

DOSSIER “Human development, drama and perezhivania:
Vygotsky and the question of the psychology of the actor’s creation”^{1 2}

Between form and content: affective generalization in Art^{3 4 5}

Entre forma e conteúdo: a generalização afetiva na arte

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Abstract

This article continues Vygotsky’s efforts in investigating the social genesis of affective generalization in artistic creative and reception process proposed in *On the problem of the psychology of the actor’s creative work*. Affective generalization abstracts emotions and feelings from the individual to the social plane and from the mundane to the hyper-generalized level. Based on an examination of Vygotsky’s aesthetic ideas, we introduced Chinese philosopher Defeng Wang’s work in philosophy of art under the existential approach. Finally, we propose to adopt the cultural psychology of semiotic mediation as a framework to capture this dynamic process.

Keywords: affective generalization, Vygotsky, psychology of art, existential affectivity, cultural psychology

¹ For more information, please see: Vigotski (2023).

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Resumo

Este artigo continua os esforços de Vygotsky em investigar a gênese social da generalização afetiva na criação da arte e no processo de recepção proposto em Sobre o problema da psicologia do trabalho criativo do ator. A generalização afetiva abstrai emoções e sentimentos do plano individual para o social e do mundano para o nível hipergeneralizado. Com base no exame das ideias estéticas de Vygotsky, apresentamos o trabalho do filósofo chinês Defeng Wang em filosofia da arte sob a abordagem existencial. Na última parte, também propomos adotar o arcabouço da psicologia cultural da mediação semiótica para capturar esse processo dinâmico.

Palavras-chave: *generalização afetiva, Vygotsky, psicologia da arte, afetividade existencial, psicologia cultural*

Between form and content: affective generalization in Art

In *On the problem of the psychology of the actor's creative work*, Vygotsky (1999) intensively discusses Diderot's paradox on whether the actor should experience the role being acted on stage or not. Vygotsky reframes the problem from the perspective of concrete psychology as not to limit to actor's awareness of his experience. Rather, the psychology of the actor should be understood as a historical category imbued with a sociological prerequisite. As Vygotsky puts it:

The melancholy of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, presented on the stage by actresses of the Arts Theater, becomes the emotion of the whole audience because it was to a large degree a crystallized formulation of the attitude of large social circles for whom its stage expression was a kind of means of realization and artistic interpretation of themselves (1999, p. 241).

The actor's experience and artistic expression of the emotions and the audience's interpretation are all located in a specific historical, cultural and social setting that constitutes the primary ground and endows meaning for the crystallized affectivity presented in art.

By developing Vygotsky's social and historical exploration of artistic creative and perception process, we seek to answer the following theoretical question: how is social affectivity crystallized in an artwork and becomes the audience's emotion in their artistic perception, interpretation and appreciation? For this purpose, we first examine Vygotsky's esthetic ideas about how art facilitates affective generalization in audience's psychological processes discussed in *The psychology of art*. Vygotsky emphasizes affective contradiction, stating the difficulty in explaining the generalization process of esthetic synthesis from collision and explosion of conflicting affects. We then introduce Chinese philosopher Defeng Wang's book *Philosophy of art*, which represents a tradition of investigating esthetics under an existential lens. Existential approaches understand art and other areas of human activities as emanating from the historical dimension of humans. As Wu (2001a, 2001b) highlights, the difference between the existential and epistemological approach is that "the characteristic of epistemological approach is conceptual, logic and reflexive, while the principle of existential approach requires itself to arrive at the pre-conceptual, pre-logic and pre-reflexive" (Wu, 2001b, p. 94). Constitutive of the primary plane of human's historical existence, which gives birth to logic categories, the pre-conceptual, pre-logic and pre-reflexive disappear in the epistemological approach. Art, as a marker of humanity's historical development, preserves its existential affectivity and consciousness in sensuous figures. Wang's work re-conceptualized the contradiction between form and content into a dialectical relationship between the artist's experiencing and re-experiencing. In their skilled forming and configuration, the artist's sensitivity of transcendental meanings construed by their re-experiencing of experiences are successfully transformed into sensuous figures. Hence, the essential connection between works of art and human beings are founded on transcendental existential affectivity, meanings and values. After presenting Wang's perspective, we introduce Wang's concepts of XiangYi and inner vision to identify the configurative characteristics of artwork in triggering aesthetic synthesis in the audience. Finally, we propose to adopt the theoretical lens of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation, which focuses on humanity's generalized affective being, to capture and theorize this complex dynamic affective process.

