

A.A. LEONTIEV

The Life and Creative Path of A.N. Leontiev

1. Childhood and youth: The university years

Aleksei Nikolaevich Leontiev [Leont'ev] was born in Moscow on February 5, 1903 (February 18 by the Old Style Calendar). He died on January 21, 1979, approximately two weeks short of his seventy-sixth birthday.

His father, Nikolai Vladimirovich Leontiev, descended from a family of the petite bourgeoisie from the Pankrat'evskaia neighborhood of Moscow and worked in finance, specializing in the film distribution business (e.g., in 1932 he worked in the financial administration of *Soiuzkino*). To be more precise, this is who he became during the Soviet period—who he was before the revolution was not advertised for understandable reasons (on forms, A.N. wrote that his father was a “clerk” before the revolution), but it is known that the family was well-to-do. However, not for long. In the mid-1930s, Nikolai Vladimirovich was arrested by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) (and legend has it that this was on direct orders of the people's commissar, Yagoda); his fate, and perhaps his life, were redeemed by his wife at the price of all the family jewels. No one else bothered N.V., and he continued to work

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Translated by Nora Favorov.

peacefully in the cinematography system and was even head of the finance department of the Ministry of Cinematography of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic [RSFSR], although according to his employment record, he had only an elementary education. This is unlikely. In photographs of him at the age of fourteen, it is clearly visible that he is wearing a school jacket—probably the uniform of the Commercial College. Nikolai Vladimirovich spent the last years of his life in retirement. He left behind two published books, again on issues of planning in the cinematography industry.

The father of N.V., and grandfather of Aleksei Nikolaevich, Vladimir Dmitrievich, was also listed as a *petit bourgeois* and appeared to have been a merchant. Before they married, his wife, Maria Vasil'ievna, a Roma, lived in a Gypsy community, and it is from her that Aleksei Nikolaevich got his rather typical Gypsy appearance. (He recalled that in Moscow during the 1930s he met a famous Indian anthropologist. After a little while, the anthropologist inquired whether by some chance Leontiev might have any Indian ancestors?) Portraits of both men have been preserved by the family. Also preserved is a postcard sent by Vladimir Dmitrievich in 1905 to "His Honorable Aleksei Nikolaevich Leontiev," his two-year-old grandson. . . . From this postcard we know the Leontievs' address during that time: Laskovskaia Building, apt. 10, Medvezhii Lane, Nikitskii Gate, Moscow. (Judging by the church in which he was christened—the Cathedral of the Savior in Nalivki—A.N. was born outside Moscow in Zamoskvorech'e, located between Polianka and Iakimanka.) Then they moved to someplace quite nearby—Bashkirov House on Skatertnyi Lane. Thus, the Leontiev family lived for nearly fifty years in the same district, near the Nikitskii Gate.

A.N.'s mother, Aleksandra Alekseevna, bore the name Ivanova before her marriage, coming from the Nizhnii family of a Volga steamship operator, that is, she was also from the merchant class. Family legend has it that this steamship operator was a merchant of the first guild and by special imperial decree had been granted nobility. What is puzzling, however, is that according to the same legend, he was given the name of Ivanov at that time.

A.N. graduated from the First Specialized School of Science at the corner of Volkhonka and Gogolevskii (Prechistenskii) Boulevard, across from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. This building now houses the Russian Academy of Science's V.V. Vinogradov Institute of Russian Language. It is easy to account for the fact that he actually graduated

from a unified labor school. According to his own memoirs (from the scholarly autobiography he started and then abandoned, a fragment of which has been used as the epigraph here), he graduated “somehow or other . . . a year earlier than he should have,” and then worked for a short time as an office clerk (revised: “did odd jobs”). The next few years, from 1918 to approximately the beginning of 1921, the Leontiev family history is obscure—there is reason to believe that A.N. intentionally bent the truth when, in filling out many forms, he claimed that during the Civil War he was *not* in territory occupied by the White Guard. In any event, at the beginning of the 1920s, the Leontievs had already returned to Moscow.

A.N. decided to enter the university. There was no specialization in psychology offered; there was a school of historical philology with a philosophy department, which was soon transformed into the FON—the Faculty of Social Sciences. A psychology institute headed by Georgii Ivanovich Chelpanov was part of this school. However, documents provide contradictory information: according to an official “certificate” given to Leontiev by the university in 1926, he entered Moscow State University (MGU) in 1922 and graduated in 1925, and in 1926 he passed the graduation examinations (“was subjected to the examinations of the State Qualifying Commission”) and defended his thesis (“qualifying work”). But in one of his autobiographies, A.N. indicates that he was a student from 1921 to 1923 and graduated ahead of time at the end of 1923. In forms filled out in 1949 and 1972, the years as a student at MGU are listed differently—1921–24. In his oral recollections, Leontiev said that he was expelled from the university in the spring of 1923, and then graduated from the university, taking examinations without attending classes. The reason for this, according to the recollections of A.N., was a student prank. Leontiev asked the lecturer in philosophy, A.I. Udal'tsov, a provocative question—how the respected lecturer regarded the works of a certain Wallace, a psychologist basing his theories in biology, and overall an anti-Marxist. Is it necessary to explain that there was no such person named Wallace? Nonetheless, Udal'tsov—afraid of revealing a lack of familiarity with the name of Wallace—gave a detailed and entirely Marxist characterization of this phantom person. As a result, the inquisitive student was expelled. . . .

(In his stories about himself there seemed to be one more reason for his expulsion. In filling out one of the numerous forms, A.N., in answer

to the question, “What is your attitude toward Soviet authority?” supposedly wrote the following: “I consider it a historical necessity.” . . .

Evidently, he was an exceptional student—even after such an incident, they kept him at the university “to prepare for work as a professor,” the equivalent of what today would be a doctoral candidate. He attended the lectures of Georgii Ivanovich Chelpanov, who gave a course in general psychology in the school of social sciences, and who has already been mentioned (he is well known as the founder of the Institute of Psychology, which still exists in the same building on the campus of the old university on Manezh Square); the philosopher Gustav Gustavovich Shpet, who after many decades of obscurity has again become popular (as Leontiev recalls, Shpet taught the History of the Concept of Form—“this course would come out ahead in a comparison with the mandatory course on the history of philosophy”); the historian of socialism, V.P. Volgin, at one time celebrated, now has his name preserved only on street signs in southwest Moscow; the historians M.N. Pokrovskii and D.M. Petrushevskii; the classical philologist P.S. Preobrazhenskii. These are all names of European significance. In the Communist Hall (of the present-day school of journalism at MGU), Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin first gave a course in the history of materialism—A.N. encountered him several times in the pet store on the Arbat, which he, blending in with the crowd of visitors, obviously visited with great pleasure. And on Tverskoi Boulevard, M.I. Kalinin, the All-Union elder, often took walks without any security personnel.

Students—and A.N. was among them—were also converging on Miuskaia Square, at Sverdlov Communist University: there Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin read lectures on the nationalities question. In his old age, A.N. was, of course, more than reserved in assessing his lectures (“I would not call him a great orator”).

At the time Leontiev entered the university there was real havoc there. “The humanities schools were abolished and in their place, at the end of September 1922, the so-called FON was opened—the School of Social Sciences. The School of Historical Philology, of which the philosophy department had been a part, was transformed into the social pedagogical department of FON. Disciplines forming the Marxist worldview were introduced into the academic plan. Marxist methodology was actively introduced. . . . The faculty was hounded, there was an effort to put science “on a Marxist track,” and noncompliant teachers were driven

out. The fate of Chelpanov was predetermined” (Psychology Institute, 1994, p. 11). But he hung onto the post of director until the end of 1923.

After becoming a doctoral student, A.N. was hired as a nonpermanent researcher at the Institute of Psychology. He was not paid for this and at the same time he worked in the literacy system—he taught Tatars who worked in the textile complex Mossukno in Zamoskvorech’e to read and write in Russian and inspected similar courses. For this he received 46 gold rubles per month—a tremendous sum, according to his memoirs. “It sounds strange, but then I was earning more than at any other time in my life,” he recalled. In a lengthy interview he gave to K.E. Levitin (1990), he mentioned that at the same time he was managing library matters for that same Commission on Liquidating Illiteracy. “But then I finally managed to get a modest, low-paying job at the pedagogical institute as a laboratory assistant and I was able to devote myself completely to science,” A.N. recalled (Levitin, 1990, p. 99). This is not quite right—according to records, he was actually a laboratory assistant starting October 1, 1924, but in the department of psychology of the Moscow Institute of Pedology and Defectology, which was closed in September of the following year, 1925.

Why did Leontiev decide to become a psychologist? The family had prepared him for a career as an engineer (and therefore had enrolled him in a technical high school rather than a gymnasium). He writes of this period in the autobiography he undertook and then abandoned, mentioned above:

When I was a technical pupil, my parents thought that I would become an engineer. It was technology that attracted me most of all. I cannot remember from what age my passion for building airplanes began. In our class, nobody was building airplane models, to put it in modern terms, and there were no clubs of this sort. In any event, I did not know anything about their existence. Actually, there were toy planes for sale that could not fly, even kits to put them together, but they provoked something akin to scorn in me. There were “propellers” and “butterflies” that could fly, but this was something entirely different.

I built flying models completely independently, using the most basic, well-known diagrams as my guide: there was a bamboo stick for the fuselage, a surface covered with glued cigarette papers, the same for the rudders, and a rubber-band motor to turn the propeller. Everything else was contrived. Even the propeller was made with my own hands in a very ingenious way: a packet of narrow, thin sticks of wood were then glued

together at an angle, fanning out from the center, and then the uneven edges were cut off with a knife. The body was also built very cleverly—from the spokes of a broken umbrella. In short, the most important thing was invention.

Things went on this way until February 1917. Then technical interests somehow disappeared on their own, and philosophical problems emerged. It was these problems that led me one fine day to the Institute of Psychology, where I asked: where does one study to be a psychologist? Someone told me that it was necessary to enroll in the school of classical philology (it soon became the School of Social Sciences) to study with Professor Chelpanov.* That is what I did and the first university lecture that I heard was specifically a lecture on psychology and it was Chelpanov himself who delivered it—in the large auditorium of the Institute of Psychology.

In his oral reminiscences all this is related a bit differently. As a witness to the events of the revolution and the Civil War, and having become interested in the teachings of the anarchists (the house that they occupied, which was destroyed in January 1918, was not far from his house on Malaia Dmitrovka), Leontiev developed a desire—as he recalled in old age—“to philosophically understand and make sense of” what was happening. “Societal cataclysms gave rise to philosophical interests. This was what happened with many,” he said. And it was later, not without the influence of Chelpanov, that he switched from philosophy to psychology, starting with the philosophical problems of affect. The first paper presented by Leontiev at the Institute of Psychology (on a topic suggested by Vygotsky), as he remembered, was received with much restraint, and was titled, “Kant and Luria.”

