

## Vygotsky and the Cultural Historical Theory of Play<sup>1</sup>

The following ideas in Vygotsky's cultural historical theory can be considered relevant in an analysis of play.

1. The *dialogue* with other human beings keeps man (the subject) in a dynamic relationship to his environment (the object), and he develops his conceptions of the world through a process which is both reproductive and productive. At the same time as he can remember and repeat patterns of behaviour, he is able to shape and reshape his own conceptions. Man is thus basically creative, since he creates his own conceptions of the world, i.e. he makes his own interpretation. This is a *dialectic theory* of influence in the pedagogic process.

2. The theory displays an *all-embracing cultural approach*, which unites art, culture and social processes. It is an integrated theory of human development, which unites emotion and thought, two aspects which are often separated in theories of developmental psychology. In the theory of cultural history, *consciousness* is the key concept and the principle of individual development, and to children *play* is the activity through which they become conscious of the world. Play does not keep emotion, thought and will separated from one another.

3. There is a *correspondence between man's consciousness (internal) and the external environment*. Artistic, cultural and social structures are reflected in the structure of consciousness. Vygotsky's view of the dynamic structure of consciousness corresponds with the aesthetic form of art. In play, a meeting between the individual's internal and its external environment takes place in a creative interpretation process, the imaginary process, in which children express their imagination in action. Play reflects the aesthetic form of consciousness.

The theory of cultural history did not develop into an unambiguous theory in the sense that there is no agreement between Vygotsky's view of man as being basically creative (something which is manifested early on in children's play), and his followers' views of play. Normally, Soviet theories of play are thought

<sup>1</sup> Biographic data on Vygotsky are available in Hydén 1981; Wertsch 1985a, b; Kozulin 1990.

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It is therefore my op sky's theories which is and his studies of child Vygotsky's scientific p to play and that of his :

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### A dialectic appro

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<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky 1972, chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## Historical

to share the same standpoints. However, Vygotsky's followers came to conform with the developments in the then Soviet Union, thereby emphasizing reproduction rather than production (creativity), and adult intervention in play rather than a creative approach.

It is therefore my opinion that there is a need for an interpretation of Vygotsky's theories which is based on his original ideas of "the psychology of art" and his studies of children's imagination and creativity. I believe that following Vygotsky's scientific path will shed some light on at what point his approach to play and that of his supporters diverge.

My opinion is that Vygotsky's line of argument will provide ideas on a creative pedagogic attitude as opposed to an instrumental one. Vygotsky shows how children interpret their experiences by creating new meanings, and how emotion and thought are united in the learning process.

My interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas follow two lines: first a description and analysis of the cultural historical theory of consciousness in the light of Vygotsky's theory of art, followed by an analysis of his theory of play. In connection with the play analysis, I will draw parallels between Vygotsky's theory and prevalent Soviet theories of play, mainly represented by Leontiev's and Elkonin's approaches.

### A dialectic approach to knowledge

The dialectic theory of cultural history illustrates the complex and contradictory interaction between man and his environment. It is a theory of processes, in which the relationship between the dialectic concepts and the world are cinematic rather than photographic.<sup>2</sup> This dialectics is characteristic of the entire learning process, which is both reproductive and productive at the same time. The reproductive aspect is attached to the memory and it means that people repeat patterns of behaviour which have been created and shaped at an earlier point, whereas the productive aspect, or creativity, as Vygotsky calls it, means that something new is being produced.<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky is of the opinion that all people are creative and he calls this creativity imagination. Imagination is the basis of every creative action and manifests itself in "all aspects of our cultural life, making artistic, scientific and technical creativity possible".<sup>4</sup> Creativity is not characteristic only of a few people; it is present wherever someone is creating something new, even if this is thought to be "nothing but a speck of dust compared with the creations of geni".<sup>5</sup> Creativity is essential for the existence of man and society, Vygotsky writes.

<sup>2</sup> Løvlie 1992, p. 26. He compares two pedagogic philosophies, with an analytical and a dialectic approach. The British analytical tradition is aiming for conceptual unity, whereas the dialectic tradition is trying to describe processes and courses.

<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky 1972, chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## "The dialogical word"<sup>6</sup>

The child receives knowledge about the world in a dialogue together with other people.

... any function in the child's cultural development appears on stage twice, on two planes, first on the social plane and then on the psychological, first among people as an intermental category and then within the child as an intramental category.<sup>7</sup>

The child learns the cultural methods, the different ways of thinking and behaving. Reading and writing are typical examples of cultural methods.<sup>8</sup> Learning is a social process, which means that the child becomes part of the general culture, which can thereby be said to be social. The dialogue between a child and an adult reflects a meeting between the different experiences of the adult and the child. The adult challenges the child's thinking through language, because the adult's language and words do not have the same meaning as the child's. The relationship between the child's developmental process and learning is dialectic. "What a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow," Vygotsky writes.<sup>9</sup>

Vygotsky uses a concept which reflects his dynamic approach to knowledge: "zone of proximal development". It covers the cultural changes in society which influence our way of thinking. Moreover, the word "proximal" indicates that man has a freedom of choice. On the other hand, he must be challenged. "The only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development," Vygotsky writes.<sup>10</sup> When dealing with the issue of learning and development, Vygotsky is critical of Piaget's view of development as a process separated from external learning—a form of self-regulation.<sup>11</sup>

Consciousness is developed as an internalization of social communication.<sup>12</sup> According to Vygotsky, language and action are intertwined, and any contact with the objects, the environment, always takes the shape of a dialogue with another person.

<sup>6</sup> "The dialogical word" alludes to Bakhtin's dialogic perspective in which the word is regarded as being part of many contexts, and corresponds with Vygotsky's approach. See e.g. Zinchenko, Davydov 1985 viii f. and Kozulin 1990, p. 180 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Vygotsky 1960, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Vygotsky 1981, p. 37 and 1978a, chapter 8.

<sup>9</sup> Vygotsky 1978b, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Hydén 1988, p. 77. He shows that Vygotsky's approach differs from that of Leontiev, who regards active action (practice) as the materialistic base for consciousness. Vygotsky places active action in the mediation process, i.e. using language to form conceptions of the world, and gives the *word meaning* as the analysing unit applied by consciousness. Rubinstein (1946/1973, p. 339) accused Vygotsky of idealism. In his interpretation of Vygotsky, Wertsch (1985a) introduces "tool-mediated action" as a compromise between the supporters of the theory of activity and Vygotsky. See also Zinchenko 1985; Kozulin 1990; Engeström 1987.

The path from object to child person.<sup>13</sup>

Vygotsky also describes consciousness are related to one another at different ages, and will function and perception as the child are thought and language.<sup>14</sup> Meaning means that something time.<sup>16</sup> It is the unit of the communicative, and on an intercommunicative and a cultural dialogical, and man is commu

Consciousness is reflected in to consciousness as a living the universe. A word is a m.

"The dialogical word" means text belongs to the context. The influence can be analyzed as simple stimulus-response patt

## An all-embracing cul

### The importance of art

In my opinion, Vygotsky's theory can be explained by its ship to art and literature. When human consciousness and soc

"The Psychology of art" discusses experiences and interprets art to Vygotsky, and art is what is on from merely being reprodu

Art is the organization of o  
Without art there can be no

<sup>13</sup> Vygotsky 1978a, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Vygotsky 1986, chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Vygotsky's view of the role of the word" 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Vygotsky 1986, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>18</sup> Vygotsky 1971, p. 253 and 259.

Vygotsky finds the current theories of art too narrow and inadequate, as they tend only to explain certain aspects of art.<sup>19</sup>

This is why it is important to develop a theory of art which is connected to human consciousness on the whole. For this reason, Vygotsky describes the relationship between emotion and thought as crucial to his theory of art. He claims that people's emotions are influenced by the aesthetic form of the work of art. As opposed to everyday emotions, there is an aesthetic emotion, which results in a delayed action and which inspires people to interpret and express their experiences. The aesthetic form is of decisive importance and requires interpretation. A military march will only result in rhythmic marching, whereas a sonata by Beethoven, with its complicated form, will cause contradictory reactions, creating a more powerful experience and interpretation. This, Vygotsky claims, shows there is a close connection between emotion and thought. The need for interpretation brings the emotion up to a conscious level. This statement was partly a reaction to psychoanalytical theories, which separate the conscious from the unconscious. Man produces his interpretation within the scope of culture. He can in this way become part of a culture, and culture can become available to his personal interpretations. Art provides man with a knowledge of society's cultural symbols, which have various meanings. Both when art is being created and when it is being interpreted, it serves as a meeting place for the personal and the social. Amongst other things, this means that art introduces the most personal and intimate aspects of our way of thinking into the sphere of social life. In a way, Vygotsky writes, art is the antithesis of everyday life, as it releases aspects we would otherwise not experience. Art is crucial to man's creative thinking.

## The correspondence between the internal and the external

The dialectic theory is a materialistic theory: the external, or man's activity, is reflected in his consciousness, the internal. Vygotsky's term for this is correspondence, a description of the nature of the relation. There is a correspondence between the internal and the external, but this is not merely a mechanic mirror image. In "The Psychology of Art", Vygotsky illustrates how the artistic

<sup>19</sup> In "The Psychology of Art" (1925) 1971, Vygotsky tries to develop an unambiguous approach to the creation and reception of art. His aim is to unite all aspects: the intention of the author, time, background, the form, content and symbols of the literary work as well as the reader's experience and interpretations of it. He is critical of the prevailing theories of art of that time, especially the idealistic theory, but also the psychoanalytical and the extremely formalist theories. The introduction to the book contains a comment made by V.V. Ivanov, where he points out that the psychology of art is the beginning of the cultural historical theory with cultural signs as its key concept. Marxist research tradition claims that "The Psychology of Art" remains within the scope of Western European aesthetics, and lacks all relevance to Marxism. See e.g. Hydén 1981, p. 12. This has meant that "The Psychology of Art" has been neglected in the analysis of the cultural historical theory. In Sweden, the issue of aesthetics has been neglected in the social sciences.

forms influence man's thought role when Vygotsky describes cultural historical theory. The imaginary process, is described Vygotsky has been inspired by aesthetic form. The Russian writers, Chukovsky and Prokofiev, ideas, which will be more n

## Imagination and reality

"There is a dynamic system and intellectual processes", short book called "Imagination which has so far only been treated in analyses of Vygotsky's work. Vygotsky regarded the connection between emotion and thought this brings to the fore the internal which clearly states that reality but that also the internal process

According to Vygotsky, reality, but there is a dialectic tension—an ability to combine more than one. It is based on elements

<sup>20</sup> Vygotsky's contact with the Russian aesthetic form of the work of art. The literary theory, which was active for it affiliated itself with the structuralist. See Aspelin 1970; 1971; Wertsch 1985.