Vygotsky's idea of aesthetics: catharsis, affective contradiction and transformation

By analyzing different forms of fable, poetry, short stories and novels in *The Psychology of art*, Vygotsky developed his idea of aesthetic psychological processes as affective contradiction: “Contradiction is the essential feature of artistic form and material. The essential part of aesthetic response is the manifestation of the affective contradiction which we have designated by the term of catharsis” (1971, p. 217). For Vygotsky, the interrelating relations between the emotions generated by artistic content and form is mainly conceptualized as antagonism, and the healing and purification function of catharsis—from displeasure to pleasure—is correspondingly understood as a collision and annihilation of opposing affects at resolution. In his conceptualization of catharsis, Vygotsky also emphasizes the transforming process of emotions and affects generated from collision of contradiction. As Leontiev has remarked about Vygotsky's work:

Just as the artistic creation produces a transfiguration of the material of which the work of art is composed, it also causes a metamorphosis of feelings. The significance of this metamorphosis is, in Vygotsky's view, its transcendence of individual feelings and their generalization to the social plane (Leontiev, 1971, p. vii).

Larrain and Haye (2020) point out that the transformation and resolution of conflicting emotions distinguishes catharsis from other emotional contagion or transmission processes in aesthetic experience. Such transformation, according to Vygotsky, is motivated by the form conflicting with, destroying, and overcoming the content: “The words of a story or verse carry its meaning (the water), whereas the composition creates another meaning for the words, transposes everything onto a completely different level, and transforms the whole into wine” (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 154-155). “A work of art always contains an intimate conflict between its content and its form, and the artist achieves his effect by means of the form, which destroys the content” (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 215).

Here we encounter an important question of how the transformation from water into a completely different level—that of wine—is possible from the collision and explosion of contrasting emotions. This problem roots itself in our understanding of the purification effect produced by catharsis. In other words, whether the healing and purification effect of catharsis

is stronger when finally arriving at a peaceful state via destruction of all emotions or by elevating emotions to another higher level. For potential transformation, how can one generate emotions to a higher plane of experience from the affective explosion? In examining Vygotsky's metaphor of short-circuiting to explain the central question of aesthetic synthesis in the psychologist's theoretical efforts, Valsiner (2015) points out that affective synthesis concerns how novelty and new gestalt quality develop as a dialectical leap from what already exists and the 'short-circuiting' metaphor can only capture the destruction of the arising affects, leaving the emergence of more generalized ones unexplained. To properly illuminate the unique phenomena of affective generalization in aesthetics, Valsiner introduces a second negation of the primary negation in classical logic to reunite the separated opposites caused by the first. From 'A is not B' (form is not content), we hence move towards the claim that 'A is not B is irrelevant' (form is not content is irrelevant) by the double negation. As such, we are faced with the critical question of how the double negation is realized from overcoming separated opposites to arrive at affective synthesis in aesthetic processes. In other words, at what plane can the form-content dualism be overcome and integrated into new synthesis?

Reconsidering the form: form as re-experience of affective experience

The opposition $A \leftrightarrow B$ was primarily posed between the affects induced by form and content by Vygotsky. Formal elements, like metrics in poetry, can generate affects regardless of content. Can we randomly choose forms from a toolbox to shroud and shape the materials so that the original emotions derived from the latter can be distanced, contracted and overcome? The solid opposition between form and content can hardly be resolved if these are theorized as two parallel elements separated and external to each other. In *Philosophy of art*, Wang (2005) proposes an original way to revisit the dialectical relationship between the artistic form and content which can be summarized as follows:

1. *Works of art, as a kind of narration, construct contents into sensuous figures to present, convey and preserve affects.* Art condenses fluid and transient feelings and affects into perceivable and sensuous figures. Different from other areas of human activities, art relies on and always remains in the sensuous field to arrive at generalization. Innovative insights and understanding arising from aesthetics are thus characterized as an unity of affective and

cognitive psychological processes. What Valsiner has termed “affective abstraction” or “generalization in the form of feeling” (2015, p. 98).