It was at this time, when Leontiev was “preparing for work as a professor” at the Institute of Psychology, that a new generation took over leadership of the Institute—people who called themselves Marxists. K.N. Kornilov and P.P. Blonsky stood at the head of this anti-Chelpanov opposition.

In the newspaper *Dni*, which was published in Russian in Berlin at that time, a letter was published in 1923, titled “The Fate of Psychology in Russia,” and signed with the initials N.N. There, thoroughly and with

*If we keep in mind that this occurred approximately a year before the school was transformed into the FON, then evidently Leontiev really did enroll in the university in 1921.—Eds.

knowledge of all the details, the methods by which the Marxist wing of psychology was battling with Chelpanov and his colleagues was described (see Psychology Institute, 1994, p. 12). There turned out to be a surprising number of Marxists. In 1930, in a collection that came out in Paris devoted to Moscow University, one of its former professors, V.V. Stratonov, clearly analyzed the nature of this:

After the pogrom of 1922—under the perpetual threat of losing one’s position, and consequently of going hungry—the professorship found itself forced to learn the theories of Marx and to follow orders to pass resolutions abhorrent to their feelings and dignity. . . . It was different with the younger university personnel. Some still vividly remembered how, at times, they had experienced the excessively dictatorial treatment of academic department heads, assistant professors, laboratory assistants, and others; young people were basically freed of these problems. And then—young lecturers, who had at least three years of seniority themselves, automatically became professors. All of the young university faculty not only achieved an equal voice with the full professors but also received almost equal salaries. Who, in the depths of their hearts, would be embittered by an increase in their rights? (cited in Psychology Institute, 1994, pp. 12–13)

One of the consequences of such an “equality of voice” was the firing of Chelpanov. V.Ia. Briusov, then a member of the Moscow City Council, wrote in his report about the process of the reorganization of Moscow University (of which, by the way, he was an alumnus):

The purge of the staff of professors and instructors was carried out at a faction meeting of professors and instructors of the FON. This purge, in which many prominent party activists took part, including the deputy People’s Commissar M.N. Pokrovskii, was conducted *with much firmness*. A number of professors with well-known names were fired from teaching at the University because of their sociopolitical views, their idealistic world views, and similar considerations—for example, Professor Chelpanov. (cited in Psychology Institute, 1994, p. 13)

Chelpanov’s banishment from the directorship and the appointment to this post of K.N. Kornilov—a person who was his main antagonist (despite having been his direct follower)—was also accompanied by the firing or resignation of many supporters and disciples of Chelpanov, which meant that the institute’s size almost doubled through the hiring of young scientists, together with the restructuring of research interests

(where the study of reactions became the central focus); and, of course, there was the renaming of the institute as the Moscow State Institute of Experimental Psychology—the first in a long chain of subsequent name changes. The institute was separated from Moscow University and became part of the Russian Association of Research Institutes in the Social Sciences (RANION).

Most of the new leaders, not to mention the rank and file, had some sort of unimaginable philosophical hodgepodge in their heads—their books and articles, which were supposedly Marxist, would be embarrassing to read now. It was the typical vulgarization of Marxism that was the sin of the new director of the Institute, Chelpanov's replacement, Konstantin Nikolaevich Kornilov, as well as dozens of others.

Among the faculty, however, were some remarkable people—talented and broadly educated. For instance, there was Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bernshtein—one of the most distinguished physiologists of the twentieth century. Quite young, but nonetheless provocatively talented and already making a scientific name for himself was Alexander Romanovich Luria—although his scientific path originated in Freudian-Marxism with an attempt to cross materialism and psychoanalysis. There was the well-known social psychologist, M.A. Reisner, the father of Larisa Reisner, who most notably was the author of the remarkable book *The Ideology of the East* [Ideologiia Vostoka]. There was also the wonderful philosopher, pedagogue, and psychologist, Pavel Petrovich Blonskii (although he, no less than Kornilov, had a hand in the firing of Chelpanov), and Blonskii's former follower, whom Luria had brought from Gomel, the former art historian and critic—also young then, but an absolute genius—Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. They were all serious Marxists—Blonskii, Vygotsky, and Leontiev. This phrase will raise many eyebrows. But we will try to make sense of it.

For the moment we will try to put aside the fate of the social and economic theories of Marx. We will forget—although this is impossible!—what use these theories were put to in so-called revolutionary practice. To put it more simply: we will not project onto Marx himself either October 1917, the Civil War, the liquidation of the kulaks, 1937, the “Short Course,” or the persecution of geneticists and cyberneticists.

And if we take a step back and look at Karl Marx as a *historian of philosophy*, it will be clear: he was one of the major philosophers of the nineteenth century, an ingenious follower of Hegel who was able—alone

among philosophers—to synthesize his dialectic with the materialist tradition. “The three sources and three components” of the teachings of Marx, which our older generation abstracted time and again, existed in reality. To be a Marxist simply means to be a consistent materialist and at the same time to be a dialectician in the spirit of Hegel.

And what is criminal about this? It was not out of conformism and not out of worry about their careers in the 1960s and 1970s that the most talented philosophers and thinkers, “masters of thoughts” of the scientific intelligentsia—Ilyenkov, Merab Konstantinovich Mamardashvili, Henrikh Stepanovich Batishev—openly called themselves Marxists, and were not ashamed to comment on and develop the ideas of Marx. None of them answer for the simultaneous existence of “Marxists” along the lines of academic M.B. Mitin, whom one American scientific historian called “the high priest of Stalinism.”

A professional historian of philosophy, Blonskii was the author of a wonderful book about the Hellenic philosopher Plotinus, creator of the idea of the “unified labor school,” and was also the first ideologue of developing and alternative education. Vygotsky—who had graduated from the School of Historical Philosophy of the A.L. Shaniavskii People’s University, was the primary expert on Spinoza in our country, had especially and extensively studied German classical philosophy, was a supporter of academic A.M. Deborin (his group was personally destroyed in December 1930 by Stalin, who brought Mitin to power along with another “Marxist,” Yudin), was a friend of B.G. Stolpner, who translated Hegel—was the most professional philosopher of the new Russia. Leontiev, who had gone through the schools not only of Volgin and Bukharin but also of Chelpanov and Shpet. . . . They were all *true* Marxists, unequivocally—and first and foremost they were philosophically educated people, *competent* people. This is something that cannot be said about the galaxy of “materialist” psychologists of the 1920s and 1930s, with K.N. Kornilov as their leader, all of whom had only the haziest concept of genuine materialism and Hegelian dialectics. In a word, they did not learn their dialectics from Hegel. . . .

Vygotsky once said: “In physiology, it is not hard to be a materialist—but just try to be one in psychology.” It turned out there was a whole group that wanted to try just that. The results were, for the most part, depressing.

Marx’s philosophy and gnoseology (the theory of knowledge) can be counted as one of the highest achievements of human thought in the spiritual/inner sphere. You can agree or disagree with him. But in any

case, it is not shameful for a psychologist to be a Marxist. And Leontiev once remarked in a conversation that, to the contrary, for a psychologist—as for any naturalist—it is actually quite natural.

2. At the Institute of Psychology: The house on Bronnaia Street

In November 1923, when, after the “purges,” Chelpanov was officially fired by the rector of Moscow University, V.P. Volgin, a young, agitated A.N. came to see Chelpanov and asked, “Georgii Ivanovich, should I leave?” To this the wise and humane Chelpanov answered: “Don’t do that! This is all a matter for scholars, and you do not have your own opinion. You have no obligation to me.” (Then, A.N. recalls, Chelpanov gave him a signed copy of his brochure “Psychology and Marxism.”) Aleksei Nikolaevich, after some hesitation, followed this advice—and as a result became a close associate and follower of Vygotsky. This is what he told his son. As V.P. Zinchenko tells it (also based on Leontiev’s words), Chelpanov put it somewhat differently: “You are still a young man, you have your whole life ahead of you, and you are not yet sufficiently mature to make fully conscious decisions” (Levitin, 1990, p. 82).

A.R. Luria (who had been invited to the Institute from Kazan, also not long before the events described—at the end of 1923) retained vivid recollections of what was happening at the Institute when Leontiev arrived there:

The situation at the institute was quite unique. All the laboratories were renamed so that their names would include the term “reactions”—there was the laboratory of visual reactions (perception), mnemonic reactions (memory), emotional reactions, and so on. All this was intended to destroy any remaining traces of subjective psychology and replace it with a version of behaviorism.

Everyone working there was young and inexperienced. None were older than twenty-four,* and there were few who had the appropriate training, but everyone was on fire with enthusiasm, and the choice of studies carried out on various reactions was truly wide: white mice ran through labyrinths, the motor reactions of adult subjects were painstakingly studied, and problems of education were addressed. (Luria, 1982, p. 18)

*Of course not all, but the majority.—A.L.

While the above was written in a published autobiography, here is what Luria had to say when giving a talk about this same period entitled “The Course of Early Development of Soviet Psychology. The Twenties,” delivered March 25, 1974:

I immediately found myself in the thick of things. It was suggested that our institute should overhaul all of psychology. For the moment, the overhaul of psychology was taking two forms: the first—renaming, the second—relocation. Everywhere possible, and everywhere impossible, we put the word “reaction,” sincerely believing that we were doing something important and serious. At the same time we moved the furniture from one laboratory to another, and I clearly remember how I myself, dragging desks up and down stairs, was certain that this was the way we would restructure the work and create a new basis for Soviet psychology.

This period is interesting for its naiveté and its enthusiasm, but, naturally, it soon reached a dead-end. Disagreements with Kornilov began almost immediately, we did not like his direction, but work at the Institute had to be carried out—so it went on and subsequently led to rather curious results. (cited in Levitin, 1978, p. 49)

Over the course of the reorganization of the Institute of Psychology, a laboratory was established, headed by Luria to research affective reactions. A.N. became Luria’s main researcher, his “hands,” as he himself later put it. Leontiev had developed an interest in affect back in his student years—in his archive there is a fifteen-page manuscript “The Theory of Affects,” written under the supervision of Chelpanov. A.R. Luria later recalled, “I had several young people, among them Aleksei Nikolaevich Leontiev. Back then he showed his magnificent inventiveness, building an excellent working cybernetic device that did everything for us” (Levitin, 1990, p. 132). Many of his coworkers’ memoirs testify to the outstanding abilities of A.N. in creating and arranging experimental setups and experimental designs.

Not a year went by before a young man from Gomel appeared at the institute who had been invited by Kornilov on the initiative of Luria (who was then the Institute’s academic secretary)—Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. He, Luria, and Leontiev quickly found a common language and soon their collaborative work began, coming to an end only with Vygotsky’s death.