"Device" is a key concept to form plot). The fairy-tale morphology described West. In "The Grammar of the Imaginary the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, developed

One of the most important forms Brechtian "Verfremdung"). The purpose the perceptibility of life. This includes "From Two to Five" from 1975, a literature, describing how "probably Hellman's book "Children's books Vygotsky in the latter's analyses of 1971 given the opportunity of creating theories have been "revived" both in literature in Sweden have, for example Kolajeva 1992, on intertextual analysis Vygotsky 1986, chapt. 1.

In his article "To the History of Ideas in the Age of Enlightenment and the Enlightenment as the source of creativity wh

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... le when Vygotsky describes the nature of the process of consciousness in the  
... ltural historical theory. The interpretation process, which Vygotsky calls the  
... maging process, is described as artistic creativity, and it is obvious that  
... Vygotsky has been inspired by his literary analyses and his interest in the  
... aesthetic form. The Russian formalist school, with representatives such as Ba-  
... khtin, Chukovsky and Propp<sup>20</sup>, has inspired some of Vygotsky's concrete  
... ideas, which will be more noticeable at a later stage in this thesis.

## Imagination and reality

"There is a dynamic system of meaning in the form of a unit between affective and intellectual processes", Vygotsky writes.<sup>21</sup> He deals with these issues in a short book called "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood" (1930)<sup>22</sup>, which has so far only been translated into Italian, and which is rarely included in analyses of Vygotsky's approach to knowledge. This book describes how Vygotsky regarded the creative process of the human consciousness, the link between emotion and thought, and the role of the imagination. To Vygotsky, this brings to the fore the issue of the link between reality and imagination, which clearly states that reality is not only to be regarded in an external sense, but that also the internal processes are real.

According to Vygotsky, there is no opposition between imagination and reality, but there is a dialectic relationship. Imagination is a form of consciousness—an ability to combine—which is connected with reality in more ways than one. It is based on elements taken from reality, which means that:

<sup>20</sup> Vygotsky's contact with the Russian formalists was partly responsible for his interest in the aesthetic form of the work of art. The Russian formalists was a movement based on linguistics and literary theory, which was active for a short period of time (1915-1930) in the Soviet Union before it affiliated itself with the structuralist movement within the sciences of linguistics and literature. See Aspelin 1970; 1971; Wertsch 1985a; Ivanov 1971; Kozulin 1990.

"Device" is a key concept to formalists, and it includes the plan of structure of the narrative (the plot). The fairy-tale morphology developed by Vladimir Propp has been very influential in the West. In "The Grammar of the Imagination", G. Rodari 1988, who was one of those who inspired the Reggio Emilia pedagogy, develops several of Propp's ideas in the art of telling a story.

One of the most important formalist devices is "defamiliarization" (well-known through the Brechtian "Verfremdung"). The purpose of art is to alienate, enhance sensitivity and re-establish the perceptibility of life. This includes the interest in nonsense, the absurd and parody. In his book "From Two to Five" from 1975, Chukovsky asserts the role of the imagination in children's literature, describing how "probable improbabilities" break up the established order. See also Hellman's book "Children's books in Soviet Russia" from 1991. Michail Bakhtin has inspired Vygotsky in the latter's analyses of the fable in "The Psychology of Art". In a dialogue "the word" is given the opportunity of creating new meanings through its inexhaustible potential. Bakhtin's theories have been "revived" both in Eastern and Western Europe. Researchers into children's literature in Sweden have, for example, recently started taking an interest in his theories. See Nikolajeva 1992, on intertextual analyses.

<sup>21</sup> Vygotsky 1986, chapt. 1.

<sup>22</sup> In his article "To the History of Ideas of Human Imagination", 1993, Skoglund points at a line from the Age of Enlightenment and Diderot, via Ribot, to current popular ideas of human imagination as the source of creativity which tallies with Vygotsky's approach.

The creative activity is directly dependent upon the individual's experiences, and the extent and degree of variation of these experiences ... This is why the imagination of the child is poorer than that of an adult, because of their differences in experience.<sup>23</sup>

In order to influence the child's imagination, its reality must first be expanded. Imagination and reality are one another's prerequisites.

Imagination is not the antithesis of memory; it supports itself on memory and is using its contents in forever new combinations.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to using elements from the individual's own experience, imagination also uses elements of other people's experiences (social and historical). These indirect experiences are also based on combinations of imagination and features from reality.

Emotion and imagination are closely related, Vygotsky writes. Emotions result in an imaginary process and vice versa. Emotions are also closely related to reality.

Every emotion takes shape and corresponds to notions ... of certain impressions, thoughts and images which are related to the mental mood of every given moment.<sup>25</sup>

The images of our imagination provide our emotions with an internal language. The reverse is also true: the emotions influence our imagination.

Every imaginary construction influences our emotions ... to such an extent that the emotion which has been kindled by our imagination is an emotion which has really been experienced in such a way that it has affected the entire individual.<sup>26</sup>

Emotions are always real and true. In this way, Vygotsky claims, emotions are linked to reality.

Also completely new products of the imagination, which do not correspond to any existing models, will belong to reality once they take shape and become as real as any other object, and in turn influence their environment. This shows that Vygotsky experiences art (fiction) as real, and this is the conclusive difference between him and his social realistic followers.

Imagination describes a circle. It takes fragments of reality and transforms them, the new fragments take shape and re-enter reality. Imagination is both emotional and intellectual, and that is why it develops creativity.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

## The imaginary process

The imaginary process is a complex of impressions, concentrations, exaggerations and meanings.

The impressions which originate in relation to its natural dimer exaggerations, which can also be influenced ... the influence which our imagination has generated.<sup>28</sup>

Children's interest in the absurd with the creative process in the ordinary form can be found in child return to in connection with Vygotsky, the exaggerations of the imagination, since what it amounts to is links. This is an obvious indication of his general theory of construction of the aesthetic form of the Russian formalist approach.

Calling the imaginary process imagination is limited by the external basis for the construction and reality go together.

Creativity is a continuous, historical process.<sup>29</sup>

Vygotsky's opinion throughout is that the more experienced the imagination and creative. Vygotsky have a more vivid imagination than an attitude.

This attitude, which claims that stems from a lack of demand, an attitude that children have a more u

Instead, Vygotsky writes, we know that the child's imagination is as versatile as that of an adult. The child's imagination, as adults do, is often mistaken for vi

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

## The imaginary process

The imaginary process is a complex of transformations, distinctions, regroupings, concentrations, exaggerations and shrinkings which create new combinations and meanings.

The impressions which originate from reality will alter in nature, grow or shrink in relation to its natural dimensions. The kind of passion which a child has for exaggerations, which can also be encountered in adults, can be traced far, far back ... the influence which our internal emotion exerts ... of viewing it from an exaggerated angle.<sup>28</sup>

Children's interest in the absurd, the topsy-turvy and fabulous is connected with the creative process in the consciousness, its aesthetic form. This imaginary form can be found in children's play, and this is a point I would like to return to in connection with Vygotsky's approach to play. According to Vygotsky, the exaggerations of the imagination are equally important to art and science, since what it amounts to is the ability of recognizing new, unforeseeable links. This is an obvious indication of how Vygotsky's theory of art has influenced his general theory of consciousness. Furthermore, Vygotsky's description of the aesthetic form of the imaginary process has been influenced by the Russian formalist approach.

Calling the imaginary process an internal movement does not imply that the imagination is limited by the external environment—on the contrary, it provides the external basis for the creative process. In Vygotsky's eyes, imagination and reality go together.

Creativity is a continuous, historical process in which every form is dependent on the previous one.<sup>29</sup>

Vygotsky's opinion throughout is that imagination and reality belong together, and that the more experienced man is, the greater are his possibilities of being imaginative and creative. Vygotsky polemizes with the opinion that children have a more vivid imagination than adults, and states that this is too convenient an attitude.

This attitude, which claims that children can create everything from anything, stems from a lack of demand, and this lack of requirements leads to a misconception that children have a more unfettered and vivid imagination.<sup>30</sup>

Instead, Vygotsky writes, we know that a child has had far less experiences than an adult, and that the child's relationship to its environment is in no way as versatile as that of an adult. Children's inability to think rationally, like adults do, is often mistaken for vivid imagination.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 45

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

When it comes to imagination, a child's ability to imagine things is less developed than an adult's, but the child believes more in the fruit of its imagination and has less control over it ... not only the working material ... is less extensive than an adult's, but the way in which the child combines this material, as well as the quality and variety of it is inferior to the combinations of an adult.<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, Vygotsky regards creative imagination as an "omnipresent" activity, which will continue to affect our whole lives, as much on a personal and social plane as on a speculative and practical one.

