psychological concerns). Already at the end of 1910's, his activities in both fields evolved simultaneously and, even though the invitation to work at the Moscow University can be seen as a turning point towards psychology, art was not eliminated from his scope of interests.

The works by Vygotsky-critic and Vygotsky-scientist/pedagogue written between 1919 and 1924 were summarized in two books, his first and more extensive ones: *Psychology of Art*, written in 1925, and *Educational Psychology*, written in 1926 (which has a chapter entitled “Aesthetic Education”). Still in 1916, Vygotsky published a preface to the book of the visual artist A. Bykhovsky.

Finally, it can be cited the works: “Art and imagination in childhood”, written in 1930, and the essay “On the problem of the actor's creative work”, written in 1932 and published in 1936 in the anthology *Psychology of the Actor's Scenic Sentiment* (edited by P. M. Jakobson).

6- For the list of institutions where Vygotsky worked, see Vygodskaya and Lifanova, 1999a.

7- From Nekrasov's poem *Form* (1877): *Форме дай щедрую дань / Временем: важен в поэме / Стиль, отвечающий теме. / Стих, как монету, чекань / Строго, отчетливо, честно, / Правилу следуй упорно: / Чтобы словам было тесно, / Мыслям — просторно.*

Vygotsky on children's theater: translation

On Children's Theater⁸

Not long ago I have watched a children's play. The children have invited me. The play was interpreted by them and directed by the actress A. Vasileva.

It is well-known that, while watching a children's play, adults observe both the audience and the stage, and by the first he can judge more easily if what is being done on stage is good, if it reaches the spectator or not. A critic did the following: instead of reviewing a children's book, he published his little son's opinion.

All the time I wondered that if it was possible through this method to publish what could be seen in the faces of the spectators, among which the oldest was likely a little more than ten years old, it would be something like: *how interesting is children's theater, the children's republic must have its own theater subsection in the commissariat of play.*

This is an extremely complicated question for adults, and has provoked a whole polemic in the Russian pedagogical literature: must children play theater games, and how? I highly doubt that the children's faces would get much from the usual make-up and that the sugary fabulation and the fluffy crocodilesque silliness⁹ are the only materials for children's theater and literature. There are entire countries of serious childness and profound jest. Just see how seriously a child plays.

And what is more: theater for children or theater by children. In a word, for the adult there is a heap of questions (pedagogical, artistic) and of unresolved complications and doubts about what should be called children's theater.

For the children, though, all is decided and clear: theater is for them an elevated play (that is, two times interesting), and not the retelling of story that they can understand even without the representation. And it is so good that children are not interested in pedagogical questions.

This once I want to be with them on this issue. It may not be very clever for an adult, but it is cheerful. How interesting (extremely interesting!) would it be to care for children's theater to exist (after all there are books, songs and paintings for children); for it to be more attentive and better for them than that play I have watched and that children have watched suspended in the air: for it to give children what they need, in an accessible way.

The exterior possibilities for that exist. How many theatre circles there are in schools, how many spectacles. Without trying to find child prodigies, but try and organize at some point a great play for children. It is certain that one must disseminate not only what is "rational, good and eternal", but also care for what is cheerful, prosaic and fascinating. Add salt to this insipid and dry slice to the child, add the salt of laughter and tear, the salt of theater.

8- Translated from the original in Russian, "O detskom teatre" (VYGÓTSKI, 2015a, p. 372), originally published in *Nash Ponedel'nik*, on May 7th, 1923.

9- Translator's note: in Russian, *krokodilovaia chepushistost*. The word *chepushistost* is a neologism created by Vygotsky by the juxtaposition of the words *chepukha* (silly) and *pushistost* (having feathers of being fluffy). The word *krokodilovaia* is related to the expression *lit krokodilovyi slizy* (cry crocodile tears), that is, expresses something artificial, false, not believable).

Vygotsky on children's theater: commentary

The play, therefore, is the art or technique that the man possesses to suspend virtually his slavery inside reality, to evade, escape, take himself from the world he lives to another, unreal.