The year 1924 was not only the time that A.N. officially enrolled in the Institute of Psychology (starting January 1), and not only—and more

important—the year that he met and grew close to Vygotsky. It was also the year of his marriage to Margarita Petrovna Leontieva, nee Lobkova, who accompanied him throughout the remainder of his life’s journey, outliving him by six years (she was born in 1905 and died in 1985). The wedding ceremony took place in a small church at the rear of the Kamernyi Theater. The newlyweds moved in with A.N.’s parents, into a three-bedroom, but very small, apartment on the first floor of a two-story wooden house, built, according to family legend, from timber left over from the Moscow fire of 1812 (by chance I saw this house being torn down in the mid-1950s—in fact, on many of the beams you could see traces left by fire). The official address of this apartment, known to everyone in psychology in Moscow in the 1920s through the 1940s, was 5 Bol’shaia Bronnaia, apartment 6. In the house there was neither gas nor central heating and the center of the apartment was a huge Dutch stove. The first room off the tiny foyer, to which the few steps from the main entrance from Bol’shaia Bronnaia Street led, was A.N.’s study. Then came the so-called “dining room,” where (at least during the post-war years) Margarita Petrovna slept, and then the room occupied by A.N.’s parents, and later their grandson as well, one of the authors of this book. The windows of the first two rooms faced Bronnaia, and this was what was called a raised first floor—it was not possible to look into the apartment from the street, but there was nothing stopping a passerby from having a quiet conversation with the residents of the apartment. And they did this quite often—A.N. and M.P. were closely acquainted, for instance, with Aleksandr Iakovlevich Tairov and Alisa Georgievna Koonen, who lived quite close (in a house attached to the Kamernyi Theater). In general, there were tons of interesting people who came to the house; it can be recalled that among them were the famous reciter Vladimir Nikolaevich Iakhontov and the relative of A.V. Zaporozhets, the famous scholar academic Aleksandr Iul’evich Ishlinskii. During the prewar years at the dacha in Kratovo, A.N. spent a lot of time with the other residents of the cinematographers’ dacha settlement—Sergei Eisenstein (they were actually acquainted starting in the late 1920s), Vsevolod Pudovkin, Mikhail Romm, and the journalist Boris Agapov. Later A.N. became friends with Leonid Osipovich Utesov and his family (for several consecutive years the Leontievs rented a small house on the Utesov land), and through them he met a multitude of actors, directors, and vaudevillians; the couple Grigorii Aleksandrov and Liubov’

Orlova were dacha neighbors of L.O. In the last years before his death, Vladimir Fedorovich Tendriakov became close with A.N., leaving interesting memoirs of their relationship (Tendriakov, 1983). It goes without saying that any Soviet psychologist or physiologists of the slightest renown spent time in this house, and some slept for weeks or even months on the famous Leontiev couch.

Daniil Borisovich Elkonin recalls:

At the end of June 1945 I came to Moscow on business—specifically to submit papers in connection with the disbanding of the 42nd army—and with the dream of returning to civilian life and work. . . .

And here I found myself at the house on Bronnaia Street. I went inside. In the house, everything was as it had been. There were the three tilted steps leading into the foyer, the crooked door leading into Aleksei Nikolaevich's study. To the right was the bookshelf, beyond it—the work corner with the couch, which was covered by a rug, and a little work table. To the left there was some sort of specially-designed bookshelf with a couch built into it. This couch was where I slept for a long time. . . .

I can remember that on the next day all the old friends from Kharkov got together. Supper was brought to the table that took up almost the entire room. Aleksandra Alekseevna played hostess around the table. For those times, the food was sumptuous, there was even *kulebiaka*. Then the samovar appeared and we drank tea. Somehow, I was immediately absorbed into this peaceful household. Aleksei Nikolaevich was very animated and spoke a lot. There was something childlike in his face, full of dreams, and his eyes glimmered with cheer. . . .

I lived for quite a while with the Leontievs. (1983, pp. 248–49)

Petr Grigor'evich Lobkov was Margarita Petrovna's father, a peasant of the Egor'evskii district of Riazan Province, or to use Soviet terminology—a kulak. (In any event, the Lobkovs had lived in Moscow since the turn of the century—at least Margarita Petrovna had been born in Moscow and christened at the church on Presnia Square. Family legend has it that on the very day of her christening there was shooting on Presnia Square—the December revolution was taking place—and the frightened christening party “packed up” the infant, wrapping her head first, so when they got home, little Mara had to be given artificial respiration.) Her mother was named Anna Alekseevna and she was from a clerical family: it was known that when she was very young she often spent time with the future Patriarch Sergei. During her later years she worked in a seismological laboratory. Margarita Petrovna had a younger brother,

Nikolai Petrovich Lobkov, a police sergeant, the deputy head of his division and a former border guard. He died of leukemia when he was still very young, before the war.

Margarita Petrovna devoted her entire life to Aleksei Nikolaevich—she herself never received a higher education. Actually, from 1925 to 1927 she studied fine arts and was a guide at the Tretyakov Gallery, studied stenography, was a scientific-technical worker at the All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine from 1929 to 1933, worked in the editorial department of the newspaper the *Meditinskii rabotnik*, in the personnel department of MGU, and at the Institute of Psychology—but these were random jobs to earn some money or (during the war) a ration card; in actuality she remained a “classic” housewife. “Patient, hospitable,” S.Ia. Rubinshtein recalled of her (Rubinshtein, 1983, p. 255). But at the same time she was, as they say, a woman of character, even somewhat authoritarian. Not many know that in A.N.’s life there were other women, or actually, at least two great loves; and the fact that the Leontiev family did not fall apart, and in the end was even strengthened, can be credited specifically to Margarita Petrovna—who was not only patient, but wise and decisive.

But let us return to the professional biography of Aleksei Nikolaevich.

We have become accustomed to measuring the history of science in decades or at least in years. For the history of Soviet psychology in the 1920s, the only suitable unit of measure is the month. An example—the rapid and brilliant rise of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. January 1924: the paper “Methods of Reflexological and Psychological Investigation” [Metodika refleksologicheskogo i psikhologicheskogo issledovaniia]. March 1924: the paper “On the Psychological Nature of Consciousness” [O psikhologicheskoi prirode soznaniia] (its contents are unknown). May 1924: “Investigation of Dominant Reactions” [Issledovanie dominantnykh reaktzii] (it appeared in print under the title “The Problem of Dominant Reactions” [Problema dominantnykh reaktzii]). October 1924: “Consciousness as a Problem of the Psychology of Behavior” [Soznanie kak problema psikhologii povedeniia]. No later than the beginning of 1925: an introduction to the article by K. Koffka about self-observation, an introduction to the republication of the textbook by A.F. Lazurskii *General and Experimental Psychology* [Psikhologiiia obshchaia i eksperimental’naia], an introduction to the translation of Thorndike’s book. In 1925: *The Psychology of Art* [Psikhologiiia iskusstva] and *Pedagogical Psychology* [Pedagogicheskaiia psikhologiiia]. In 1925–26: *The*

Historical Meaning of Psychological Crisis [Istoricheskii smysl psikhologicheskogo krizisa], a brilliant conclusion to this (pre-cultural-historical) stage.

A.N. Leontiev's ascent into "great science" was not as rapid as that of Vygotsky, but nonetheless rather impressive.

A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev managed to conduct a series of studies related to "vital psychology" and its direct, practical usage. They studied special features of affective reactions arising in stressful situations (e.g., the conditions under which students prepared for examinations, or during the "purges"—although, A.N. recalled that for those being "purged" this turned out emotionally indifferently). For Luria, the choice of a given subject was also conditioned by his interest at that time in psychoanalysis (it is known that in 1922 he organized a psychoanalytical circle in Kazan, and that he was well acquainted with the method of free association established by C.G. Jung). As he later wrote in his memoirs, Luria decided to undertake his own "experimental psychoanalysis." But now a motor component was added to verbal associations with emotionally neutral and emotionally significant words (as with C.G. Jung). The method used in these studies has since come to be called "the combined motor method of A.R. Luria." For A.N. Leontiev, turning to the subject of affective reactions also had, as it appears to us, a special meaning—there was a reason why he had taken a specific interest in affects—a position from which he saw the motivational-reasoning side of human life—back in his student years. L.S. Vygotsky liked to say: "Nothing great is done in life without great feelings." It seems this thought was always important to Leontiev, too.

The results of the joint work between A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev became well known, which cannot be said about other research that was, for the most part, the development of the same ideas, but conducted by A.N. Leontiev independently, as he would later put it, "hidden away from Luria." A.N. Leontiev's article published in a Russian-German medical journal in 1928 remained unnoticed and underappreciated. The work was entitled, "An Experiment in the Structural Analysis of Chain Associative Sequences (An Experimental Study)" [Opyt strukturnogo analiza tsennykh assotsiativnykh riadov (eksperimental'noe issledovanie)]. The method used in it also represented the development of one of the forms of the Jungian associative experiment. Usually, in an associative experiment a "one-time association" was given; a word stimulant—a word

association. Such a method was especially well suited for formal analysis of the results using statistical methods. However, it completely failed to take into account the phenomena of affective perseveration (“obtrusiveness”), that is, the influence of one affective reaction on others. The method developed by A.N. Leontiev in the above-mentioned study was aimed at the creation and subsequent analysis of such perseveration. The subject was required to provide not a single association, but a chain of associations in response to each word given.

As a result of careful analysis of the form and content of the “chains” generated, Leontiev determined that each sequence of chain associations is composed of separate groups of reactions united through a specific semantic connection. Such groups of reactions are characterized by a corresponding “inhibition coefficient.” Especially interesting was the comparison of a sequence of similar “affectively loaded” associations with sequences in which the association was generated in accordance with instructions to the subject to associate with a letter of the alphabet. Furthermore, the subject was told that he could freely change to another letter if all of the associations with the previous letter were exhausted. In the figure representing the results, such changes essentially did not manifest in any way. On the contrary, in the case of affective “complexes,” evident changes from one affective complex to the other could be observed. The overall conclusion drawn from this work was as follows: “Associative sequences, although they are comprised of separate reactions, cannot be viewed as ‘mechanical collections.’ An associative series or a segment of an associative series is primarily a certain *organic whole* that organizes its parts in a certain manner” (Leontiev, 1983, p. 71). In this work, as A.N. himself said, we encounter the first attempts by Leontiev to develop a concept of “meaning,” a concept he would, a decade later, call the definitive category of the general study of the psyche. Unfortunately, the article went unnoticed, and in later works about associations by other authors, it has neither been considered nor cited, being too far ahead of its time.