## Vygotsky's approach to play—an aesthetic, cultural theory

The basis of my analysis is the lecture on play which Vygotsky held as late as 1933 in the then Leningrad, a lecture which is later published (1966)<sup>32</sup>, but which retains its hypothetical nature, and is open to a multitude of interpretations. The fact that this lecture is often mentioned and referred to in different contexts shows that many play researchers, also in the West, have considered and do consider it a central text to the research into play. In Soviet psychology, this text was the introduction to research into play on the basis of children's socialization. When Elkonin (1988) summarizes Vygotsky's ideas, he adds that there is more to these theses than research in the Soviet Union has so far been able to look into, and that they should therefore be elucidated further.

Vygotsky's article is permeated with his dialectic approach which makes it somewhat difficult to pick up the main thread<sup>33</sup>, since his arguments overlap. Below I will discuss three main issues, and for each one, I will draw a comparison between Vygotsky's approach to play and that of Leontiev/Elkonin.

### Why do children play?

In his article, Vygotsky claims that children play to satisfy their needs and motives, and not, as many Western play researchers of that time would claim, simply because they enjoy it or to get rid of surplus energy, etc.

To Vygotsky, play is to a large extent a matter of the dialectic relationship between will, emotion and intellect. This in itself means that Vygotsky is seeking an all-embracing theory. Play is "the imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires". It is separate from everyday life and "imagination is a new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child ... and represents a specifically human form of conscious activity ... child's play

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Vygotsky 1966. See also Hydén 1981; Elkonin 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Heimsohn & Kneiper 1978.

is imagination in action ..." ever, isolated wishes but get

This shows that it is in play the adult world, in this way the child's distance to its emotion and by the fact that it is living a fiction.

Chukovsky (1975) presents their way of breaking with the child who stubbornly kept saying "no", simply to face "the need" endows something with the passion for, or rather passion for, imagination in children's play, according to its connection with the poetic art.

Vygotsky writes that play is not isolated wishes, but a main emphasis placed on the important Vygotsky's theory resembles an obvious difference between play merely as a pleasurable activity and other activities which give more than play<sup>38</sup>, and secondly because the word, comprising both elements that it is the interplay between development of imagination in play, e.g. Freud's and Piaget's

Trying to intellectualize play is one-sided as only emphasizing

Without a consideration of the child's ability to act ... there will never be a

Of course, play is a matter of imagination. It is pleasurable in at least two ways. Following the line of least resistance, it makes it link play with pleasure. Following the line of greatest resistance,

Vygotsky 1966, p. 7-8.

Ibid., p. 8.

Chukovsky 1975, p. 162.

Kozulin 1990, p. 216 (cf. point 1).

For Vygotsky's view on primary processes see Vygotsky 1966, p. 6.

Ibid., p. 7.



... ability to imagine things is less developed in the fruit of its imagination and material ... is less extensive than an adult combines this material, as well as the imaginations of an adult.<sup>34</sup>

... imagination as an "omnipresent" force in the lives, as much on a personal level as on a social one.

... aesthetic,

... which Vygotsky held as late as his later published (1966)<sup>32</sup>, but which led to a multitude of interpretations and referred to in different ways in the West, have considered play. In Soviet psychology, play is seen as a basis for child development. In Vygotsky's theory, he summarizes Vygotsky's ideas, he argues that the Soviet Union has not yet fully elucidated

... the approach which makes it possible since his arguments overlap with one, I will draw a comparison between Leontiev/Elkonin.

... to satisfy their needs and desires of that time would claim, such as energy, etc.

... of the dialectic relationship between means that Vygotsky is seeking an illusory realization of unmet needs and "imagination is a new activity of the very young child ... child's play

is imagination in action ...".<sup>34</sup> "Play is essentially wish fulfillment, not, however, isolated wishes but generalized affects."<sup>35</sup>

This shows that it is in play the child starts maintaining its will in relation to the adult world, in this way creating a conscious form for its actions. In play, the child's distance to its environment is characterized both by its self-assertion and by the fact that it is liberating itself from the actual situation by creating a fiction.

Chukovsky (1975) presents a vivid example of children's self-assertion and their way of breaking with the established order of things when he tells of the child who stubbornly kept saying that the dog is the animal which says "mi-aow", simply to face "the most important humoristic principle—that which endows something with the very opposite traits of real life".<sup>36</sup> This aptitude for, or rather passion for, improbabilities and inversions is an intrinsic part of children's play, according to Chukovsky. At a later stage, I will describe this in connection with the poetic and musical patterns of play.

Vygotsky writes that play liberates the emotions, and it is mainly these emotions which create a fiction. The child expresses its wishes, which are however not isolated wishes, but a matter of generalized emotions. Because of the emphasis placed on the importance of emotions, Heinsohn & Kneiper (1978) find Vygotsky's theory reminiscent of the theory of psychoanalysis,<sup>37</sup> but there is an obvious difference between Vygotsky and Freud. To Vygotsky, defining play merely as a pleasurable experience is not plausible; firstly because there are other activities which give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play<sup>38</sup>, and secondly because play is a matter of need in the wide sense of the word, comprising both emotion and thought. Vygotsky's explanation is that it is the interplay between emotions and intellect which gives rise to the development of imagination in play. He emphasizes a link where other theories of play, e.g. Freud's and Piaget's, have emphasized detachment.

Trying to intellectualize play and children's development in general is as one-sided as only emphasizing emotion.

Without a consideration of the child's needs, inclinations, incentives, and motives to act ... there will never be any advance from one stage to the next.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, play is a matter of pleasure, but it is a contradictory pleasure. Play is pleasurable in at least two different respects, one being that the child is following the line of least resistance, doing what it feels like doing, which makes it link play with pleasure. "At the same time, [the children] learn to follow the line of greatest resistance, for by subordinating themselves to rules

<sup>34</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Chukovsky 1975, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> Also Kozulin 1990, p. 216 ff. points out certain similarities between Vygotsky and Freud as concerns the view on primary processes (Freud) and nonmediated processes (Vygotsky).

<sup>38</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

...” and “renunciation of spontaneous impulsive action constitute the path to maximum pleasure in play”.<sup>40</sup> Vygotsky calls this one of the paradoxes of play.

The form of play (its rules) and the child’s command of this form provide a feeling of pleasure and excitement. This line of thought is the same as when Vygotsky describes the aesthetic feeling which results in delayed action. The child is able to control its actions, and to assert itself in relation to the adults.

### Comparison between Vygotsky and Leontiev/Elkonin

Vygotsky’s emphasis on dialectics, between the worlds of adults and children, between emotion and thought, and between will and emotion, has not been developed in Leontiev/Elkonin’s interpretation of children’s play.

Leontiev even criticizes Vygotsky’s opinion that play is the child’s way of maintaining its will (unrealizable tendencies). He claims that play is rather a result of children’s inability to assume the roles of adults. When they fail to carry out adult actions, they create a fictitious situation, and this situation is the most important characteristic of play.<sup>41</sup> It means that there are no elements of hostility or conflict between the worlds of children and adults, and the child gradually familiarizes itself with the adult world. Play faces the future. Adult roles are what children play, and adults are what children model themselves upon.

This interpretation shows that Leontiev thinks of play as a reproduction of the roles featured in the adult world. This has made the Soviet pedagogy of play emphasize the harmonious relationship between adults and children (as opposed to the dualism of Western pedagogies of play), which has encouraged an ideological approach to children’s play where adults are supposed to serve as models to the children. Heinsohn & Knieper (1978), amongst others, have criticized this approach for being “play intervention oriented” and preventing the children from acting out their feelings of fear and anxiety, etc. The adults enter the play and correct it. Play is interpreted as a realistic phenomenon, and there is no conflict between the reality and the children’s interpretations in play.

Heinsohn & Knieper’s have a psychoanalytical approach, but also Vygotsky with his dialectic standpoint regards play as a way for children of expressing feelings and asserting themselves in relation to adults. However, at the same time, he senses a longing on the part of the children to move closer to the adult world. This is neither dualism nor harmony—this is dialectics.

### What is characteristic of play?

#### a) *Play creates meaning*

Play develops children’s consciousness. In addition to the role of play in the children’s emotional development process, it also helps them form their own ideas of the world. Play is the activity where a meeting takes place between internal ideas and external actions. Thus, this is the meeting between the

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 13–14.

<sup>41</sup> Leontiev 1977, p. 530.

child’s inner self and the outside world. The child with a general understanding thinks and creates its own ideas.

The thinking process develops in play because a meaning is created. Play reflects the process of meaning. The child acts on the object and from the situation. Play is always a generalization, and it is language and thought.

In play activity thought is rather than from things.<sup>42</sup>

Play is a matter of meaning<sup>43</sup>.

A symbol is a sign, but the meaning is retained but their meaning. Thus, in play the child creates a meaning—the meaning of the child’s behavior [the child’s] behavior.

Rather than being a symbol, the attitude corresponds with Chukotka in playing with language. and turns. According to Chukotka a metaphorical one.

Piaget (1962), for one, describes Piaget does not view language as an in him the ability to discover sudden realization. In contrast claims that children’s early, play. Contrary to the system of play primarily fulfils individuality against the adult world as a way of thinking (assimilation), play is not of crucial importance, but a way of confirming it.

<sup>42</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> “*Smysl*” is the Russian word which objects and actions. It roughly corresponds to “meaning”, “significance”, “sense” and “value”.

<sup>44</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ragnerstam 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Elkonin, 1988. Piaget’s theory is “lower world” theory, where the lower world deals with the upper one reflects the logic and reality.

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### Elkonin

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child's inner self and the outer world. It is imagination in action. Play provides the child with a general understanding of the world as well as with an ability to think and create its own ideas.

The thinking process is a creative process—an imaginary process—which develops in play because a real situation takes on a new and unfamiliar meaning. Play reflects the process in which the visual field moves away from the field of meaning. The child is able to separate meaning from the concrete object and from the situation. Language constitutes consciousness, the word is always a generalization, and the word meaning is the common denominator to language and thought.