2. *The essential content of a work of art is the artists re-experience of the experiences contained in the material.* Artists tackle material contents. An artist’s creative process includes a co-affect between experiencing and re-experiencing. Artists distance themselves from and re-experience the affects and emotions contained in their materials. Re-experience endows innovative meanings to the original experience and becomes a driving force to facilitate the artist’s imagination in turning his re-experience into sensuous figures.
3. *Artist’s re-experiencing is sensitive and dedicated to highlighting the transcendental meanings and values inherited in the experiences.* Artists obtain and re-experience their experience materials in different ways from ordinary people, as they are sensitive to ordinary experiences inherited with transcendental humanized meanings and values. Artists search for raw materials, not to make a sensuous cloth to shroud a pre-given value or idea, but to uncover and reveal the humanized dimension of daily experiences.
4. *Re-experience turns the previous experience into sensuous figures and this making can be abstracted as a kind of form. Forms as the way of revealing the transcendental meanings in experience dominates the material contents.* As a kind of re-experiencing, it remains a sensuous, emotional and affective element and constitutes a sensuous power for facilitating imagination and fantasy to construct figures to express, convey and preserve this re-experience. The concrete way of making sensuous figures can be detached from its original material afterwards and further abstracted as a form. It is only in this theoretical abstraction after the creative process that form and content are set in a difficult dualism. Consequently, overcoming this dualism cannot be achieved in theoretical logic but only in artistic practices. Form, as the artist’s creative tool for highlighting and illuminating his re-experience of transcendental meanings, can produce different affective tones with the tones inherent to the material and thus constitute complex interrelations with the latter. These interrelations include but do not limit possible contradictions and ambivalences. Contradiction between emotions induced by form and content constitutes one among the many possibilities of the artist’s re-experiencing of the material.

Understanding the form-content dualism from the dialectic relationship between artistic re-experience and experience provides us with a new angle to approach the issue of the actor’s

psychology. From Diderot's formulation of the question, "Must the actor experience the role or not?", we obtain a negative answer as two actors being in a family quarrel can perform a highly convincing romantic scene. But wouldn't this formulation allow only a "no" answer, that is, to understand the actor's performance as an artificial imitation of an ideal prototype? Accepting this understanding means to assume the existence of an ever-lasting ideal prototype of emotion that possesses the power to deeply move the audience, and that all the actors' creative talent is dedicated to finding ways to approach and represent the ideal prototype. This goes against Vygotsky's proposal to investigate the actor's psychology on a historical and social plane:

We must understand the psychology of one actor or another in all his concrete historical and social circumstances; then the normal connection of the given form of stage *perezhivaniya* with the social content that is projected through this actor's *perezhivaniya* to the audience will become clear and understandable for us. (Vygotsky, 1999, p.241)

To continue with Vygotsky, emotions have social contents that pre-frame what kind of emotions are powerful to move an audience and how the audience pre-imagines the ways in which emotions can be expressed.

Experiencing and re-experiencing perspectives offer a different dimension to understand the co-existence of the character's emotions and those of the actor. As discussed, to re-experience is to endow new meanings to the original experience. The actor not only intensively experiences what the character is experiencing as if a living person on stage, but creates another dimension to his representation, thus transforming the artistic representation into creative presentation. Wang called this re-experiencing dimension "the tone of affective judgement" (2005, p. 111), which aims to present the real and unique meaning and characteristics of the character's emotions and thus determines how these emotions should be conveyed. By following this process, the actor performs emotions in an artificial and artistic manner as to avoid imitating and representing an idealized version of human emotions, as if polished and preserved pure human emotions could ever exist in Theatre. As a revelation of the meanings inherent to the character's emotions, the emotional tone (emotion expressed along with affective judgement) undergoes historical changes and constitutes the plane for audience resonance. It also distances the audience from the play and induces their re-experiencing and reflections on the character. In this two-dimensional performance, not only the content but also