All of A.N. Leontiev’s studies examined by us were conducted outside the paradigm of L.S. Vygotsky, although at that time Vygotsky was already working (starting in 1924) at the Institute of Psychology, first as a “second level” scientific worker, and then working at the “first level.”

What happened was that Vygotsky appeared at the Institute when the Luria–Leontiev team had already been established. Luria, who despite

his young age was already a well-known scholar and the author of many publications, was the leader of this team. As far as A.N. was concerned, in his oral reminiscences he openly acknowledged that he had arrived at the Institute “empty,” and his encounter with Vygotsky was something that determined his own path, “filling a vacuum.” The arrival of Vygotsky immediately turned the assignment of roles upside down—he instantly became the leader. But Leontiev remained Luria’s assistant for some time; L.V. Zankov, I.M. Solovev (both students of Luria), L.S. Sakharov, and B.E. Varshava began to work directly for Vygotsky. Sakharov and Varshava soon died, and Zankov and Solovev moved away from the “main line” of Vygotsky’s research, and as A.N. recalled it, “they were caught up in dominant reactions,” and then left for defectology (although it was Zankov in particular who organized Vygotsky’s funeral, pushing aside Leontiev and Luria). It is not by chance that in Vygotsky’s famous letter to the “piaterka” [the “five”], Kuzma Prutkov (these were Lidiia Il’inchna Bozhovich, Roza Evgen’evna Levina, Nataliia Grigor’evna Morozova, Liia Solomonovna Slavina, and the leader of this group—Aleksandr Vladimirovich Zaporozhets) the following is written: “I experienced a great sense of satisfaction when A.R. [Luria] in his own time first started to go down this road, when A.N. came after him. Now joy is added to surprise that along with these uncovered tracks, not just for me, or for the three of us, but for five others, the great road is visible.” (In “Honor of the Ninetieth Anniversary,” 1986, p. 61).** It is easy to see that neither Zankov nor Solovev are included here, and it is not surprising. In A.N. Leontiev’s letter dated July 23, 1929, Vygotsky speaks openly about their “departure from cultural psychology.” In fact, they never fully took those positions.

3. The Birth of Cultural-Historical Theory

Vygotsky’s followers recall their first months of collaborative work differently. A.N. related that Vygotsky first sketched out his cultural-historical conception in a conversation that took place either at the end of 1924 or at the very beginning of 1925. He literally sketched it out—with a pencil on a scrap of paper. This scrap was stored for a long time in Leontiev’s personal archive, with Vygotsky’s letters and several manu-

**Many references are missing in the original Russian text. Henceforth, all missing references are marked with a double asterisk.—Eds.

scripts. Now we cannot find it; but one of the authors (A.A. Leontiev) believes that A.N. showed him the scrap of paper after the destruction of part of the archive (more about this later), specifically, some time during the 1950s. “It has to be found!” A.N. insisted not long before his death.

Luria recalled a later stage when he and Leontiev met regularly once or twice a week in Vygotsky’s apartment:

to work out plans for further research. . . . We reviewed each of the main divisions of psychology: perception, memory, attention, speech, decision making, motor systems, and so on. In each of these areas we began to use new experimental methods designed to demonstrate that, as higher forms of activity take shape, the entire structure of behavior is changed. (Luria, 1982, p. 33)

Leontiev received from Vygotsky several scientific problems to develop. The main one was the problem of memory, which Leontiev developed in depth (in addition to several articles, resulting in the well-known book *The Development of Memory: The Experimental Study of Higher Psychological Functions* [Razvitie pamiatii. Eksperimental’noe issledovanie vysshikh psikhologicheskikh funktsii]). Additionally, Leontiev worked on arithmetical thinking and wrote a large article on this subject, which remained unpublished at that time.

We will not discuss the content of the book *The Development of Memory* here. Suffice it to state that using the “experimental-genetic” approach suggested by Vygotsky (specifically, the double stimulation method), and relying on the general idea of tool/sign mediation of all higher mental functions, Leontiev arrives in this book at a sharp distinction between “natural” forms of memory and its specifically human forms in terms of function and history. He reveals the dynamic approach in the transition from externally mediated to internally mediated memorization in phylogenesis and ontogenesis, the connection between memorization, speech, intellect, understanding, and so on. The higher forms of behavior, according to A.N., presume that “the external sign is transformed into an internal sign.” The highest level of memorization is internal verbal activity in the form of logical memory, based on the word in its instrumental function.

This is not a chance stipulation—specifically through its instrumental function. The study conducted by Vygotsky on voluntary attention was just as one-sidedly “instrumental.” The proposition changed when

systematic study of the generalizing role of the word began, at first using nonsense words made up in an experiment to classify objects. This cycle of works, as is well known, was conducted by Vygotsky with Sakharov (and after the latter's death was continued by Iu.V. Kotelova and E.I. Pashkovskaia), which in the end led to a reevaluation of all "cultural-historical" concepts. It turned out to be necessary to examine the word not simply as a tool or instrument, as a "stimulus/means," but first and foremost in terms of its internal content looking not only at function, but at the structure of meaning.

The main idea of the article "On the Development of Arithmetical Thinking in the Child" [K voprosu o razvitii arifmeticheskogo myshleniia rebenka]* is the following. The development of mathematical thinking cannot be treated as the development of operations based on the formation of concepts that are products of some sort of initial abstraction, separate from this development and preceding it. Of course, it is untrue that the perception of mathematical operations relies "directly on the natural perception of certain groups of numbers and that with the development of this direct perception the child arrives at his own arithmetical thinking and arithmetical operations." But the idea—which on the surface appears to oppose this—that the development of mathematical thinking in the child boils down to the appearance and development of "the first actual calculating operations" is insufficient and inadequate. In actuality, it is all the more complicated: natural functions at a certain stage of development are transformed into mediated functions, relying on external stimuli/means. But these mediated functions can at certain stages of development "appear as acts that no longer rely on external means and in which their role is taken over by corresponding internal elements." And the objective is not to develop computation using groups of numbers, but "to replace these groups *with the sign* of the groups as quickly as possible" (all citations taken from: Leontiev, 2000a [no page numbers in original]).

For the most part, the studies on which *The Development of Memory* was based, according to the recollections of Leontiev himself, had already been completed by the end of 1928. One of A.N.'s biographers, Professor Georg Rückriem, believes the book was written in 1929 and presumes that its manuscript was turned in to the publishers in 1930

*Translated in this issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, pp. 70–77.—Eds.

(Rückriem, 2000, p. 408); the first is incorrect (in a letter to N.G. Morozova [Morozova, 1983, p. 259], A.N. writes that eight of the fourteen author's sheets were signed in 1930), and the second is exactly right. The author's introduction to the book was dated July 8, 1930, and the text cites many books and articles, including those of foreign authors, published in 1929 and unlikely to have been immediately available in the Soviet Union (there are five such references in the first chapter alone). However, in that same year, 1930, the book was awarded the top prize by *Glavnauka* [the Main Directorate of Scientific, Museum and Arts and Sciences Facilities] and TsEKUBU (the Central Commission for Improving the Lives of Scholars). ("Five hundred rubles, with which I bought a coat lined on both sides with fur and kangaroo," Leontiev recalled.) Officially, the book was released in 1931 (this is the date on the title page, with the *Glavlit* [Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs] permission date of May 23, 1931. But an introduction by Vygotsky and Leontiev inserted as a brochure in the published (but still uncirculated) edition says: "The book to which these lines must serve as an introduction, is coming out in 1932 after a long delay: it was written and submitted for publication more than two years ago; the experimental study that makes up its content was conducted by the author several years ago and completed, summarized and theoretically generalized in 1929, that is three years ago" (Vygotsky and Leontiev, [no date], p. 2).**

Why was the edition held back and what created the need for a second introduction? To understand this, one must imagine the scientific and political situation at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s.

Let us begin with the fact that the position of Vygotsky and his team at the Institute of Psychology became less and less secure with each year. Neither the directorship of the Institute—headed by Kornilov—nor many of its scientists understood or accepted the cultural-historical approach to psychology. It was not so much that Kornilov did not understand that a revolution in psychology was taking place within the walls of the institute for which he had been given responsibility—it seems he did not even read what was being written by those under his direction. From the book by K. Levitin, *A Fleeting Pattern* [Mimoletnyi uzor]:

It was not without sarcasm that Luria recalled Kornilov saying, "Imagine, *historical* psychology—why should we study some savages? Or *instrumental* psychology. All psychology is instrumental, for instance I myself use a dynamoscope." The director of the Institute of Psychology

did not even understand that it was not instruments used by psychologists that were being referred to, but the means, the tools that man himself uses to organize his behavior. (Levitin, 1978, p. 41)

Kornilov oriented the work of his institute first and foremost toward the study of classificational psychology.

Even twenty years later, there was much that Kornilov did not understand. For example, in 1944, while speaking (in his capacity as vice president of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the RSFSR) to the Academic Council of the Institute of Psychology, he said, "At the Institute, the problem of activity has been raised, but I do not understand its sense; I did not understand it before, and I do not understand it today—not just me, but those who work at the Institute" (cited from Psychology Institute, 1994, p. 21). Nonetheless, in September 1948, Kornilov explained to Institute workers that "when we talk about the psychology of the Soviet man, it is not motives that play an essential role—it is the psychology of activity" (ibid., p. 27). At the beginning of 1946, the same Kornilov, appearing at the Institute, asserted, "Somewhere in the human soul . . . we are still digging up some sort of unconscious roots, but, in my opinion, they do not exist under Soviet conditions due to the nature of these conditions. . . . Social life and its demands obliterate all traces of the "unconscious" (ibid., p. 24).

In general, Kornilov's relationship with Vygotsky, so to speak, was never worked out. Kornilov blamed Vygotsky for psychology's move away from Marxism and for dragging in idealistic concepts (what was meant was will). For this reason, Vygotsky's entire group tried to find a more suitable place. "We broke with the Institute of Psychology without scandal (we disappeared)," A.N. Leontiev recalled. In particular, in 1926, he passed his doctoral examinations and on September 1, 1927, he became an assistant, and then, in October 1930, he was associate professor at the N.K. Krupskaja Academy of Communist Education, to which both Luria and Vygotsky moved—the former chaired the psychological section, the latter directed a laboratory. In 1928, he also collaborated with the Moscow State Technical School of Cinematography—the future All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography (1930), where he met S.M. Eisenstein (evidently, through Luria), and starting in 1926 he taught psychology at the State Institute of Theatrical Art, then called the State Central Technical School of Theatrical Art (TsETETIS). Starting in 1927 and until October 1, 1929, A.N. also worked in the G.I. Rossolimo Medi-

cal-Pedagogical Clinic (initially called the Medical-Pedagogical Station), where he rose from staff assistant to director of the pedagogical laboratory and director of the scientific section (chairman of the Scientific Office).