In play activity thought is separated from objects, and action arises from ideas rather than from things.<sup>42</sup>

Play is a matter of meaning<sup>43</sup>, not of symbols. Play is not symbolism.

A symbol is a sign, but the stick is not the sign of a horse. Properties of things are retained but their meaning is inverted, i.e. the idea becomes the central point ... Thus, in play the child creates the structure <sup>meaning/object</sup>, where the semantic aspect—the meaning of the word, the meaning of the thing, dominates and determines [the child's] behaviour.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than being a symbol, the word becomes a property of the thing. This attitude corresponds with Chukovsky's (1975) description of children's interest in playing with language. Language turns into a toy, which the child twists and turns. According to Chukovsky, children have a literal outlook on life, not a metaphorical one.

Piaget (1962), for one, describes play in terms of symbol play. However, Piaget does not view language as a mediating process for the thinking. Instead, he describes thinking as an internalization of logical actions. Consequently, to him the ability to discover significance and meanings in symbols becomes a sudden realization. In contrast to conventional linguistic theories, Piaget claims that children's early, playful symbols are very personal constructions. Contrary to the system of symbols which adults have collectively agreed on, play primarily fulfils individual needs.<sup>45</sup> More than anything, play is a protection against the adult world and a less conscious intellectualizing, a subjective way of thinking (assimilation). Children are pre-logical, and, according to Piaget, play is not of crucial importance in the development of children's thinking, but a way of confirming their egocentric thinking.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> "Smysl" is the Russian word which Vygotsky uses in his discussion of meaning in relation to objects and actions. It roughly corresponds to the range of notions covered by the English words "meaning", "significance", "sense" and "purport".

<sup>44</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ragnerstam 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Elkonin, 1988. Piaget's theory is criticized for its dualism, and interpreted as a "two-world theory", where the lower world deals with the subjective and egocentric (reflected in play), and the upper one reflects the logic and reality of the social surroundings.

To Vygotsky, language and action are intertwined. Language is the tool (mediator) which interprets the world. In play, the linguistic meaning prevails and forms the focus of the dynamic relationship between idea and action which is so typical of play. Vygotsky (1978a) criticizes Piaget, amongst other things, for his approach to action as a process parallel to and independent of language.

Vygotsky regards play as a creative imaginary process, and he states this early on in his book "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood": "... it is the most genuine and effective form of creative activity".<sup>47</sup> Play reflects the dialectic relationship between memory (reproduction) and imagination (creativity), but the most characteristic thing of play is that it is never pure reproduction, it is a creative action.<sup>48</sup>

... [Despite imitation] such elements of earlier experiences are never merely repeated in play in exactly the same form as they were experienced in reality. Play is not a simple visual picture of experienced impressions, but a creative reproduction of these, a process in which the child combines elements from these and creates a new reality which corresponds to its needs and curiosity.<sup>49</sup>

#### *b) The form of play is aesthetic*

In play, a dynamic meeting takes place between rules, which have been decided by meanings and behaviour in the situational action, and the desires which the child gives the form of play, where it is at liberty to try its own ability in accordance with its own will. The action when playing pirates will be decided by what is regarded as typical pirate behaviour, but the child is playing the pirate and carrying out his actions in accordance with its own feelings and capability.

The child's internal wishes are expressed in action. "Internal and external action are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action."<sup>50</sup> This affects the form of play, so that actions can for example be abbreviated, and when children play, one day may pass in 30 minutes, and 100 miles may be included in five steps. In "The Psychology of Art", Vygotsky provides an example of how the form of play corresponds to the imaginary process, or the aesthetic form of the fairy-tale.

First, there is the early presence of special structure required by art, which points to the fact that for the child there exists a psychological kinship between art and play ... the child very early adopts the correct structure, which is alien to reality but required by the fairy tale, so that he can concentrate on the exploits of the heroes and follow the changing images.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup> Initially, play is more of a memory than imagination, Vygotsky writes in his article on play. For this reason, reading his comments about the relationship between reproduction and production in his book "Imagination and Creativity in the Childhood" is elucidating.

<sup>49</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Vygotsky 1971, p. 257.

Play has an aesthetic form, and follows its course. The elements have the same characteristic traits as the absurd, the improbable,

When it comes to children's abilities, the most common

A child who sees a train play the role of the engine in a multitude of ways.<sup>52</sup>

In Vygotsky's eyes, drama wants to visualize things, and the vague and obscure gain

Drama is linked to play and to play which is the origin of the most differing forms of play to children. It opens doors to creativity.<sup>53</sup>

Children can compose the accessories: scenery and costumes join together.

Vygotsky emphasizes the different forms. The drama pedagogy Bolton analyses drama in a dialectic relationship, or in play, when meaning prevails and actions are charged with emotion.

Since play creates meaning on the same level, and can never be compared the same way as art, Vygotsky regards it as a part of everyday life. The rules are not fixed. This freedom of self-determination—a passion—of an artist, but revels as a player to dramatize as well as its

Vygotsky points out the form of play by emphasizing play (contents) and the rules

<sup>52</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> Bolton 1979, p. 20 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 14.

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Play has an aesthetic form, and it is largely the aesthetic emotions which influence its course. The elements of transition, exaggeration and shrinking are the same characteristic traits as in the imaginary process, along with the interest in the absurd, the improbable, pointed out by Chukovsky amongst others.

When it comes to children's creative abilities, the dramatic and the literary abilities are the most common, according to Vygotsky.

A child who sees a train for the first time will dramatize this performance. It will play the role of the engine, it bangs, whistles and tries to imitate what it has seen in a multitude of ways.<sup>52</sup>

In Vygotsky's eyes, drama is related to play. Like when playing, the child wants to visualize things, even if they appear vague and lacking in contours. The vague and obscure gains shape and becomes manageable.

Drama is linked to play more directly and more closely than any other form of art; play which is the origin of every child's creativity and includes elements from the most differing forms of art. This is partly what makes dramatization so valuable to children. It opens doors to and provides material for different sides of their creativity.<sup>53</sup>

Children can compose the text, improvise the roles and prepare the scenic accessories: scenery and costumes, which they can paint, stick on, cut out and join together.

Vygotsky emphasizes that the form of play corresponds with the artistic forms. The drama pedagogue Bolton is one of those who has observed Vygotsky's way of relating drama to play. Play and drama are fictitious actions. Bolton analyses drama in terms of internal and external actions, and it is this dialectic relationship, or inversion, he encounters in Vygotsky's description of play, when meaning prevails over objects and actions, and when, moreover, actions are charged with emotional meaning, i.e. dramatic.<sup>54</sup>

Since play creates meaning, it will not simply reflect reality on a surface level, and can never be confused with a realistic portrayal of an action. In the same way as art, Vygotsky writes, play is like a photographic negative of everyday life. The rules are not moral rules, they are rules for self-determination. This freedom of self-determination is part of the form of play. It is a strong feeling—a passion—of an ambivalent nature. "The child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player."<sup>55</sup> The form of play challenges the child's ability to dramatize as well as its creativity.

Vygotsky points out the dynamic relationship between the contents and the form of play by emphasizing the dialectic relationship between the fiction of play (contents) and the rules (form). In addition to this, play follows a certain

<sup>52</sup> Vygotsky 1972, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> Bolton 1979, p. 20 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 14.



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"The Great Play" 1985.

reality have a common structure, this reproduction is possible, and internal  
action will develop from the external action.<sup>62</sup>

According to Leontiev, children's internal conceptual world, their imagina-  
tion, cannot start functioning as the basis for dramatic or imaginary play until  
they are at the age when they move from preschool to school. This is when  
play starts resembling the productive activity to which the result is essential.  
Instead of reproducing role actions, the child starts trying to "make a complete  
reproduction of the objective contents of a certain role".<sup>63</sup> Dramatic play is the  
transitional form preceding aesthetic activity.

Leontiev's social-realistic interpretation of play becomes even more appar-  
ent in his opinion of imaginary play. To Leontiev, the point of interest is the  
external action, not the children's imaginary world. Besides, he interprets the  
situation from the visual picture of the author, and not from the experience the  
children had at the time:

One example of imaginary play can be the beautiful description of a game chil-  
dren play in an old calash in L.N. Tolstoi: the children climb into an old, deserted  
calash. They take their seats and "travel" in their imagination. In this play like  
this, there is no action, no rules and no tasks. Nothing but the external situation--  
a forgotten calash--bears a witness to this activity which turned into proper play.  
But this is no longer play; it is a dream, an infatuation. The children are only  
appreciating the imaginary picture. This picture results in poignant and pleasant  
feelings, which in turn are intensified by the picture. The play motive has moved  
towards its product: the play died down and the dream was born.<sup>64</sup>

There is an obvious difference between Vygotsky's dynamic and Leontiev's  
realistic views on play. To Vygotsky, longing is important, whereas Leontiev  
if anything regards it as an obstacle for the action. Vygotsky sees no opposi-  
tion between reality and imagination, but regards play as the creative interpre-  
tation process where imagination is both a prerequisite for and a result of the  
play action. The more experience, the better the imagination. Play is a meet-  
ing between the internal and the external, and emotion colours the interpreta-  
tion to the same extent as the external reality. The internal emotion exists as a  
reality.

### The role of play in children's development

Vygotsky regards play as the most important source of development of  
thought, emotion and will.

Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal develop-  
ment.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Leontiev 1979, p. 131

<sup>63</sup> Leontiev 1982, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Vygotsky 1966, p. 16.

The child is expansive and challenges its own thinking in play; it "is always above [its] average age, above [its] daily behaviour; in play, it is as though [the child] were a head taller than [itself]"<sup>66</sup>

Since the child is able to create an imaginary or fictitious situation, this should be regarded as a means of developing abstract thinking, Vygotsky writes. Consequently, play is the predominant form, praxis, for preschool children, and in Soviet preschool pedagogy, play has indeed had this predominant role.