the quality and meaning of the character's emotions and feelings are presented on stage. A successful staging of Hamlet, for example, should not only vividly show all the rich contents included in the original play but also shed light on its modern relevance and interpretation. By the actor's *perezhivaniye*, to successfully play Hamlet is to play a Hamlet living in the present and to represent the human meaning of his pain for contemporary audiences. The re-experiencing dimension constitutes the social content projected through the actor's *perezhivaniya*, similar to Stanislavsky's system of internal justification. To configure and present the character's emotions in certain sensuous forms, an actor studying under Stanislavsky should first try to identify and justify the emotions from his own experiences as to endow them with meaning—the tone of affective judgement. Thus, the actor's performance always contains two layers: content and tone. The tone layer can be further abstracted and distanced from its content. In Brecht's system, for example, we see an emphasis on estrangement to induce audience reflection. Here, the effect of estrangement is completed by exaggerating the tone of emotional judgement.

Distinguishing between experience and re-experience becomes essential in the artistic creative process. Primary experience can be incredibly overwhelming (e.g., for Hamlet and Othello). Immense pain, jealousy or delight can enrapture us and leave no way out. To re-experience is not to rationally reflect upon, but to sensuously grasp all the unique humanized meanings of a particular emotion. Only by revealing and grasping this transcendental level of our experience can the overwhelming burden of the original experience be removed. Take Vygotsky's citation of Valter as an example:

if Tolstoy had said that the gaiety of the peasant women put him in a good mood, one could not object to that. It would mean that the language of emotions that expressed itself in their singing (it could well have expressed itself simply in yelling, and most likely did) infected Tolstoy with their gaiety. But what has this to do with art? Tolstoy does not say whether the women sang well; had they not sung but simply yelled, beating their scythes, their fun and gaiety would have been no less catching, especially on his daughter's wedding day (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 241–242).

The peasant women's gaiety can be expressed through singing or simply by yelling and beating scythes to move others; but simply yelling cannot express and convey the particularity and humanized dimension of their gaiety. On her daughter's wedding day, a mother experiences huge happiness. Her deeply felt happiness is unique and is rooted in her relationship with her daughter. There may be tears from separation, worries and best wishes for her daughter's future

life, and even memories from her own wedding day. How to express and convey all this uniqueness? She may sing, that is, make sensuous figures to distance herself from this overwhelming happiness and realize its unique meaning. If the song she chooses is an established piece of art, its pre-structured affective field would frame, guide, and elevate her emotions and affects to a transcendental level (e.g., the value of the mother-daughter love). Once the mother realizes the transcendental dimension of her empirical relationship with her daughter, she can be relieved from all the burdens of her original emotions. The empirical relationship may be transient and irreversible, but from that transient form she is capable of transcending her limited being to become part of the everlasting value of ‘mother-daughter love’.

Vygotsky also touches on the transcendence of life: “Oh, how we must despise and respect life at the same time in order to live. The main thing is to be above life, to deal with it slightly condescendingly (Chekhov) and to be free of it” (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, pp. 470–471). Being ‘above life’ means transcending our mundane life. This transcendent level involves despising and respecting life: we despise the empirical and irreversible life because we are able to transcend it to the level of ultimate humanized meanings shared by humanity. At the same time, we respect life because it is through our sensuous and mortal life that we are able to grasp these ultimate meanings that make our limited and transient experience shine with human glory.