It is interesting that during that same year, 1927, Leontiev began, and in 1929 successfully finished, what we would today call his “second higher education,” passing exams in all subjects in the biology program of the medical school of the Second MGU (now the Moscow Pedagogical State University), although he did not quite earn his diploma, leaving during his third year. A little later Vygotsky (at the Kharkov Medical Institute) and Luria (at the First Moscow Medical Institute) followed the same path.

But the very end of the 1920s (and the beginning of the 1930s) was marked by a sharply negative turn in science, culture, and education overall. The ideological “screws” began to be tightened. In the humanities this took the form, in part, of the appearance of academic and scientific schools that were proclaimed to be the only Marxist ones (Marr in linguistics, Pokrovsky in history, Friche in the study of literature, Matsa in art history) and the rest (including the historians Platonov and Tarle, the linguists Polivanov, Vinogradov, Il’inskii, the renowned literary scholars Eikhenbaum, Zhirmunsky, and Shklovskii, and many, many others) were subject to devastating criticism, and, at times, repression. In education the following occurred: the “unified labor school”—which had been founded through the efforts of Krupskaja and Lunacharskii on a conceptual basis developed by Blonskii and Vygotsky—went out of existence. The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party issued a series of decrees returning Soviet schools to the “ideal” of the prerevolutionary gymnasium. (The sadly notorious “pedological” decree is discussed below.) The outstanding theoreticians and practitioners of pedagogy Pinkevich, Kalashnikov, Pistrak, Shatskii, Epshtein, Shul’gin, Krupenina, and Ter-Vaganian were all subjected to defamation.

A “reactological” debate took place within psychology, as a result of which K.N. Kornilov lost the post of director in 1930 (he was replaced by A.B. Zalkind); Bekhterev’s reflexology, psychotechnics (all of its leaders were subsequently repressed), Borovskii’s “behaviorism,” and finally Vygotsky’s cultural-historical school all fell under bitter ideological attack. Grounds for destroying the cultural-historical school were found first in the release in 1930 of the book by Vygotsky and Luria,

Studies on the History of Behavior: Ape, Primitive and Child [Etiudi po istorii povedeniia. (Obez'iana. Primitiv. Rebenok)], a book that Vygotsky, by the way, showed little respect for in letters, calling it "The Ape," and again in letters, criticizing it rather harshly. Second, grounds for destroying it were found in the expeditions by A.R. Luria to Uzbekistan, which took place on the initiative of Vygotsky in 1931 and 1932. In one of the "critical" articles (1934) about the "cultural-historical" conception it was described as, "This pseudoscientific reactionary, anti-Marxist, and class-hostile theory" (Razmyslov, 1934; quoted from Luria, 1994, p. 67). Elsewhere, Vygotsky's group was accused of "idealistic revisions to historical materialism and its concretization in psychology" (quoted from Petrovskii and Iaroshevskii, 1994, p. 142). Even the pinnacle of academia, S.L. Rubinshtein, in *The Foundations of Psychology* [Osnovy psikhologii] wrote, "A prominent place in Soviet psychology belongs to Vygotsky, who together with Lurie [sic], Leontiev and others developed the theory of the cultural development of higher mental functions created by him, the mistakes of which have been covered in the press more than once" (Rubinshtein, 1935, p. 37).**

With the arrival of a new director, the institute was again renamed: it became the State Institute of Psychology, Pedology, and Psychotechnics of the Russian Association of Scientific Institutes of Marxist Pedagogy. However, as early as 1932, a decision of the institute's party office (on orders from on high, naturally) issued an order "to rake psychotechnics and pedology over the coals of Marxist-Leninist criticism" (Institute Psychology, 1994, p. 18), and a debate on pedology was planned, so the new name proved unfortunate for the institute.

But the main "turn" was in philosophy. Until 1930, the struggle against vulgar materialism was being won by dialectical materialism in the most literal sense of the word; there was a reason that the so-called Deborin School, which stood at the helm of philosophical research in the Soviet Union (e.g., A.M. Deborin was director of the Institute of Philosophy), not without pride carried the name "dialecticians." But in December 1930, I.V. Stalin made a personal appearance at a meeting of party activists of the Institute of the Red Professoriat, declaring the necessity of fighting on two fronts—against the "left deviation" (meaning the "Deborinists") and against the "right deviation" (meaning mechanistic materialists, then headed by the son of K.A. Timiriazev, the physicist A.K. Timiriazev, who, incidentally, entered the annals of physical sci-

ence primarily through his devastating criticism of Einstein's theory of relativity for its supposed mathematical errors). Stalin introduced the famous, albeit to this day obscure, label on the Deborinists as being "menshevizing idealists." A month later there came a scathing Central Committee decree "Concerning the Journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*." People unschooled in philosophy and genuine "vulgarizers" came to power (and they were not shy in adopting the arguments of the mechanistic materialists they had so harshly criticized), headed by future academics M.B. Mitin and P.F. Iudin. The Deborinists were annihilated, both in the physical (B.N. Gessen, Ia.E. Stein), and figurative sense (Deborin himself). It should be noted that Vygotsky was close to the Deborinists in terms of his philosophical views and gladly cited them in his publications. Leontiev also met with Deborin.

By now it is probably clear to the reader why the edition was withheld and why the brochure introduction was inserted in it. In that brochure, incidentally, it was stated that the author admits to "deviations from the main methodological path." One "objectively comprises an element of an ideological order," and the other, "objectively comprises an element of a mechanistic order. . . . In the struggle with idealistic theories of memory, the new conception put forth in this book has not proved sufficiently consistent, having failed to overcome completely and definitively idealistic elements within it. In the struggle against mechanistic theories, this conception also has not proved to be sufficiently consistent, in the same way failing to overcome completely and definitively mechanistic elements within it" (Vygotsky and Leontiev, [no date], pp. 9–10).**

And there was something else that affected the subsequent fate of Leontiev: at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, the scientific and pedagogical institutions where he was working began to close—at times under political scandal. For instance, the same editorial was simultaneously featured in two central newspapers about the Institute of Cinematography with the threatening headline "Nest of Idealists and Trotskyists." One of the consequences of this article was that A.N. was forced to leave the Institute of Cinematography in 1930. The bulwark of the Vygotsky school—the Academy of Communist Education—also fell into disfavor in 1930; its School of Social Sciences was proclaimed "Trotskyist," and in 1931 it was "exiled" to Leningrad and renamed as an institute. In any event, Leontiev was dismissed on September 1, 1931.

Working at the Psychological Institute was not an option, although after Kornilov's departure, the ideas of Vygotsky and his school were being put to use in the Institute's new scientific program. Then again, according to records, in December 1932, A.N. was still listed as a "level 1 scientific employee." At Moscow University, beginning in 1931, psychology was not taught at all. So there was no place for Leontiev to work—at one time he even served in the Supreme Council of the People's Economy of the Soviet Union as a "techprop" (technical propaganda) consultant.

4. Kharkov and its surroundings

All three—Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev—began to look for a place to work that would allow them to continue the cycle of research they had begun. They were lucky: at the end of 1930, all three (as well as Bozhovich, Zaporozhets, and M.S. Lebedinsky) received invitations from Kharkov, which was then the capital of the Ukrainian SSR. And these invitations came not just from anyone, but from the Ukrainian people's commissar for public health himself, S.I. Kantorovich. The Ukrainian People's Health Commissariat had decided to establish a psychology division ("psychoneurological division") within the Ukrainian Psychoneurological Institute (later, in 1932, it was transformed into the All-Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy). Vygotsky, A.N. recalled, took part in the negotiations. Luria was offered the position of director of the division and Leontiev was offered the directorship of the experimental psychology section (later called the general and genetic psychology section). Officially, A.N. was employed there as of October 15, 1931. In November 1931, Vygotsky was confirmed as director of the department of genetic psychology of the State Institute of Staff Training of the People's Health Committee of the Ukrainian SSR (Vygodskaia and Lifanova, 1996, pp. 128–29); but unlike Luria and Leontiev, he did not move to Kharkov, although he was there often—he presented papers, read lectures, and took examinations in his capacity as a correspondence student of the medical institute (which he entered in that same year, 1931). In fact, within his family the question of a move to Kharkov was discussed on numerous occasions and the possibility of exchanging the Moscow apartment for one in Kharkov was even entertained (Luria, 1994, p. 73). Why the move did not take place remained unknown. In the opinion of E.A. Luria (expressed in her memoirs of her father), the reason was that Vygotsky (and Luria) did not get along with the administration

of the Psychoneurological Academy (*ibid.*). A.N. had told, however, of the wonderful relocation terms proposed to Vygotsky, and the reasons they were turned down remained a mystery to him.

At the end of 1931, Luria, Leontiev, L.I. Bozhovich, and A.V. Zaporozhets moved to Kharkov. Zaporozhets's wife, Tamara Osipovna Ginevskaia recalls:

Not finding any moral or financial support there, a small group of Moscow scholars (Luria, Leontiev, Bozhovich, and Zaporozhets) went, as they then said, “on a long business trip,”—they moved to Kharkov to the psychoneurological center newly established by Professor Rokhlin at the psychiatric hospital. This center was the base of the new Academy of Psychoneurology.

Vygotsky organized the work in Kharkov. Twice he came to go over work completed and discuss further research.

We settled in a large apartment that Professor Rokhlin had rented for the Moscow commune. We really did live there all together for some time—Luria, Bozhovich, and Leontiev. (Luria, 1994, p. 69)

For three years, until 1934, Luria made frequent trips to Kharkov—according to his own recollections he “was running back and forth” between Kharkov and Moscow (while Vygotsky was shuttling between Kharkov, Leningrad, and Moscow). L.I. Bozhovich was not in Kharkov for long either—she soon moved to the neighboring Poltava, to the pedagogical institute, although she continued to constantly collaborate with the “Kharkovites.” Vygotsky visited her from time to time in Poltava.

Leontiev remained in Kharkov for almost five years. He not only led a section and was an active member of the Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy, but also—after Luria's permanent departure—took over the administration of the entire psychology division from him (even earlier, in 1932, he was deputy division director). Additionally, he was director of the psychology department of the Medical-Pedagogical Institute of the Ukrainian People's Health Commissariat, and later director of the psychology department of the Kharkov Pedagogical Institute and the Research Institute of Pedagogy (subsequently named the All-Ukrainian Institute of Scientific Pedagogy). Among the positions held by A.N. in Kharkov was the rather exotic post of professor at the P.P. Postyshev Kharkov Palace of Pioneers and Children of October. “That same year [1931], the Central Qualifying Commission of the Ukrainian People's Health Commissariat gave me the title of professor, and after the law regarding degrees and titles came into effect, I was made a full member of

the Institute of the Central Qualifying Commission of the Ukrainian People's Health Commissariat, and professor of the Central Qualifying Commission of the Ukrainian People's Education Commissariat," Leontiev states in his published autobiography (Leontiev, 1999, p. 366).