In 1933, Vygotsky held a lecture on education and development of preschool children. It contains the starting-points for the work on a preschool programme, and was written during the same period as his article on play.

For children of a preschool age (3-7), education should be "something between" spontaneous and formalized education, according to Vygotsky, who expresses himself as follows: "If the preschool child is able to do what the teacher wants it to do, then the child's situation can be explained in the following way: the child does what it wants, but it wants to do what I want it to do".<sup>67</sup> In short, this means that the child learns things to such an extent as the programme becomes its own.

Preschool children are developing the ability to generalize. Also emotions are generalized. The value of a situation is decided by its significance or meaning, and the child is creative in its actions, since it is able to move from idea to action.

A preschool programme should include general concepts of the subjects which will later be taught at school. The programme should not follow the logic of these subjects, but deal with general conceptions, as the child, according to Vygotsky, creates its own explanations and theories.

When reading the article on preschool activities, Vygotsky's approach comes across as strikingly modern, and his reflections on preschool pedagogy as equally close to the role of play in children's development, viz. that children create their own programme (meaning), that emotions and conceptions are generalized and that the child's actions are creative. Furthermore, the child has the ability to formulate its own interests and make its own choices.

### Comparison between Vygotsky and Leontiev/Elkonin

With respect to the importance attached to play as a pedagogic tool, there is no major difference between Vygotsky and his followers. Play has had a dominating position in Soviet preschools. On the other hand, the social-realistic approach, which has permeated the entire Soviet society, also has a firm hold on play, and the national preschool curricula have emphasized adult controlled play and the need for moral themes in play from the very beginning.<sup>68</sup> This development is in contrast to Vygotsky's theses on children's need to assert themselves and their creative imagination. In fact, his books were banned shortly after his death, which is a clear indication that his ideas were controversial.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Vygotsky 1982, p. 91.

<sup>68</sup> Köhler 1980.

## The Preschool as Modern Society an Aesthetic App

The psychological theories of pedagogy do not seem to have taken course.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, nature struggle. The romantic view of self-regulation, still has a presence which I have described at the end when it comes to the approach of their attempts to avoid mass-media in schools and preschools (see also (1990) there seems to be a battle also between different generations part of the sphere of interest in schools nevertheless try to avoid will not allow mass-medial television and playing electronic developing media and different only serves to reinforce the exist in preschools. As a result isolated from the rest of the world

Vygotsky's cultural historical terms, which means that the child the surrounding culture. I find Ziehe (1986; 1989) provides a modern children as well as a modern society.

<sup>1</sup> Frønes 1990; Hultqvist 1990.

<sup>2</sup> See also Cohen 1972, who coined



## Thomas Ziehe's cultural analysis as part of the critical theory

According to Wertsch (1985a)<sup>3</sup>, Vygotsky's approach and the critical theory show certain similarities. In the same way as Vygotsky is seeking an all-embracing theory, in which the role of the individual is emphasized in relation to the surrounding culture, the critical theory is also seeking a "whole" when it unites an individualist (psychoanalytical) and a social (Marxist) perspective, whilst keeping both under critical observation.

Like many others, the German pedagogue and socialization researcher Thomas Ziehe is trying to map out and establish theories which describe how the human subject is influenced by modern trends in society. In other words, he is analysing the fate subjectivity suffers in society.

Childhood is a different matter today, Ziehe (1986) says. At the same time as an increasing subjectivity has created a growing need for intensity, the ego has become more sensitive and vulnerable. This contradiction stems from two parallel processes in the individual, viz. a "cultural detachment" and a "mental detachment".

The cultural detachment can be explained by the changes in society. The relationship to history has changed. Tradition plays a less important role. The capitalist system has resulted in an exploitation of the bourgeois culture and its traditions, or what in earlier generations used to belong to a private sphere. The result of this is that our subjects change and become "societylized", as Ziehe puts it. This cultural detachment means that the consciousness changes. Since tradition is being watered down, people start experiencing their individuality in a different way, and every one has to make their own interpretation of their current situations, since the subjects are lacking a common interpretation of life and meaning, the one which lies hidden away in tradition.

According to Ziehe, the social and cultural changes also affect the more profound personal structures. Ziehe talks about a narcissistic disturbance, when the ego is characterized by ambivalence and vulnerability. These days, the narcissistic phase has changed. Less importance is attached to family bonds and to the role of the authoritative father. Social institutions, such as preschools, now play a more important role in children's socialization process, which means that the natural liberation from the mother (or the mother figure) has not taken place. It is difficult for the child to establish its own identity. The meaning of childhood has changed radically. Children who are subjected to "secondary experiences" (through television, for example, which provides an insight into most phases of life) are forced to grow up. They are both precocious and immature at the same time. Narcissism signifies self-reflection and insecurity when faced with the ego, but at the same time, it entails a freedom to look for different ways of life in order to find an identity—a "mental detachment".

<sup>3</sup> See also Kozulin 1990, p. 190 ff., where he emphasizes Vygotsky's critical approach to dogmatic Marxist psychology.

Ziehe emphasizes it when he says:

... knowledge is less pictorial and as unlearned knows about every

Ziehe's cultural concept "life forms" and "life forms" Ziehe to create. "Life forms" context, which "makes life worlds exists".<sup>5</sup> In communicative action. interpret children's theoretical-cultural approach to ers from the Nordic c which shows e.g. in children's actions on a approach to study their regulated through differ the basis for interpreting experience on the basis Vygotsky's concepts of consciousness lies in the hi

The need to be able to more and more urgent fragmentary and that th with modern technolog ularly important in the meaning. Hundeside's de out, bears obvious reser play. Children are basic meaning—a conscious

## The critical analysis of institutions

Ziehe is critical of the c contrary, he sees in mo cultural modernization

<sup>4</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 16 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas 1988, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Hundeside 1989, p. 123.

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Ziehe emphasizes the ambivalence (one of the key concepts in his theory) when he says:

... knowledge is less formalized, not so much a result of training as multifarious, pictorial and as unlimited as it is fragmentary and lacking in context. The child knows about everything before it has the chance to experience things itself.<sup>4</sup>

Ziehe's cultural concept is of cultural anthropological origin, and includes "life forms" and "life worlds"; concepts which Habermas, for one, inspired Ziehe to create. "Life world" is the interpretative background, the underlying context, which "makes sure that the link between objective, social and subjective worlds exists".<sup>5</sup> Habermas describes "life world" in relation to human communicative action. Also Hundeide (1989) uses the concept "life world", to interpret children's thinking and their actions. Hundeide represents a historical-cultural approach to children's development, and he is one of the researchers from the Nordic countries who has been inspired by Vygotsky's ideas, which shows e.g. in his criticism of Piaget's theory. Instead of interpreting children's actions on a basis of logical criteria, Hundeide uses a theatrical approach to study their ways of acting. Children play roles, and the interplay is regulated through different rules and contracts. "An internal theatre constitutes the basis for interpretation, which means that we interpret or construct our experience on the basis of these prototypes," Hundeide writes.<sup>6</sup> Referring to Vygotsky's concepts of dialogue, Hundeide claims that the origin of consciousness lies in the human dialogue.

The need to be able to interpret experiences in a meaningful context appears more and more urgent in the light of the fact that children's knowledge is fragmentary and that the amount of information is growing faster and faster with modern technology. This is, in my opinion, why children's play is particularly important in the society of today, since play can create contexts and meaning. Hundeide's description of children's life world, their actions carried out, bears obvious resemblance to my interpretation of the dramatic actions in play. Children are basically, theatrical, or dramatic, and in play they can create meaning—a conscious world.

### The critical analysis of schools and preschools as institutions

Ziehe is critical of the changes in society, but he is not a traditionalist; on the contrary, he sees in modern society a great potential for development. The cultural modernization which has emerged after the Second World War is char-

<sup>4</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 16 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas 1988, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> Hundeide 1989, p. 123.

acterized by secularisation, mobility and consumerism—partly as a result of the development of capitalism—and has meant that old traditions are now less important in relation to the bourgeois culture. These changes have been described by Ziehe (1989), and he also relates them to the school as an institution. When traditions change, this means the school will change; it will lose its "aura"<sup>7</sup> and become an impersonal and administrative system. With the lack of common values and traditions, organization becomes the dominant feature. Cultural life has been rationalized, which has meant de-traditionalized but also rendered meaningless. During the 1960's and 1970's, a social-democratic surge of modernization swept across the continent and influenced the school, Ziehe writes, and the result was democratization, but also increased bureaucratization. Culture and economy have walked hand in hand. In the 1980's, a neo-conservative wave of modernizations speeded up the bureaucratization by calling for rationalizations at the same time as it was trying to trace and reintroduce old traditions. The preschool experienced a "Fröbel wave" which was very probably a result of the nostalgia and the planning rage which signified the increasing bureaucratization. The wave of institutional changes carried out at the beginning of the 1990's is an even more obvious sign.

At the same time as the institutions have lost their "aura", they have been faced with a more and more important task in our society—that of shaping individuals. Despite their air of impersonality, they have become responsible for providing continuity and context. It is, above all, the role of the school which interests Ziehe, but in my opinion, his argument is equally applicable to the preschool.

The preschool tradition is considered obsolete by many people. Attempts to revive the Fröbel pedagogy almost come across as pathetic, and when a general attempt was made at introducing themes as a working method at the end of the 1980's, the void became obvious.<sup>8</sup> The only known model was the one which belonged to the old preschool tradition. There did not seem to be any natural cultural content to focus on, and many people perceived modern culture as threatening. There was a general fear of chaos.

Day-care centres have often been planned without any imagination whatsoever. A typical room in a day-care centre is characterized by straight lines, large open spaces; by regularity. "There is no scope for either surprises or enthusiasm," Andersen and Kampmann<sup>9</sup> write in their analysis of the preschool. Day-care centres are institutions where time and order prevail. This linear approach to time comes into conflict with the subjective way in which children experience time and space. The tempo is speeded up, and the children feel rushed, Rasmussen writes in his book "Time for Children and Time for Adults" (1990). This strengthens the impression that childhood has no value in itself, and that it is merely a necessary stage for moving on. "Being a child

<sup>7</sup> "Aura" is linked with the tradition created by culture; the cultural inheritance.