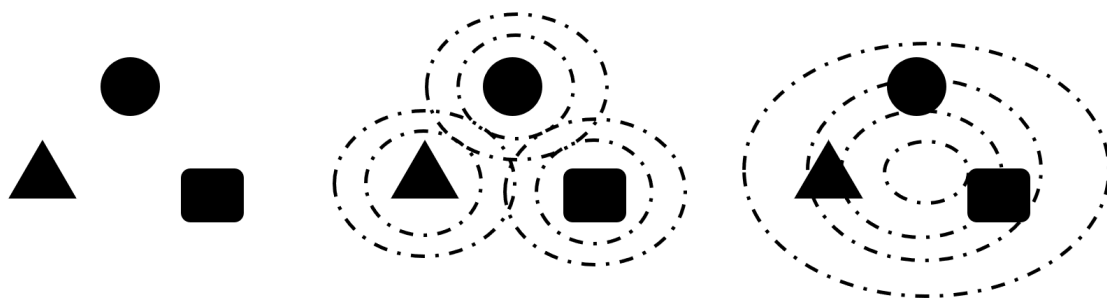
Aesthetic synthesis: from symbolic XiangYi to inner vision of the artwork

Based on Wang’s work, we re-conceptualized the A <> B opposition between form and content into a dialectic relationship between the artist’s experience and re-experience. The affective generalization produced by this dialectic relation is understood as a revelation of the transcendental dimension of daily experience. However, we are still faced with the issue of affective synthesis, that is, how the transcendental meanings and values present in a work of art drag and elevate the audience to its level. Wang (2005) uses the terms XiangYi (象意 in Chinese) and inner vision to clarify the qualitative leap to a higher generalization level. To summarize Wang, the uniqueness of artistic narration facilitates imaginary associations based on the symbols presented, for example Bunin’s presentation of the order of events in the short story *Gentle Breath*. XiangYi are symbols in imaginary associations, the meanings of which are defined

not by logic but by the multiple possibilities of imagination and fantasy. As a special kind of symbol, XiangYi presents the existential field of objects rather than the concrete objective thing. By breaking the logic chain of mundane interpretation, the material qualities of the symbols appear center stage and actively guide the audience's imagination and affectivity. Through these material characteristics, we can enter into the humanized world from which objects are endowed with meanings and glories in their essential connection with human existence. Pelias states that "science is the act of looking at a tree and seeing lumber. Poetry is the act of looking at a tree and seeing a tree" (2004, p. 9). From the perspective of XiangYi, to see a tree is to see its existence in the humanized world and its historical relation and connection with human beings—in short, the humanized dimension of the tree. Inner vision is the holistic existential experiential world presented by the work of art. XiangYi and its existential field can be understood as pieces of existential experiences that are synthesized into a holistic world opened up by human existential experiences of living in the world (Fig. 1). Existential experiences, as the truth of existential situations such as deep loneliness, are shared by all human beings. As human beings, we can have various different personal experiences of being lonely. Great works of art deeply move and assuage us with their power to represent the truth of human loneliness as humanized pain and sorrow.

Fig. 1

Aesthetic synthesis from objects as XiangYi to inner vision of the artwork



XiangYi and inner vision pre-frames the potential dynamics of the audience's affective generalization processes. Both XiangYi and inner vision focus on motivating and facilitating imagination and fantasy, breaking with the mechanical and linear connection between the artistic material and the audience's affective experience. As Vygotsky (1971) argues, fantasy is "the central expression of an emotional reaction," and "the emotions caused by art are intelligent

emotions releasing themselves in images of fantasy rather than external actions.” Thus, “we must resort to psychological systems based on the association between fantasy and feeling” to “explain the intimate connection between our feeling and the objects we perceive” (1971, p. 209). By means of creative imagination and fantasy, the meaning of XiangYi is freed from a logic determinism and mundane interpretation and allows for abundant associations, which constitutes a ground for audiences to resonate with a given work of art by bringing their own personal experiences into it. The inner vision, as a revelation of the transcendental dimension of living in the world, elevates audience’s affectivity from object-bounded sorrow and happiness to an aesthetic level, on which we are freed, moved and illuminated.