In addition to A.V. Zaporozhets and T.O. Ginevskaia, Kharkov psychologists began to group around A.N. They were P.Ia. Galperin, a group of graduate students from the Pedagogical Institute and the Research Institute of Pedagogy—P.I. Zinchenko, V.I. Asnin, G.D. Lukov, and later K.E. Khomenko, V.V. Mistiuk, L.I. Kotliarova, D.M. Dubovis-Aranovskaia, E.V. Gordon, G.V. Mazurenko, O.M. Kontsevaia, the short-lived A.N. Rozenblium, T.I. Titarenko, I.G. Dimanshtein, Solomakhina, and F.V. Bassin.

Leontiev wrote in his autobiography:

The years of my work in Ukraine were a period of reevaluation of my previous positions and independent work on general problems of psychology, work that continued to follow a predominantly experimental line. The special conditions and objectives that arose before me then favored this: it was necessary to organize a new collective of very young researchers and train them as our work was going on. This is how the Kharkov group of psychologists was formed. During this period, a series of experimental studies originating from new theoretical positions in connection with the problem of psychological activity were carried out by me and under my direction. (1999, pp. 366–67)

What does A.N. mean by “new theoretical positions” and “reevaluation of . . . previous positions”?

Numerous myths surrounded this “reevaluation.” The main one was that the “Kharkovites” had completely rejected the theoretical legacy of Vygotsky, sharply contrasting their views to “cultural historical” theory, and that at the beginning of the 1930s there arose a scientific and human confrontation between Vygotsky and the Kharkov group headed by Leontiev.

What happened in reality?

Let us begin with the fact that before the emergence of the Kharkov group, Vygotsky had already gone beyond the cultural-historical stage in the development of his psychological conception. In 1930–31, not only had the concept of activity appeared in his work, but more important, was the emergence of the psychological conception of activity—ascending toward Hegel and Marx (Tool and Sign in the Development of the Child, his introduction to Piaget's book, *The Pedology of the Adoles-*

cent, and other works). But, at the same time, in statements by Vygotsky there was a louder echo, which was referred to in a discussion between Leontiev and Vygotsky in 1933 as the “logocentrism of the system” (Leontiev, 1994, p. 23).** On the one hand, Piaget was criticized by Vygotsky because “the socialization of child thought was viewed by Piaget outside of practice, cut off from reality, as the pure association of ‘souls’ that leads to the development of thought. Knowledge of truth and logical forms . . . do not emerge through the process of the practical mastery of reality” (Vygotsky, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 74–75).** On the other hand, in his famous 1933 talk about consciousness it was stated, “Speech is the sign by which consciousness communicates” (Vygotsky, 1982, vol. 1, p. 165), and it was specifically the “collaboration of consciousness” that determines the development of meanings; and in his very last publication, Vygotsky unambiguously asserted that “human consciousness is . . . consciousness formed through communication” (Vygotsky, 1960, p. 373).** None of this is tied to a rejection of the activity approach (testified to, at the very least, by notes found in Vygotsky’s famous 1933 lecture about play, published by D.B. Elkonin in “From Notes” [Iz zapisok], 1978),** but instead it ties itself to the activity approach. At least that was how Leontiev and his group initially perceived Vygotsky’s change in position. It was specifically Vygotsky’s ideas about activity that they were striving vigorously to develop—and it seemed to them that in concentrating on the problem of the unity of affect and intellect, in talking about meaning as the unit of consciousness, Vygotsky was taking a step backward. I attempted to make a detailed analysis of these events in the monograph *The Active Mind* [Deiatel’nyi um] (2001). Also refer to the introduction to the publication of Leontiev’s letter to Vygotsky,* about which there will be more below (Leontiev and Leontiev, 2003).

In his oral memoirs, A.N. recalled, “The alignment of forces within Vygotsky’s school was dramatic. A confrontation between two directions for the future.

“My orientation: the return to the initial theses and their development along new lines. Research of practical intellect (i.e., objective action) . . .

“Vygotsky’s orientation: affective tendencies, emotion, feelings. This was beyond consciousness. The life of affects; from here a turn toward Spinoza.

*The letter, but not the introduction to it, is translated in this issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, see pp. 70–77.—Eds.

“I: practice.

“Vygotsky: the freedom to search for approaches. But nothing more! grief (about me).

“ . . . the apogee of the divergence was 1932 (after the paper) and the beginning of 1933.

“ . . . Vygotsky was left with everything, I had to start *from the beginning*.”

What were the theoretical divergences between the Kharkovites and Vygotsky—if any? It seemed to them, at least during the first years, that there were some. Leontiev actually wrote about Vygotsky’s “mistakes” (naturally, not for print, but for his own use) in *Materials About Consciousness* [Materialy o soznanii] (end of the 1930s—after 1936): “The mistake was that (1) the subject was not understood as the subject of the activity of man; (2) ordinary practical activity continued to seem like something that only externally depends on consciousness” (Leontiev, 1994, p. 40).**

In fact, everything was significantly more complicated. Vygotsky tried to unite activity and speech (language) factors of psychological development into one system—but his results were not entirely convincing. At the beginning of the 1930s, Leontiev essentially followed the same path—and from here came his interest in linguistics and his short-lived enthusiasm for the theories of academician N.Ia. Marr. And after a few years, Leontiev and other Kharkov followers of Vygotsky realized that there was not any divergence on matters of *principle*. As Leontiev wrote in one of his 1967 articles:

The intensified emphasis on the role of verbal communication, and in contrast to the vulgarizing, essentially anti-Marxist demand that consciousness per se be removed from material life, defending the idea that in the formation of child consciousness a decisive role belongs to action, and not word, naturally, overshadowed the question of that vital ground, the research of which was the only thing that could free psychological theory from the classical ‘closed circle of consciousness.’ *They overshadowed* but did not eliminate it, because that question had already been clearly articulated in the cycle of works by L.S. Vygotsky being examined. (Leontiev, 1983, vol. 1, p. 28)

And P.Ia. Galperin, remembering the Kharkov period of his career, emphasized that the theory of objective activity “led to an essential change in the *focus of research*, and L.S. Vygotsky emphasized the influence of

higher cognitive functions on the development of the lower cognitive functions, and the practical activity of the child, while A.N. Leontiev emphasized the leading role of *external, objective activity* in the development of cognitive activity, in the development of consciousness” (Galperin, 1983, p. 241; emphasis added).**

As we have already noted, in his oral memoirs not long before his death, A.N. said, “My orientation: the return to the initial theses and their development along new lines.”

Specifically a *return to the initial theses* of Vygotsky! Leontiev’s opinion as well as Luria’s was unequivocal: the activity approach was not a new theory, but the natural development of Vygotsky’s ideas; both believed until the ends of their lives that Vygotsky was the founder and leader of the scientific school of which they considered themselves a part. Nonetheless, the tendency to “subtract” the activity approach from cultural-historical theory, leaving a “balance” of “the true” Vygotsky, is encountered quite often in contemporary publications.

One thing is certain: while introducing many new theoretical ideas, principles, and concepts in the process of developing their views, while often shifting the emphasis, Leontiev did not reject and did not dispute anything from the theoretical views of his teacher. The ideas of Vygotsky could probably have been developed in other directions, different from activity theory; however, no one was able to do this on a scale even remotely comparable to that of the activity theory approach. For this reason the question of whether or not Leontiev “correctly” perceived and developed Vygotsky’s ideas does not make sense. He perceived and developed them, and whoever feels that they should be developed in some other way should do so.

Furthermore, there were no “mistakes” by Vygotsky that were “brought to light” in the 1930s. First of all, Vygotsky, as evidenced by his own statements, understood the subject exactly as the subject of activity: for instance, in 1931, in *The Pedology of the Adolescent* [Pedologiiia podrostka], it says, “The objects that surround us are not neutral to us. . . . It is as if the objects of the world around us . . . require certain actions from us . . . , they play an active, and not a passive role in relation to their own demands” (Vygotsky, 1931, p. 190).** In another work he wrote that the child “embarks on the path of collaboration, socializing practical thinking through the division of his activity with another person. It is because of this that the activity of the child enters into a new

relationship with speech” (Vygotsky, 1984, vol. 6, p. 31).** Because of this! And elsewhere, “Things signify reality . . . which he [the child—Author] encounters in the process of practice itself” (Vygotsky, 1982, vol. 2, p. 62).** And absolutely nowhere does he assert that practical activity in the child is externally dependent on consciousness. He did say, it is true, that because of play “where earlier in the action/meaning structure it was action that was defining, now the structure is inverted and becomes meaning/action. . . . This is again a critical point in the clear operation of meanings of actions . . .” (*From Notes*, 1978, p. 293).** According to Vygotsky’s idea, it is because of play that the possibility arises of “movement in the semantic field . . . not tied to real things. This semantic field subordinates all real things and real actions to itself (ibid., p. 294).** But this idea is not at all identical to the idea of the dependence of activity on consciousness, of its second psychological beginning. Vygotsky’s introduction of the concept of the “semantic field” signifies a transfer of dominance to *personality*.

And second, for Vygotsky the unity of affect and intellect was also essentially the nucleus of *the conceptual theory of active personality*. In *Thought and Speech* [Myshlenie i rech’] he wrote, specifically, “There exists a dynamic conceptual system that represents the *unity of affective and intellectual processes* . . .” (Vygotsky, 1982, vol. 2, p. 21).** And what is meant here is “revealing the direct progression from a person’s needs and urges to a certain direction of his thinking and then a reverse progression from the dynamic of thought to the dynamic of behavior and concrete activity of an individual” (ibid., p. 22).** It is no coincidence that in *Teachings About Emotions* [Uchenii ob emotsiiax], he stands in solidarity with past researchers regarding emotions—however, only in agreeing that there is “primarily a striving toward action in a particular direction” (Vygotsky, 1984, vol. 6, p. 123).** And later he states, “Every emotion is a function of personality” (ibid., p. 280).**

Soon, at the end of the 1930s, the alternative “activity as the unity of affect and intellect” wound up being eliminated in the works of A.V. Zaporozhets. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, he wrote, “There is reason to believe that, in contrast to intellectual control—which regulates behavior in keeping with the objective meaning of conditions of the problem being solved—emotional control provides for the correction of actions appropriate to the meaning of what is happening for the subject with respect to satisfying his needs. Only the coordination of the functioning of the two systems—as L.S. Vygotsky expressed it, ‘the unity of

affect and intellect’—can provide for a full-scale realization of any forms of activity” (Zaporozhets, 1986, p. 259). And elsewhere, at the foundation “of the emotional anticipation of a future result of action . . . lies, evidently, the functional system of integrated emotional and cognitive processes, the unity of affect and intellect that L.S. Vygotsky felt was characteristic for higher-order, specifically human feelings” (ibid., p. 283).