<sup>8</sup> Lindqvist 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Andersen & Kampmann 1990, p. 56.

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<sup>10</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen & Kampmann 19

<sup>12</sup> Ehn 1983, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 71 ff.

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means having to wait," Ziehe writes.<sup>10</sup> Children are totally dependent on the adult understanding of time.

Not only are children dependent on the adult understanding of time, they are also dependent on the adult understanding of order. "Any order which is being established is always an adult understanding of order. Its function is to serve as protection against the world of children, which, in the eyes of an adult, is characterized by a lack of order and purpose, unpredictability, anarchy and chaos," Andersen & Kampmann write.<sup>11</sup>

In his cultural analysis of a day-care centre, Ehn (1983) describes how the fear of chaos and anarchy made the staff seek refuge behind regulations and norms. The institution is a "cool world in between the over-heated family and the frosty public life."<sup>12</sup>

The above criticism can also be viewed in relation to Olofsson's (1991) and Bae's (1985) criticism of the preschool for its lack of experiences and life (cf. chapt. 2). They observed that the adults failed to see the activities from the children's point of view, which resulted in an emotional gap between adults and children. Dencik et al. (1988) present a similar picture of preschools in the book "Children's Two Worlds", where they have found that the contact between adults and children seems to be characterized by "mechanical caring". The preschool seems to be impersonal and lack "aura" to a very high extent.

## The need for an aesthetic approach in schools and preschools

How can the preschool and the school be turned into living institutions? Some critics recommend that a close relationship be created between teachers and pupils in order to counteract the feeling of impersonality. This closeness, Ziehe writes, is often a "false closeness"<sup>13</sup>, which has its basis in everyday life and not in the institutional world. This kind of closeness will not create a living relationship, but a therapeutic one, he continues. Psychologization is not the opposite of objectification; if anything, it is the other side of the same modernization process. Establishing emotional relationships with each and everyone in a preschool class is no way of neutralizing the impersonal. The institution can never turn into a home. Lost as they are when faced with modern society, these critics often base their ideas on the concept of feeling at home and on the commonplaceness which the institution is able to offer. Presumably, Schrader-Breyman's "motherliness" is still the underlying ideal.

"Intensity" is what is needed instead of "closeness", according to Ziehe. Intensity is the opposite of closeness, and can be created when children and

<sup>10</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen & Kampmann 1990, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ehn 1983, p.52.

<sup>13</sup> Ziehe 1989, p. 71 ff.

adults (teachers and pupils) meet one another in a defamiliarized form of punctate concentration. "Defamiliarization", which Vygotsky emphasized as a fundamental part of thinking, is one of the main characteristics of modernism.

Ziehe states that there is a call for an aesthetic approach, or "paradigm". In modern society, there is an expressed interest in aesthetic signs and forms of expression. Aesthetics is particularly valuable as a way for the ego to create a distance between itself and its experiences. Ziehe wishes to see a pedagogic approach, which unites consciousness and playfulness (pleasure) with solidarity. Ziehe warns that "closeness" will contribute to the destruction of everyday life. The sociability of the institutions is dissolved, and the public life becomes private. Institutions such as schools and preschools need to be interpreted as a public space—neither objectified nor made intimate. Teachers and pupils meet on a social "stage", which needs to be made aesthetic. The teacher will make the pupil eager to face the unknown. Instead of setting out from the pupil's everyday life (subjective) or from the environment (objective facts), the meeting takes place in a defamiliarized space, where there is scope for new meaning. Everyday life (and even very small children have had the time to gain a lot of experience) is being deconventionalized, which does not mean a retreat from reality, but creating new approaches and ways of dealing with the new experiences.

Teenagers of today show a keen interest in aesthetics. Music and pictures are part of everyday life, vital ingredients in their lives. Nor does teenager culture make a division between high and popular culture.<sup>14</sup> Also very young children show an interest in aesthetic signs. Dencik (1992) describes how a 5-year old child will feel at ease in the new media reality. She is able to combine television, telephone and video in an inter-linked communicative network, which she monitors in such a way that it serves her purposes of creating new experiences. Dencik writes that children of today are able to handle a chaotic reality in which they can combine curiosity and a quest for knowledge with a critical approach. They need to be able to see their reality from different angles in order to avoid believing in definite truths. They need to be creative.

Ziehe (1989) is strongly convinced that the cultural modernization could lead to "abstraction and contingency gains", which would mean new thematization opportunities, new ways of interpreting the world, new horizons of possibilities. The result would be a cultural mobility open to contexts, with scope for everyone to make their own interpretations.

The aesthetic subjects play a special role when it comes to interpreting the world in a new and different way. Art and rationalization go together, according to Ziehe. The aesthetic form is necessary for making knowledge come alive. We need something radically new and unusual to become aware and start reflecting. The aesthetic subjects are able to provide this unusual and artificial aspect—in the most positive sense of the word.

<sup>14</sup> Fornäs 1989.

The Norwegian pedagogy, an aesthetic approach in education and pedagogy, with self-construction. The children's self-regulation and texts are pushed to the side. It provides cultural counterpart to mere consumption of products. It is able to be creative, child forms and codes. Quality and learning go together, Dale claims. It is developing personal interest found in children's play, a historical theory.

The general point which children learn to act according to means, that play promotes play with social meaning also in the adult life, means

On the basis of such that play and games for children as well as adults which I concur in, is the source of personal development

<sup>15</sup> Dale 1992, p. 156.

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The Norwegian pedagogue Dale (1990; 1992) presents a similar demand for an aesthetic approach in schools. An aesthetic theory is needed within teacher education and pedagogy, Dale writes. Modern identity projects are connected with self-construction. This proves that it is time to dispel the myth of children's self-regulation and free development, where the social and cultural contexts are pushed to the side. According to Dale, it is vital that education provides cultural counterparts, or a kind of "product aesthetics" will take over: a mere consumption of products, which is one-dimensional and uniform. To be able to be creative, children need to be able to reflect and master aesthetic forms and codes. Quality and competence are required. Art and rational thinking go together, Dale claims, and calls for liberating pedagogy with scope for developing personal interpretations. To Dale, the basis of creativity is to be found in children's play, and he supports his theory with Vygotsky's cultural historical theory.

The general point which I wish to emphasize in connection with Vygotsky, is that children learn to act according to their will and based on their own decisions. This means, that play promote the will and creativity of the subject. Yes, they learn to play with social meaning, actions and disguises—and this is a positive feature—also in the adult life, may I add.

On the basis of such considerations, play is a source of development. I claim that play and games show decisive structures for man as a creative subject—children as well as adults. And one of the main perspectives in Vygotsky's theory, which I concur in, is that teaching should be an internal continuation of play—a source of personal development for the pupil.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dale 1992, p. 156.

Part II  
The Project

## Research Method and Interpretation

### Vygotsky's method of "double stimulation"

In order to learn more about the potential of developing play towards a conscious cultural thinking, it is necessary to study complex and qualitative changing processes. According to Vygotsky, one way of conducting such a study is using a "functional method with double stimulation".<sup>1</sup> This methodology concentrates on the child's cultural development, and not on its biological maturity process, Kozulin writes.<sup>2</sup> As a contrast to a simple stimulus-response situation, this method is aiming at bringing the internal processes into the light, or "objectifying" them. This means deliberate influence or intervening in a situation in order to study how the people involved will solve different problems with new tools. This gives an indication of their potential development. Vygotsky's method should naturally be regarded as a reaction to the behaviouristic experimental psychological methods of his time (the 1930's), which merely studied simple connections and external behaviour. However, the most interesting aspects with respect to the current situation are his ideas of studying potential development and regarding research as a means of intervening, which makes didactic studies particularly well suited to research into development processes.

The education experiment has become a well-developed method within the cultural historical school of thought—a further development of Vygotsky's methodology.<sup>3</sup> The education experiment can be said to represent a form of action or intervention research, where everyday situations are systematically intervened, and an educational perspective is combined with a research perspective. In short, new methods of education are being tried within the frame of a pedagogic research programme. An example of one such study carried out in one of the Nordic countries is the Danish project "Education in Schools", in which Hedegaard (1988) has studied how pupils' thinking can be developed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vygotsky 1978, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Kozulin 1990, p. 137. In the West, the method is commonly known as "Vygotsky's block-test", a method used to study children's conceptual thinking, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> According to Markova 1982, p. 74 ff., and Davydov 1989, p. 268 ff., this method is called "education experiments".

<sup>4</sup> Hedegaard 1988, p. 89–90.



Also Malmgren & Nilsson (1993) have united education and research perspectives in their didactic research into the teaching of literature to children between the ages of 10 and 12. On a basis of general progressive pedagogic principles, they have tried different methods (contents and forms) as part of the regular teaching. The researcher and teacher have developed the methods and followed the course of the project together.

## Using a didactic project as research method

To a large extent, Vygotsky's approach became my guideline when it came to planning and organizing the play pedagogic project. Letting the project assume the form of a didactic experiment or project made it possible to deliberately try different ideas of studying the connections between children's play and creative subjects or cultural, aesthetic forms. What potential did the play have for developing? To what extent did the adults function as "mediators" in their dialogue with the children? How would it be possible for children and adults to meet in a world of play? What was the nature of the dialectic pedagogic process in the meeting between culture (the context) and the different play forms (texts)?

Being able to try out ideas under normal circumstances, i.e. at a regular day-care centre, was important. How can a creative pedagogy of play be created as part of the regular activity? Moreover, trying out different ideas, both as regards form and content, would be valuable for discovering variations and have a chance at following different pedagogic development possibilities. This is why I chose to work with *three* classes in the same day-care centre, so as to be able to compare my results and form a wider base for making interpretations and drawing conclusions.