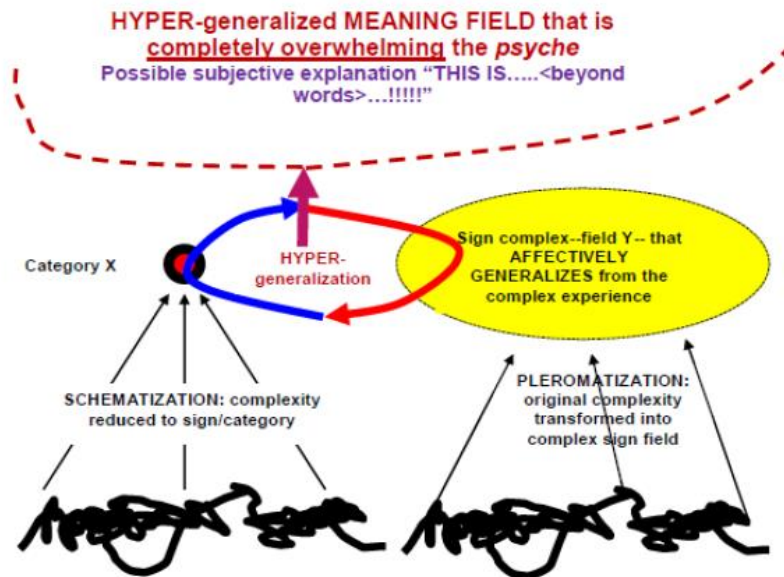
Now let us resume the question of how social affectivity is crystallized in a work of art and becomes the audience’s emotion in their artistic perception, interpretation and appreciation. Based on Wang’s work, the social affectivity crystallized in the artwork is first identified as the transcendental existential affectivity (e.g., the ultimate value of love, friendship and destiny), which presents itself as the inner vision of the artwork. The audience’s emotions are guided and facilitated by imaginary associations enabled by the artistic form, breaking with the mundane interpretation and foregrounding the unique symbols of XiangYi and the unique existential world they belong to. Anchored on the lively symbol of XiangYi, audiences recall and bring into it their own personal experiences of similar existential affectivity. By accessing this inner vision, audience’s individual affectivity is elevated and generalized into existential affectivity, illuminating the humanized dimension. Thus, both the crystallization of affectivity in the creative process and the audience reception include generalization processes. The artist’s efforts are directed towards constructing and transforming the existential affectivity he captures in daily experiences into sensuous figures thus completing an inner vision for his work. The audience, in turn, must mobilize imagination, fantasy and other forms of higher psychological abilities to capture and access the inner vision, so that the evoked feelings are not just a repetition of previous experience but actual affectivity transformation into a higher transcendental social plane. It is from the generalized level of existential affectivity that artworks deeply concern and relate with our living existence.

Efforts to capture existential affectivity: the notion of hyper-generalized affective field in cultural psychology of semiotic mediation (CPSM)

From Wang's *Philosophy of art*, we were able to glimpse the affective generalizing process inherent to human's aesthetic activities. But how can psychology conceptualize and investigate this complex experience? The cultural psychology of semiotic mediation provides us with a fundamental framework to capture our affective being. Studies from philosophy of art and cultural psychology can inspire each other to enrich our understanding. In this last section we will apply CPSM terms to theorize on the psychological process of appreciating a work of art's XiangYi and inner vision. CPSM distinguishes human generalization processes into schematization and pleromatization (Valsiner, 2016, 2018, 2020). Schematization is the process of abstracting complex phenomena into categorical signs (e.g., Yellow River = a river), whereas pleromatization uses field-like signs to condense and preserve the affective complexity (e.g., the Yellow River is our Mother River). In schematization, we can try to grasp the dynamic flow of our affective experiences by labelling it with categories. In pleromatization, our feelings of a given situation are intuitively understood as a general atmosphere. These two generalizing processes work together to further abstract phenomena into a hyper-generalized affective field integrating affective atmosphere and categorical label (Valsiner, 2020). Hyper-generalized meaning field, like personal philosophy, religious beliefs and values, can be so overwhelming as to re-orient our way of relating with the world (Valsiner, 2013, 2014).