And in the *Methodological Notebooks* [Metodologicheskie tetrad] Leontiev himself unambiguously wrote, “Psychology has turned into a science about personality—personality of the real, of action. . . . Therefore, the study of activity is the alpha and the study of meaning is the omega of psychology!” (Leontiev, 1994, p. 210).** Incidentally, it is interesting that he did not see at that time the analogous train of thought in Vygotsky. At the beginning of 1932, in a letter to Vygotsky (see below), A.N., in formulating his view on the objectives of further research, wrote, “Most important: is *personality* as the subject of psychological development, that is, the problem of *active* psychological development, the problem of the *psychological culture* of personality (of freedom!)” (Leontiev, 2003, p. 20).**

Can you imagine when reading this letter how, Lev Semenovich raised his eyebrows in surprise: as if I, Vygotsky, could think otherwise . . .

Many years later, in 1977, giving a talk about Vygotsky, A.N. directly acknowledged that, “the alternative of 1930–31 turned out not to be an alternative, but an essential orientation for psychological research. Not ‘either/or’ but definitely ‘and/and!’” (quoted from A.A. Leontiev, 1983, p. 12).**

So the conceptual divergences of the Kharkovites, headed by A.N. and Vygotsky, tied to “logocentrism” and the unity of affect and intellect, were not the most important things in their “divorce.” In many ways these divergences were imagined—Vygotsky thought the same way as his Kharkov followers, and in some ways was ahead of them.

Not long ago, in 2002, a letter was found in the Luria archive from Leontiev to Vygotsky dated February 5, 1932—the very night before Leontiev’s final move to Kharkov. It is critically important in understanding what actually happened then within the Vygotsky school. Furthermore, this letter is amazing not only as a historical document, but as an existential one.

Even a reader distant from the world of psychology and knowing nothing about its history in our country, passing over the incomprehensible

parts, would be intrigued by it as a tale of a strong, exceptional man at the moment of a difficult, critical choice that would determine the subsequent fate not only of himself, but of the endeavor with which he had merged himself and which had become the meaning of his life. He made this choice in a state of complete awareness, under conditions of global uncertainty and with the acceptance of full responsibility. The die is cast, the Rubicon is crossed—this is the sense of the letter. At least three layers can be discerned within the letter—a personality at the moment of existential choice, interpersonal relations, and the development of ideas—and it can be read on three different levels.

Leontiev begins his letter with the fact that the choice has been made: the ticket has been purchased, the telegram sent. Tomorrow he is cutting the knot that cannot be untied. The letter is written in a firm hand, with his characteristic copious emphases. This letter was not written impulsively; it was thought through, agonized over. Leontiev states: our common endeavor is in crisis. Vygotsky, as is apparent from the letter, does not want to become involved in a serious discussion. Leontiev is in no hurry to reproach him: at the end of the letter he admits the possibility that Vygotsky is right in encouraging a certain development of the situation. He accepts this as a fact that has to be reckoned with as he makes his decision. Overall, on a personal level, one of the most interesting features of this document is the clear differentiation by Leontiev between what he can do himself and what does not depend on him, what is desired and what is real. He understands inexorable logic and, in entering a battle for his values and his cause, is prepared for the worst. He discusses the possibility that he will have to leave psychology, obviously not wishing this, as well as the possibly inevitable, but obviously undesirable for him, prospect of breaking off relations with A.R. Luria (in the letter, the pain this subject causes him is evident), whom he reproaches in the letter for a series of mistakes, reproaching him, nonetheless, as one of his own. We know that, fortunately, neither of these events came to pass: Leontiev was not forced to leave psychology, and his close friendship with Aleksandr Romanovich Luria withstood this trial.

Leontiev takes upon himself the entire weight of responsibility for the overall direction in psychology, and in the text of the letter there is a strong sense of the burden on his shoulders. He is worried about the dilution and erosion of Vygotsky's ideas about cultural psychology—or as it was previously called, instrumental psychology—as they spread.

Vygotsky does nothing to prevent this and Luria, easily carried away with eclecticism even contributes to this problem. Leontiev is by no means setting himself against Vygotsky, and in the letter there is not a single reference to some alternative; on the contrary, he cites to Vygotsky his own letter written three years earlier, reproaching him for straying from his own principles. Leontiev—together with the 1929 Vygotsky versus the 1932 Vygotsky—appears to be a stronger supporter of Vygotsky than Vygotsky himself, reproaching Vygotsky for inconsistency. On the contrary, he suspects that it is Vygotsky who has made a decision to part ways.

“We” resounds throughout this letter from its first lines to its last, uniting, in addition to Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria, the core of the future Kharkov group—mentioned in the letter are A.V. Zaporozhets, L.I. Bozhovich, and N.G. Morozova. Leontiev writes of them not only with love (“wonderful and dedicated group . . . who will be tested for clarity and reliability”), but with a sense of mature responsibility (“They obligate us. We must not fail this test!”). He calls on Vygotsky to come, repeatedly underscoring that he holds no grievance against him, that he does not know how he can work alone, without Vygotsky, but he feels that he is doing the right thing—not from the narrow perspective of his own personal sense and values, but from the perspective of the common sense and values that unite the three of them. And their personal relations, Leontiev writes, again referring to the letter Vygotsky had written to him three years earlier, are secondary—they will resolve themselves with the clearing up of the fundamental question.

Within the letter, Leontiev’s theoretical and methodological views concerning cultural psychology comprise their own separate component and constitute a separate area of interest. For the most part, this component emphasizes the philosophical-methodological foundations of theory, something that would subsequently continue to be characteristic of Leontiev. From among specific problems: first and foremost appears that of the mental-psychological, which a few years later would become the subject of his doctoral dissertation; the problem of functional systems and interfunctional relationships, which became one of the central problems for the entire school during the 1940s through the 1960s. The key role of the sign; and finally, the problem of will and intention and—in the context of the problem of development—the problem of personality as its subject, in other words “the problem of active

psychological development, the problem of the psychological culture of personality (of freedom!) and from here, ethical problems.” Even today, this way of putting the question appears fresh. But such questions were quickly “blacklisted” in our country, and it is only in personal notebooks and in isolated phrases making their way into the publications of the last years of his life that we see the problem that excited Leontiev—the problem of personality, not as an object of formative influences, but as an active, free, and responsible subject of its own development, of the personality that he himself exhibits in this letter.

The letter concludes, again, on an existential level: fear of the future, a verdict, being doomed to solitude, a sense that he must undergo a new examination in Kharkov. And there is a feeling of relief in the last lines—despite the burden, he is happy that he has written this letter and is free because he has done what he was able to do and what he had to do. Tomorrow there would be a leap into the unknown. Because the fate of cultural psychology comes before all else. A.N. writes:

You yourself understand that now we, as a group of people bound by ideas, are undergoing a tremendous crisis. . . . The external circumstances, their tremendous pressure on us all . . . *the mismatch between the movement of thought and the organizational, external side of work*, the lack of movement forward with concrete work, while, at the same time there is an expansion of ideas . . . all of this has suppressed, undermined, and shattered our work as a *common* effort. The very system of ideas is in *tremendous* danger. . . .

I am calling you . . . Decide: I am ready to accept your refusal—let our paths part, *external paths*, for I do not believe in the possibility of a parting of *ideas* . . . I will try to find my path without you. . . .

The concluding summation:

It is necessary to separate philosophical problems, *as such*. . . . Further: specific theoretical tenets, *regulating*, guiding concrete research, must be projected directly into research . . . In any research it must be clear *what* theoretical problem is being solved and *what* is being given to Cultural Psychology.

This is a strange letter . . . The strangest thing about it is that Leontiev did not see how close his theses were to what the addressee of the letter—Vygotsky—was thinking and doing at the time. Perhaps, it showed that Leontiev then truly lacked, as he had written, preparation and schooling. Let us not forget that he was only twenty-nine years old

and that his only truly significant work to date was *The Development of Memory* [Razvitie pamiati], written entirely, or almost entirely in keeping with Vygotsky's "classical" cultural-historical conception. In essence, in the "empirical," truly scientific part of this letter, there is not a single proposition that would be in conflict with Vygotsky or could not find an analogue in his thoughts of approximately the very same time!

Vygotsky's reaction—or rather the absence of a reaction—on receiving this letter is interesting. How else can one interpret the phrase in Luria's letter dated May 13 of the same year, "And are you on the right path, just as A.N. and I are?" We do not know whether or not Vygotsky replied to Leontiev—it is true that Leontiev did not ask for a reply. But a letter has been preserved in A.N.'s archives dated August 7, 1933. It is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Dear Aleksei Nikolaevich!

I kept thinking I would send a letter through A.R. [Luria], but we did not meet before his departure, which is the reason for the delay. It is not the first time that I feel we are on the verge of some very important conversation, for which neither of us, evidently, is prepared; and, therefore, we have trouble imagining what it should be about. But its distant lightning could already be seen many times, including in your last letter—that is another reason I cannot refrain from responding with the same sort of lightning, some sort of premonition (hazy) of a future conversation.

Your external fate is being decided, it seems, in the fall—for many years. With it, in part, our (and my) fate, the fate of our endeavor. However you may have experienced your "exile" to Kharkov subjectively, whatever joys may have made it worthwhile (in the past and even more in the future), your permanent departure—objectively, in terms of its own internal meaning—is our internal, difficult, perhaps irreversible misfortune, stemming from our misconceptions and simple carelessness toward the endeavor that has been entrusted to us. It seems that neither in your biography nor mine will what has happened once ever happen again, not in the history of our psychology either. Well, what is one to do?—I am trying to take a Spinozaesque view of it—with sadness, but as something that was necessary. In my own thinking I deal with this as with a fact that has already come to be.

While internal fate cannot but be decided in connection with external fate, it is not completely determined by it. For this reason it is unclear to me, in a fog, I can only make it out vaguely—and it fills me with a sense of alarm greater than any I've experienced in recent years.

But since, as you write, on a personal-scientific level your internal

position has crystallized, that means that the external solution is, to a certain extent, predetermined. You are right that the first thing is to eliminate the necessity of behaving two-facedly. This could have been achieved with the help of “abstraction” (the Kharkov way) or branching out (the Moscow way), independent of any of our external conditions. For this reason, I believe this to be correct, despite the fact that I have a different view of everything that happened with A.R. [Luria] (not in the happy sense). But about that, some other time.