## Method of documentation

Being *part* of the process provides a unique opportunity to follow what is happening. At the same time, this requires an ability to reconstruct the course of events and document the process itself in a comprehensive, all-round way. It is a matter of approaching the process from different angles and aspects, and keeping a distance to one's own personal interpretation.

I have chosen the following *methods* of studying the pedagogic process:

1. Videotape the *planned* dramatizations and *organized* play sequences as a basis for pedagogic interpretation and analysis.
2. Follow the general development by:
  - visiting each class regularly, keeping a journal
  - having discussions with children and adults
  - taking part in teacher-parent meetings
  - having regular contact with the head of staff.
3. Reading the project reports from the different classes.

The most important organized play. These registers the authentic dramatizations and follow from start to finish, usually taking place. Since I review it, analyse it in the project themselves, however, points out that they are under observation. In this project, however, a problem compared. Contrariwise, both and see what has been

In order to form classes, I visit regular my observations in to be able to reconstruct this, I have regular in day-care centre as an going activities. More project reports. I use books on qualitative non through different angles.<sup>5</sup>

## Interpretation and

Empathy and an ability important when applying

Qualitative research possible as its part

Understanding the qualitative interpretation make the *text*—the didactically describe the processes of both children which in some way reproduced in a drama:

<sup>5</sup> Holter & Kalleberg 1982;  
<sup>6</sup> Sherman & Webb 1988, 1

ation and research perspectives of literature to children beyond traditional progressive pedagogic forms (texts and forms) as part of the project. I have developed the methods and

## Method

As a guideline when it came to setting the project assumptions, it was possible to deliberately try to influence children's play and creative activities. What role do the "facilitators" in their dialogue with children and adults to meet in the pedagogic process in the project play forms (texts)? How can play be created as a space for different ideas, both as regular variations and have different possibilities. This is done in the day-care centre, so as to be able to make different interpretations

to follow what is possible to construct the course of events in a wide, all-round way. It is important to consider different aspects, and

pedagogic process:

Play sequences as a

The most important features of the project are the dramatizations and the organized play. These constitute the actual *text*, and for this reason, being able to register the authentic course of events is important. Videotaping the planned dramatizations and organized play will enable me to follow a course of event from start to finish, analyse the dialogue and action, and describe what is actually taking place. Since the data has been recorded, it means that I can keep it, review it, analyse it from different angles and let people who are not involved in the project themselves interpret the play sequences. Corsaro (1982), however, points out that the risk when videotaping is that the adults may feel that they are under observation, which could have a negative effect on the activities. In this project, however, the presence of the video camera is not much of a problem compared with the pressure of dramatizing roles before an audience. Contrariwise, both adults and children are able to watch the tapes afterwards and see what has been recorded and how they acted.

In order to form an opinion on the general activity and atmosphere in the classes, I visit regularly, afterwards making a note of conversations, summarizing my observations in a journal. This should provide me with enough material to be able to reconstruct the course of events in broad outline. In addition to this, I have regular meetings with the head of staff, who is always present at the day-care centre as an initiated, but nevertheless objective, observer of the ongoing activities. Moreover, I compare my own observations with the classes' project reports. I use a form of *triangulating* (a key concept in several handbooks on qualitative research methods) which documents the same phenomenon through different sources which approach the same thing from different angles.<sup>5</sup>

## Interpretation and analysis

Empathy and an ability to describe people and events in a genuine way are important when applying a qualitative research method.

Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the connections between play and aesthetic forms requires a qualitative interpretation of the detail and complexity of the activities. I have to make the *text*—the dramatizations and playing—come alive to be able to authentically describe the course of events to illustrate the emotions and experiences of both children and adults. This requires an "aesthetic" interpretation, which in some way reflects the form of the original text (a dramatic text is reproduced in a dramatic way) as a basis for the rational analysis. This analysis

<sup>5</sup> Holter & Kalleberg 1982; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983; Patton 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Sherman & Webb 1988, p. 7.

is made in the light of the *pedagogic principles* which I described earlier, and which have been inspired by drama pedagogues, Vygotsky's play pedagogic analysis and Ziehe's criticism of the school.

## Model for analysis

The pedagogic interpretation and analysis is based on a dialectical model and reflects the dynamic connections between play and culture:

Culture  $\leftrightarrow$  play. Consequently, in this process the interpretation is based on two different aspects: A) *an adult perspective*, and how the adults and children in the three sections together make a conscious effort to create a *playworld*, or a shared culture (context), and B) *children's play* (the text), and its connections with different cultural, aesthetic patterns.

A) What form does the pedagogic process take, when the adults create a playworld in the respective sections? What content becomes meaningful? How is the *meaning* established, or, in other words, how is a common fiction developed between children and adults? Play is a fictitious world, a fact emphasized by both drama pedagogues and play researchers. When using *playworld* as a concept, I mean the fictitious world (context) which children and adults come to share when they interpret and dramatize the theme in the classes. What does this shared world look like? In this respect, my analysis takes the general interpretation process as its starting-point instead of concentrating on the individual children and their development. Still, each individual child and adult contribute towards the common interpretation and dramatization of the theme. Do the three classes have different approaches to culture? If so, in what way does this influence their different interpretations of the playworld?

What *roles* do the *adults* play in the pedagogic process? To establish this, I examine the adults' ability to create a *dialogue* and share things with the children, their playfulness, etc. In what ways can they give life to the dramatizations and play? What roles do the *literary content* and *dramatic forms* play in the process of developing play?

What is the nature of the actual interpretation process, when the adults dramatize the theme content; in other words, what does the imaginary process or transformation process look like as the playworld and *meaning* emerge? To analyse the interpretation process, I use the same model as I used to analyse Vygotsky's approach to play earlier. How important is the *aesthetic emotion* when it comes to developing imagination in play; in what way do the *aesthetic forms* (literary, dramatic, musical, etc.) influence the play development, and in what way does *language* (the narrative) provide new possibilities for interpretation?

B) When taking *children's play* as the starting-point for my analysis, I use the drama pedagogic concepts of *world*, *action* and *character*.<sup>7</sup> I seek a link

<sup>7</sup> Lindqvist 1993.

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## A play pedagog

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In my analysis, I use *text*.<sup>7</sup> I seek a link

between the pattern of play and cultural, aesthetic forms. Through interpreting and analysing both play based on typical *play actions* (such as *adventurous journeys*) and play based on different *characters*, I have found out how play develops and how important the aesthetic forms and context are to the different classes, and also how play can turn into conscious dramatizations.

## A play pedagogic project

One day at the end of January 1991, Jan Lindqvist and I arrived at the day-care centre Hybelejen in the centre of Karlstad to inform the staff about the *theme work* which would form the basis for our play pedagogic project. The main reason why we chose Hybelejen was because the head of staff, Agneta Englund, had become interested in our play pedagogic ideas when taking part in some further education courses at the University of Karlstad. Besides, there were already a couple of preschool teachers at Hybelejen who had tried working with literature and drama in minor theme projects during their training period. *Hans* had dramatized "Alfie Atkins" for very small children, and *Kristina* had had "ghosts" as a theme in one group for several weeks. Despite the fact that the earlier attempts made during training programmes had given ample proof that a deliberate pedagogy of play could influence children's play ("Alfie", for example, had inspired the children to try out the roles together with the adults, and made them take an interest in books) we were convinced that to be able to develop children's play, the cultural aspect would need to permeate the entire section. Otherwise, the theme would still not be linked with nor able to influence the rest of the activities.

For this reason, our *aim* was to suggest that we introduce an all-embracing theme, of an open nature, so that the pedagogues at the day-care centre would feel free to make their own interpretations and dramatizations of the contents, and yet have the support of the substantial theme running all through the activities.

We received a warm welcome at Freja, Valhall and Oden as we entered the day-care centre's new premises. Both the head of staff and the staff members were people who really gave life to their surroundings, but the actual premises were impersonal and could easily be confused with any other day-care centre in Sweden, and it was impossible to tell whether you were at Freja, Valhall or Oden. This made the criticism of day-nurseries as anonymous (cf. chapt. 4) seem justifiable. These premises could contain more or less any kind of activity. The kitchen and the main play room were situated next to one another, and there was a large glass pane in the partition wall. This gave the feeling that the adults could be in the kitchen and still watch over the children playing in the main room. The fact that this very "window" later came to play an important role for creating an atmosphere goes to show that it is always possible to change and give life to the surroundings.

Hybelejen is a large day-care centre. There are six classes with a total of 84 children and 35 adults. There is also a cook for each class.<sup>a</sup> The history of the day-care centre is worth mentioning. It was built at the end of the 1970's as a large "residential day-care centre" in an area called Balder.<sup>b</sup> The classes Freja, Valhall, Oden and Loke<sup>c</sup> got their names at this time. The residential day-care centre was to be run on democratic principles—small units without age segregation and set duties for staff members. Different tasks would be carried out by rotation.

Ten years later, when the premises had become too small and the organization was unwieldy, the day-care centre moved to another area called Hybelejen. It now occupies the ground floors in three tower blocks. Each class occupies a flat with a kitchen, a main play room and three smaller rooms (a paint room, a mattress room and a dolls' room). The activities are based on a model used by many other day-care centres in Sweden: theme work for a couple of days a week, and in connection with this, different activities in cross-section groups. Outings and singing songs have their own allotted times. The original four classes are extended "sibling groups" (0–6 years), whereas the two new groups will only accept babies and toddlers (0–3 years). The main reason for this is simply that most of the new arrivals are babies and toddlers.

<sup>a</sup> January 1991.

<sup>b</sup> In Scandinavian mythology, Balder was the god of light.