José Ortega y Gasset ¹⁰

Vygotsky's contribution to issue 35 of *Nash Ponedelnik* stands out among the other reviews published in the same journal. "On Children's Theater" is about a theatrical play interpreted by children watched by the author. The comments and ideas presented in this text anticipate, although in a preliminary form, some topics that he would further elaborate and deepen in other texts. This is his first approach to topics such as: the problem of children's creativity; the role of play in the development; and pedagogical implications of aesthetic education, which will resurface in later works, such as "Aesthetic education" (book chapter of *Educational Psychology*) written in 1926; *Imagination and creativity in childhood*, written in 1930 and *Play and its role in the mental development of child*, written in 1933. The present commentary aims at establishing connections between thoughts and insights that appear in the 1923 text and their ulterior elaboration.

In the very beginning, Vygotsky refers to the play as production made for and by children. The more it pleases the children who play as well as those who watch the better it will be. For the child, it is such a serious activity that in a children's republic, there would be a "theater subsection in the commissariat of play", a humorous analogy with soviet denomination of the administration organs. For adults, however, the play does not have actual aesthetic value; they are interested in what happens on stage and among the audience. Therefore, in the world of adults, children's theater belongs to the field of pedagogical theories and appears as a complex issue about whether and how children should play theater games. Vygotsky combines the notions of drama and play in a later text (VYGOTSKY, 2004, p. 71 [VIGOTSKI, 2009, p. 99]):

Another reason why the dramatic form is suitable for children is the link between dramatization and play. Drama, more than any other form of creation, is closely and directly linked to play, which is the root of all creativity in children. For this reason drama is the most syncretic form of creation, that is, it contains elements of the most diverse types of creativity.

Children's theater and literature are criticized for underestimating child psychology as being based on what he calls "sugary fabulations and fluffy crocodilesque nonsense". This type of material is of little or no use to children, since they live in a world of "serious childness and profound jest". In 1926, Vygotsky makes other comments in the same line and once again resorts to the image of *sugar*¹¹:

10- ORTEGA Y GASSET, 2014, p. 55.

11- The characteristics of Vygotsky's style and language, particularly in his abundant use of metaphors and images, are discussed in the paper *L. S. Vygotsky's theatrical reviews: aspects of translation* (MARQUES, 2016).

Child literature restrain itself to nonsense and empty poetry as the sole content a child could grasp. This also gives rise to the fool sentimentalism that is present in children literature as a distinctive sign. Adults seek to adapt to child psychology and, assuming that serious sentiment is unattainable by the child, they unskillfully and artlessly add some sugar to situations and heroes. (VYGOTSKI, 2004, p. 324-5).

Vygotsky underlines that children's theater, as a type of play, should not be the imitation of a theater made for or thought by adults. This idea is also discussed in 1926: "And in truth, theatrical productions that attempt to be a direct reproduction of forms of adult theater are not suitable for children" (VYGOTSKY, 2004, p. 72). Vygotsky sees a disservice for the children's creativity when they are expected to memorize lines and act as professional actors by merely reproducing someone else's words. In children's theater, process is more important than result. It is of uttermost importance for children to develop throughout the activity, for their imagination and creative potential evolve. This is ultimately a process of great implication for the ulterior development: "From the point of view of development, the fact of creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a path to developing abstract thought" (VYGOTSKY, 2016, p. 20). For this reason, children's theater is a major pedagogical concern.

Children are clearly foreign to theoretical issues and elaborations; "it is all decided and clear: theater is for them an elevated play (that is, two times interesting)". To understand the meaning of *two times* in this excerpt it must be considered the ludic character of play and its function for child's psyche. This aspect is tackled in the essay "Imagination and creativity in childhood": "In drama, the child's creation is in the nature of a synthesis – his intellectual, emotional, and volitional powers are activated directly by the force of life itself, without any excess stress to his psyche" (VYGOTSKY, 2004, p. 71 [VYGOTSKI, 2009, p. 100]). In "Play and its role in the mental development of the child" Vygotsky claims that the emergence of play is related to an attempt at satisfying needs that cannot be fulfilled immediately; the child creates an "imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires" (VYGOTSKY, 2016, p. 7). In "Aesthetic Education", there is a passage about children's drawings that can be applied to drama:

A child's drawing is always an educationally encouraging fact, although it can at times be aesthetically ugly. It teaches the child to master the system of her experiences, to conquer and overcome them, and according to a beautiful expression, to learn the rise of the psyche. A child who draws a dog conquers it, overcomes it and put himself over immediate experience. [...] For this reason, giving full freedom for the child to create, renouncing the tendency of equaling child's conscience to the adult's, and acknowledging its originality and peculiarities are basic requirements for psychology (VYGOTSKI, 2004, p. 346).