Fig. 2

Affective generalizations and hyper-generalization in CPSM (Valsiner, 2006)

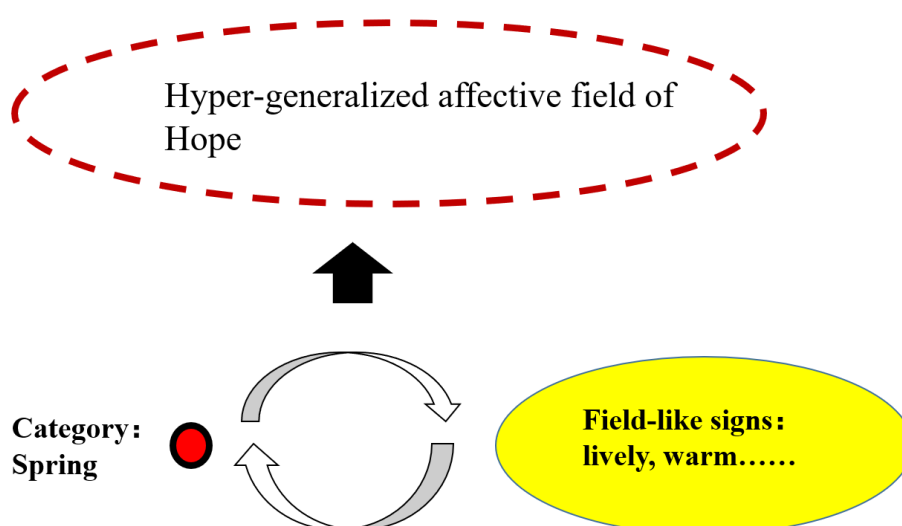


XiangYi can be regarded as a kind of field-like sign emerging from dynamic interactions between schematization and pleromatization processes; entering the inner vision, in turn, can be conceptualized as hyper-generalization achieved through XiangYi. Developing Heidegger's ideas in the concept of XiangYi, Wang (2005) emphasizes a breaking with the logic definition and the opening up of material characteristics. In other words, in schematization process, the material characteristics are usually abstracted and hidden by logic categories. Artistic ways of shaping and narrating inhibits the logic schematization process and stimulates our imagination and fantasy. But our imagination is neither random nor rootless; rather, it stays firmly rooted on the material characteristics. The XiangYi foregrounds the material aspect, which becomes the anchor for our sensuous perception and a gateway for our imagination to go deeper into the existential world underlying the materials. Wang (2005) compares the poetic expression "Spring melts the ice" with the logic sentence "Ice melts in spring" (2005, p. 102-103). Logic expressions give us factual information and is scrapped after this receiving, that is, the words function only as carriers of information and we can change these carriers indefinitely, e.g., "The melting point of ice is zero degrees Celsius." When thinking logically, we are firmly in the generalization process of schematization. The poetic expression "Spring melts ice" is specially organized as to inhibit the chain of logic generalization, hence why the sign "spring" is highlighted as a jump

off point to trigger certain affective atmospheres within the reader’s psychological world (e.g., warm). The newly rising affective field facilitates the reader’s imagination and fantasy in constructing images (e.g., new life popping out from ground) which leads to new categories and understandings (e.g., life). The schematization and pleromatization processes are motivated in a mutual amplifying process in which “spring” emerges as Xiangyi (Fig. 3); and by this mutual construction process readers are able to reach the hyper-generalized affective field (e.g., “Hope”). Due to the rich associations and meanings unveiled by the Xiangyi “Spring,” the logic categorization process of schematization is unable to overhaul the generalizing process, functioning only as footprints to mark and inspire the affective pleromatization process.

Fig. 3

Mutual-amplifying process between schematization and pleromatization in the emergence of Xiangyi and inner vision



As a symbol, XiangYi is “warmed” by the existential field and from this symbol we see, with our imaginary eye, its essential connection with the historical existence of us humans (e.g., the meaning of spring to our existence). We can use the Heideggerian analysis of Van Gogh’s painting of a peasant woman’s shoes as an example:

From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and finds protection in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself (Heidegger, 2002, p. 14).