<sup>c</sup> Similarly, Freja was the goddess of love, Oden was the supreme god and creator, god of victory and of the dead, Loke was a mean giant who had been admitted into Valhalla, the hall in which those who had died in battle feast with Oden for eternity.

Our intention was to challenge the institution, at the same time as we made use of the opportunities provided through its alien and anonymous character. Artificial surroundings are actually very suitable for creative activities. It enables the participants to meet in the aesthetic dimension, or something defamiliarized, as Ziehe calls it. Singing songs together, reading nursery rhymes and play-acting is often easier to do in a collective, public environment than in the family. Through the theme work, we wanted to give life to the institution, to let children and adults meet in a common playworld by creating the setting and dramatizing the action together. Charging the environment with emotions would fuel and inspire the imagination of both children and adults.

The theme would be based on the *form of play* (its aesthetics) and the correspondence between drama, literature and play—something which had been emphasized by both Vygotsky and drama pedagogues. Literature would provide the basic structure, and through a dialogue with the children, the adults were to bring the literature to life by assuming different roles and make use of the intrinsic dynamism between world, action and character in drama and play.

### The theme

We had sat down around the kitchen table, and Jan started explaining the theme, "Alone in the big, wide world":

"Loneliness is one of the small children who have to hours and hours every day seems dark and you feel a feeling of *security* is one of how fear can be made feel secure means that you i.e. the 'reverse' of security ble that the children can places—under the bed. One traits, as she is both scared

Fear has a brother whom man in Samuel Beckett's p surd—he is at the mercy of by a whistle. He is never at ceiling before his very eye: ognize this situation? We a cerns all ages, and that an a close to children's thought around us. We would like teachers perform 'Act with Jan turns to look at *Hans*, v

"The man in 'Act without hensible. Being small and world around you. In Tove realize how important se Moomin family, with the k inappa, and Moomintroll make her reappear. Ninny h with. The lady has been iro

We thought that "The Inv since this is a form of thea to the Moomin Valley and : puppets will make it possil lems presented. At the san with puppets, and the child themselves. This will enla Play-acting for children is the adults will be the media the Moomin world, both el and moving out into the big natural step.

"Who will comfort Toff which is parallel to our the

classes with a total of 84 children.<sup>8</sup> The history of the day-care of the 1970's as a large "residential" classes Freja, Valhall, Oden and a special day-care centre was to be a place of segregation and set duties to be carried out by rotation. The centre is so small and the organization is in an area called Hybelejen. It now occupies a flat with a kitchen, a paint room, a mattress room and a play room used by many other day-care centres days a week, and in connection with other groups. Outings and singing classes are extended "siburs" which will only accept babies and imply that most of the new

light.  
the supreme god and creator,  
the man who had been admitted  
to the battle feast with Oden for

at the same time as we made  
the child an anonymous character.  
and anonymous character. It en-  
riches creative activities. It en-  
riches, or something defamil-  
iarizing nursery rhymes and  
the familiar environment than in the  
life to the institution, to let  
the child by creating the setting and  
the environment with emotions  
for children and adults  
(and the child's aesthetics) and the corre-  
sponding something which had been  
the child's. Literature would pro-  
vide the children, the adults  
in different roles and make use of  
the character in drama and play.

the man started explaining the

"Loneliness is one of the most important existential questions, especially for small children who have to leave their parents to go to the day-care centre for hours and hours every day. Moreover, winter is the season when it always seems dark and you feel more lonely. Many people claim that providing a feeling of *security* is one of the most important preschool *aims*, but the question of how fear can be made tangible is far more challenging. Being able to feel secure means that you must be aware of the various shapes fear assumes, i.e. the 'reverse' of security. We want Fear to take shape and become so tangible that the children can actually meet her in one of her favourite hiding places—under the bed. One of the adults will play Fear and portray her typical traits, as she is both scared and frightening.

Fear has a brother whom no one can contact unless they whistle. This is the man in Samuel Beckett's play 'Act without words'. To this man, life is absurd—he is at the mercy of a world without meaning, and his steps are directed by a whistle. He is never able to reach the decanter which is lowered from the ceiling before his very eyes. We are wondering whether the children will recognize this situation? We are convinced that culture is something which concerns all ages, and that an absurd play (from an adult point of view) should be close to children's thoughts on and experience of the inexplicable things around us. We would like to try this idea out by letting one of the preschool teachers perform 'Act without words' before all the children." At this point, Jan turns to look at *Hans*, who brightens up.

"The man in 'Act without words' is totally alone and the world is incomprehensible. Being small and alone can also mean that you are invisible to the world around you. In Tove Jansson's story 'The Invisible Child', we come to realize how important solidarity and togetherness can actually be. The Moomin family, with the kind Moominmamma and the self-absorbed Moominpappa, and Moomintroll and Little My, take care of the invisible Ninny and make her reappear. Ninny has not been treated well by the lady she was staying with. The lady has been ironical.

We thought that 'The Invisible Child' could be performed as a puppet show, since this is a form of theatre which enables us to quickly transport ourselves to the Moomin Valley and also technically show Ninny's transformations. The puppets will make it possible for the children to keep a distance to the problems presented. At the same time, the adults will gain experience in playing with puppets, and the children will be able to play with the different puppets themselves. This will enlarge the existing family of dolls in the dolls' room. Play-acting for children is a way of letting them be part of art and culture, but the adults will be the mediators. Hence, the next step is to take a joint step into the Moomin world, both children and adults together. Spring is drawing near, and moving out into the big, wide world to seek adventure and togetherness is a natural step.

'Who will comfort Toffle?' is another story by Tove Jansson, with a plot which is parallel to our theme's introductory stage: Toffle is lying at home in

his bed, feeling very scared and lonely. To escape his fear, he leaves his house at dawn. But despite the fact that he feels slightly less scared, he is still unhappy and lonely. Not until he has saved Miffle from the horrible Groke does he feel strong and secure—strong, through the togetherness with Miffle.

The idea is that we try a technique in which the illustrations from the book (copied onto over-head film) are projected onto the wall with an over-head projector. In this way, children and adults will be able to dramatize scenes, try out different characters, experience the illustrations, paint, draw, dance, act and play together. The poetic story, with its illustrations and its language, will offer a vast scope for interpretation, and together, children and adults will be able to examine the different worlds. Each illustration is a world of its own.

The atmosphere in the Moomin Valley is Nordic, and when spring comes, the doors to nature open wide. This means that the day-care centre can locate a lot of its activities outdoors. Adventure awaits, with adventurous journeys of various kind. This does not have to be imaginary travelling, it could just as well be a real boat trip to one of the islets in Lake Vänern, or a train journey to Arvika.

Tove Jansson's 'The Dangerous Journey' features the perspective in reverse. To the main character Susanna, the journey becomes a way of escaping a catastrophe. A balloon comes and takes her back to safety—to Moomin Valley. The different classes will be able to build their own means of transport: a balloon, a train or a boat.

Since the day-care centre is called Hybelejen, and the area it is situated in has the same name, could this not be a reason to find out who Hybelejen really was? According to folk-tales, Hybelejen was a creative man with an unusual genius, and he is said to have been the brain behind several of the inventions and constructions in Karlstad from this time. Also the writer Selma Lagerlöf was intrigued by his fate, and she wrote about him in her book 'The Story of Gösta Berling'. There, he goes under the name of Kevenhüller and sets light to a building, amongst other things.

This mixture of fairy-tale and reality should characterize the theme work, and we want to show that imagination and reality are not opposites, but dependent on one another for their existence. The theme 'Alone in the big, wide world' should be like a weave, where the different parts are intertwined. The complexity of the literary text—the *story*—should signify the theme. This means that the aspect of loneliness should always be present in the adventurous journeys, at the same time as the individual child is naturally sociable and in search of togetherness. The theme should be characterized by the contradictions, or dialectics, in life. The different parts of the theme only succeed one another on the surface. Really, they represent different views of the same reality. The theme is a cultural world, in which children and adults can experience new things and develop their awareness of the world, which can then be expressed in play."

I am not exaggerating, when I say that the atmosphere was growing more

and more expectant as Jan pedagogues at Freja want balloon. The pedagogues children would react, who whelmed and wanted to ha these spontaneous reaction ent classes: Freja was quite the actual activities; at Vall the staff had different are focus was placed on the fo was Oden, where the acti expressed interests and wl ever meant that sometime Furthermore, a couple of ti up at Oden, which could a

After a long discussion, ing a plan for our future p the staff by participating activities at the day-care c planning to videotape dra that I would be happy to meetings.

My first analysis of th forwarded as a report to t had partly financed the pr meant to serve as a basis f

Birgitta Sohlman from (UR) also took an interes duced seven 15-minute le method for Child-care TV the project. Moreover, th second meeting with Mox

The idea was to run the with the classes Freja, Va folk-tales ("The Wishing autumn under the theme ' them the next step toward one.

These were the three cl a couple of days a week :

In practice, what happ

<sup>8</sup> Hybelejen financed part of the normal budget.

<sup>9</sup> This was shown in spring 199

were more or less engaged in the project, and after the end of the 12-month period, our play pedagogic method had become practice at Hybelejen, which has meant that our co-operation continued. We have proposed new themes, and Jan has continued to supervise dramatizations in the classes. The result is that I have been able to follow the development for quite a long time, some four years now, even if my presence at Hybelejen has not been as intensive as during that first year.

## CHAPTER 6

# Creating a P

This chapter describes their own *playworlds*. It follows the development of the themes they develop. I follow the dialogue with the children in their cultural context.

In this and the following chapters, I follow the dramatizations and play

### Freja—a feeling

At Freja, there are 14 children: seven girls. The two oldest are (four boys, two girls). At the beginning of the year, about to start school in September, three youngest were at

There are four adult staff. In the first month, *Karin*, who works in the kitchen.

The activities at Freja include dramatization, and the section on using unconventional materials. The activities is not always the same thing. There are two activities asserting their competence in an equally unclear dist