It must be highlighted, however, that all these topics are only suggested in the newspaper article and that the lack of theoretical depth (fully understandable by the type and extension of the text) is acknowledged as the author's choice: "This once I want to be with them in this issue. It may not be very clever for an adult, but it is cheerful". Finally,

his objective is to stand for children's theater, not of any type, but one that can be better and more careful with children, one that gives "*what they need, in an accessible way*", that is, something other than adult's theater, devoid of aesthetic pretension, but that can fulfill the role of elevated play.

The association of play and interpretation (and, consequently, between actor's work and child's play) appear in other theorizations about dramatic art, as it can be seen from the quote of Ortega y Gasset in the epigraph, but it is also evident in the semantic scope of the Russian words *igra* and *igrat* (play/interpretation and play/interpret, respectively), also present in the equivalent in French (*jeu/jouer*) and German (*das Spiel/spielen*) languages. For Vygotsky, the difference between the art of the adult and of the child rests in two main aspects: aesthetic value (for adult art, result is more important than process), and the requirement of developed technical skills and knowledge of the laws of art, which are not accessible to children. In this sense, Vygotsky problematizes and relativizes Tolstoy's ideas about children art (see VIGOTSKI, 2004).

The defense of children's theater in the end of the text makes it a sort of sketch of many ideas that were further elaborated three years later in "Aesthetic Education". One of the topics approached by Vygotsky in the article is the fact that the work with children's theater should not aim at finding child prodigies. Later, in "Aesthetic Education", he ponders about the teaching of technical skills to the production of art with a professionalizing objective:

Hence, the professional training of the techniques of each type of art as a problem of general formation and education must be introduced within certain limits, reduced to a minimum and, most importantly, be combined with two other approaches of aesthetic education: the child's creative education itself and the cultivation of artistic perceptions. The only profitable type of technical education is the one that goes beyond technique itself and teaches creative lessons: to create or to perceive. [...] To watch and listen, to feel pleasure seemed to be a simple mental work that did not require any special learning. However, here stands the main objective and goal of general education (VIGOTSKI, 2004, p. 351).

Then, Vygotsky claims that it is necessary to "disseminate not only what is 'rational, good and eternal'". This extract can be linked to his reprobation of attempts at associating moral pre-defined objectives while the child is stimulated to get in contact with art, for example, through the reading of fables. The mistake of taking art as an illustration to moral rules is derived of the impossibility to know for sure what moral effect the contact with art can have. Vygotsky exemplifies this fact with cases in which children come to very different, sometimes opposite, conclusions to the ones expected by the teacher. Moreover, the idea of "detaching non-artistic elements from a work of art and seeing it as pretext for assumptions about moral rules" (VIGOTSKI, 2004, p. 327) transforms art into a mere illustration of moral theses and deprives it from its autonomous value.

Also in *The Psychology of Art* it is possible to find an interesting commentary about children's art, in a passage where Vygotsky reinforces the closeness between artistic creation and play for children, and underlines that their productions should not

be considered art. However, he acknowledges a trait that approaches children and adult art in terms of the role played by absurdities and amusing nonsense resulting from the inversion commonsense events in the sphere of art/play. In play, the child enters an topsy-turvy world that does not weaken but strengthens the rules of real world: "absurdities are tools for the child to use in understanding reality" (VYGOTSKY, 1971, p. 259 [VIGOTSKI, 2001, p. 328]).

For this reason, Vygotsky ends the article by rejecting the image of children's art as something *sugary* and invites the adult to *add salt* to the child's experience, "*add the salt of laughter and tear, the salt of theater*". By experimenting with theater, the child must laugh and cry, must have the chance to wear both masks of drama.

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Received on July 27th 2017

Approved on September 14th 2017

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