The dark opening, well-worn insides, solid heaviness, leather, soil are depicted by Van Gogh as the materiality of the shoes. These characteristics can be logically abstracted as “it is a pair of dirty and broken shoes” for daily information transmission and communication purposes, but together they emerge as a XiangYi in Van Gogh's painting. With Van Gogh's magical brushstrokes we don't stop at the schematization level, but are captured by the material aspect as if seeing a shoe for the first time. Heidegger's analysis shows how the painter's perception and imagination are centered around and guided by the material qualities to finally arrive at the whole existential world of the peasant woman. The dark opening of the well-worn insides pushes his imagination to stare at the worker's tread with a specific affective tone. The pleromatization process motivated by an interrelation between perception and imagination further condenses schematized words like “tenacity” and “loneliness.” Schematization and pleromatization is thus further generalized and synthesized into a hyper-generalized affective field, in which all the values of a peasant woman's existential world are illuminated.

Sticking to material characteristics and remaining in the sensuous affective field to arrive at generalizations in works of art produces dual effects. Valsiner (2020) asserted that affective perception generalizations can go further into the aesthetic area or return to the mundane field of semiotic regulation. Material qualities, like colors and lines organized in a painting, can capture and cast us into the existential level. But it can also keep us in the sensuous level of perception and satisfaction, which shrouds the inner vision of the artwork. Standing before a painting can trigger and facilitate various cognitive and affective processes in our inner psychological world. Aesthetic synthesis needs to undergo and overcome several traps from the sublime and abstracted interest in objects to complete the dialectic leap to the “interested dis-

interest” aesthetic level (Valsiner, 2020, p. 8). The multiple paths affective generalization may take at different levels of abstraction in aesthetic processes is an interesting topic for future investigation.

General conclusion

In both *The psychology of art* and *On the problem of the psychology of the actor's creative work*, Vygotsky regards artists and audiences as social, cultural, and historical individuals expressing and realizing their social affectivities from living in the world through artistic creative activities. The social constitutes the premise and the destination for affective transformation in Art. Existential investigation in philosophy of art reveals the primary connection between art and human psyche as the existential affectivity of living in this world, thus pointing out a path for affective generalization from the individual to the social level and from the mundane to the hyper-generalized field. Transcendental existential meanings and values, featured in works of art as inner visions, are both generalized and historical. Generalized because they illuminate the shared human dimensions of living in the world (e.g., the value of love, home and destiny); historical because they crystallize the artist's social affectivity at a point in time. For the artwork to be powerful and influence those living in the present time, the existential world and its humanized dimension of meanings should still be relevant today. In other words, if we are still deeply moved by Hamlet, that is because Hamlet still lives in the present day and constitutes part of our social reality. Aesthetic synthesis is a kind of affective generalization, that is, it sensuously abstracts meanings from humans' affective being. It provides us with precious opportunities to identify our primary social and historical existence which can be so easily obfuscated by the mundane ideological interpretation. Investigating such a subjective and fluid process poses huge challenges for psychology and we believe that cultural psychology of semiotic mediation can be a promising lens to further develop Vygotsky's efforts.

In Theatre, the actor is constantly re-enacting and contributing to the theatrical performance. Besides, his multilayer emotional experiences of the character's emotions, his re-experiencing as affective judgement and his grasping of the hyper-generalized existential affectivity of the whole play can also vary from stage to stage. In *On the problem of the psychology of the actor's creative work*, Vygotsky reminded us that “to study the order and connection of affects is the principal task of scientific psychology because it is not in emotions taken in an isolated

form, but in connections combining emotions with more complex psychological systems that the solution of the paradox of the actor lies” (1999, p. 244). Future research can pay greater attention to how different affects are connected and synthesized in the actor’s psychology to arrive at a grasping of transcendental existential affectivity by means of the generalization processes of schematization and pleromatization and how transcendental affectivity in turn frames, inspires and elevates the actor’s embodiment of the character’s emotions and his own. Vygotsky once wrote: “Oh, how we must despise and respect life at the same time in order to live. The main thing is to be above life, to deal with it slightly condescendingly (Chekhov) and to be free of it” (van der Veer & Zavershneva, 2011, pp. 470-471). A good actor also needs to be above the play; for scientific psychology, therefore, the question becomes at what level and in what forms of emotions is the actor above and free of it.

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