I know and believe it to be true that internally, over two years, you have made your (final) way toward maturity. I wish you with all my heart—as I would wish happiness at a decisive moment for the closest of people—strength, courage, and clarity of spirit before the determination of your life’s course. Most important: decide freely.

Your letter ends on that point, and I will end mine on the same, although without external cause.

I firmly, firmly shake your hand.

Yours with all my heart, L. Vygotsky

P.S. I do not know whether or not I will come to Tarusa. I will do that only if our conversation appears imminent and I make up my mind to give it full expression. Otherwise—what is the point of going? Greetings to M[argarita] P[etrovna] and A.R. [Luria] and his wife.

We do not know the letter from A.N. referred to here, but the entire content of Vygotsky’s letter suggests that it is the same letter cited above. In that case, the date is incorrect either of Leontiev’s letter (i.e., it was written not in February 1932, but in 1933), or of Vygotsky’s letter (in which case it was written in 1932). The latter seems more likely.

In the book about Vygotsky by G.L. Vygodskaia and T.M. Lifanova, the history of the relationship between L.S. and A.N. is told in a distorted form (Vygodskaia and Lifanova, 1996, pp. 316–17). Based on the account of Vygotsky’s wife, R.N. Smekhovaia, Gita Lvovna [Vygodskaia] purports that at the end of 1933 or at the very beginning of 1934 A.N. wrote a letter to Luria from Kharkov,

which contained something along the lines that Vygotsky is a past stage, yesterday’s psychology; and offered to collaborate with Aleksandr Romanovich without Vygotsky. Aleksandr Romanovich agreed at first, but then, evidently, changed his mind, going to father [i.e., Gita Lvovna’s father, Vygotsky] (he was not well at the time) and showing him the letter. Father wrote a harsh letter to Leontiev. He was very upset about what was happening, viewing it not only as, or even not so much as, a personal

act of treachery as a betrayal of a common endeavor . . . It seems to me that this feeling was heightened by the fact that this was not done out in the open, but behind his back . . . I do not know whether my father and A.N. Leontiev saw one another after that, but I know that their relationship was never the same.

This story is unbelievable for several reasons.

First of all, it leaves a certain impression of Leontiev—as a professional intriguer striving to “scheme” against his mentor, Vygotsky. There may be differing views concerning A.N.’s scientific contribution and his relationship with Vygotsky or his behavior in one situation or another, but he was not an intriguer and he was completely incapable of committing a dirty trick behind someone’s back. And the nature of the relationship between Vygotsky and his disciples is clear, if only from the correspondence between Leontiev and Vygotsky introduced here, and made actions of the sort attributed to Leontiev impossible. What is fervently expressed in the letter to Vygotsky is the often-repeated desire to speak openly, lay his cards on the table, however painful the conversation might be. This was just not the kind of people they were!—and all of them, including Leontiev and Luria (the latter also does not look very good in the story above)—and on top of that they highly valued their reputation in their circle of colleagues and comrades in arms.

Furthermore, it is completely impossible that Leontiev’s invitation to work without Vygotsky was addressed *specifically to Luria*: in the letter to Vygotsky, Aleksei Nikolaevich sharply criticizes A.R., specifically for the latter’s attitude toward “cultural psychology” (as is evident from Vygotsky’s letter he shared this view to a certain degree), and at the end of the letter there is a passing phrase, “I cannot work alone with A.R.” and a possible “breaking off of relations with A.R.” is mentioned. (This, as we have said, did not take place, and Leontiev and Luria continued to be friends as long as they lived.)

And there is one more thing. It was specifically the spring of 1934—when the relationship between Vygotsky and Leontiev had supposedly been broken off—that is the most likely date of a postcard that has survived by some miracle from Vygotsky, addressed to Leontiev in Kharkov. The date on the postcard is illegible, as it is generally in very poor condition. The text reads as follows: “For now I would like to move in the direction about which you and I agreed, firmly leading the internal line toward a full linkage of our research.” Why do we date this postcard specifically during the spring of 1934? In it, Vygotsky asks Leontiev, in

particular, about the fate of theses for a congress (evidently referring to the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Psychoneurology in June 1934, to which L.S. submitted the theses "Psychology and the Study of the Localization of Mental Functions" [Psikhologiya i uchenie o lokalizatsii psikhicheskikh funktsii]). If this is so, then it explains another phrase preserved on the postcard: "for now, we are acting according to the old plan and on the 3rd–4th we will officially unveil our work. I think that in the end, we can either win a lot or lose a lot from this matter." This refers to the creation of a research group in the newly reopened All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine (VIEM). It is known that Vygotsky received an invitation from the directors of the VIEM to head their department of psychology, and, on April 28, he gave a featured speech at a conference, Problems of the Development and Decline of Higher Mental Functions [Problemy razvitiia i raspada vysshikh psikhicheskikh funktsii]. So the 3rd–4th is either March, April, or May 1934.

A letter from Margarita Petrovna to Aleksei Nikolaevich dated March 23, 1934, has survived. It serves as evidence that Vygotsky intended to invite A.N. to his section: M.P. tells of a phone conversation with Luria, who told her that "today the personnel for the VIEM is being determined, and you are the second question. Vygotsky told him that he needed you now, but since it didn't work out now, you should be brought in by other means." A.N. himself reminisced about Vygotsky's plans to invite him into his section. And in fact, on April 13, 1934, the administration of the VIEM sent the All-Ukraine Institute of Scientific Pedagogy a paper requesting that no obstacles be put in the way of A.N.'s move to VIEM. It begins as follows: "In light of Prof. A.N. Leontiev's being brought to work in the Psychology Section of the Moscow branch of VIEM, in the capacity of deputy section director. . . ."

Thus, based on the letters of A.N. Leontiev and L.S. Vygotsky published here,* as well as the subsequent course of events, it evidently follows that Leontiev's departure for Kharkov was not a *breaking off* of relations with Vygotsky. First of all, Leontiev went in order to work specifically on developing cultural psychology, which was difficult to do in Moscow. Second, Vygotsky and Luria also received invitations to work in Kharkov and began to work there at the same time Leontiev did, although

*Vygotsky's letter and an excerpt from Leontiev's letter are translated above. Leontiev's letter is translated in full in this issue of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, see pp. 70–77.—Eds.

not as decisively as Leontiev: it is not the “fault” of the latter that he wound up in the position of being the only real leader of the Kharkov group, and that only in Kharkov, with his help, a strong collective of like-minded people was formed, putting the ideas of cultural-historical psychology into service, while no such collective arose in Moscow (or anywhere else). Third, against the backdrop of an ideological crisis, it was Vygotsky who distanced himself from substantive contact, prompting Leontiev to make independent decisions, but by no means moving him toward any change in scientific outlook or human relations. Fourth, the departure of Leontiev was not a theoretical schism—there is not the slightest hint of this in the text of the letter, and the last letters and actions of Vygotsky serve as unambiguous confirmation of this, at the same time refuting the myth of “betrayal” and “relations that never recovered.”

Not long before her death, Bliuma Vul’fovna Zeigarnik was interviewed by M.G. Iaroshevskii, and it was published in the journal *Voprosy psikhologii*. There, among other things, it stated that, “Since the conversation has turned to Vygotsky, I will say that he had a very difficult life. He was accused of not being a Marxist, although he was a true Marxist. He suffered greatly at not being understood. And for all intents and purposes he killed himself. Actually: he did everything in order not to live. But that is already another subject” (Iaroshevskii, 1988, 1979).**

Since such an assertion has been made in the press, we are forced to say what we know.

In 1976, A.N. Leontiev related that in the summer of 1933, the Leontiev and Luria families lived together in Tarusa, outside Moscow. Some time around August they received a postcard from Vygotsky with an urgent request that they come. When they met, Vygotsky said that he had invited both of them in order to think about what would happen, since he, Vygotsky, was ceasing to exist in psychology. Luria and Leontiev naturally asked what he meant by that. Vygotsky said that he was prepared to discuss all questions except for the reason (the meaning) of what he had said. He would never talk about it.

During the winter of 1933–34, Vygotsky came to Kharkov, as he often did. There were no serious reasons for this specific trip, Leontiev recalled. He behaved in an extremely careless manner, as if he were not afraid of catching a cold (the weather in Kharkov was very bad—rain, cold wind; but Vygotsky walked around the train station in a light coat, which was not buttoned). It stuck in Leontiev’s memory: he began to

smoke, although he had never been a smoker. In general, he lived at that time without any concern for his health—for example, he remained in the apartment after it was fumigated with sulfur, which was terribly dangerous for his ailing lungs. There were no objectively unpleasant circumstances (at least no more unpleasant than before) during those months. The entire Vygotsky school was actively preparing for a debate. Vygotsky himself was working on a book about Spinoza, and was occupied with the publication of *Thought and Speech*. Negotiations had begun with VIEM about the reunification of all of Vygotsky's disciples, including the "Kharkovites," under its auspices. Vygotsky had written theses for the All-Ukrainian Congress of Psychoneurology that was to take place in Kharkov June 18–24—a talk on this subject ("Psychology and the Study of Localization of Mental Functions") was of critical importance for Vygotsky.

For him, Leontiev said, all of this was a mystery. It will most likely remain a mystery forever unless some written records of those months that we are not aware of become available. But conjecture about this does not give us anything. The only hypothesis that seems plausible to us (but it is only a guess!) is that Vygotsky was disturbed about what was happening in the country, and saw, or at least had a premonition about the turn things would take. We had already discussed the tightening of the ideological screws and the return to the old prerevolutionary school. But, after all, in 1933, the entire country was in the grip of a terrible famine, clearly showing how the Stalin-style collectivization would turn out. The first Five Year Plan had essentially been a failure. It was in January–February 1934 that the Seventeenth Communist Party Congress took place, where the last chance to put a barrier between Stalin and personal dictatorship was missed. The arrests of academics started, and Osip Mandelstam, who was close to Vygotsky, was arrested. In short, Vygotsky's wonderful words and thoughts about the future socialist society and about the paths toward the creation of a new man collided with the harsh reality of tyranny and incompetence. The country was approaching a chasm, and it was already obvious that victims would be necessary. If Vygotsky had managed to survive 1936, there is no way he would have lived through 1937. Even in 1932, the Party offensive against pedology had already begun—and Vygotsky was the author of several books on pedology, which were used as textbooks by all students of pedology in the Soviet Union. On top of everything else,

he and his disciples were accused of being anti-Marxist, and his theory was labeled “class hostile.”

Let us return once more to the essence of the divergence between Vygotsky and the Kharkovites. The essence—in keeping with Leontiev’s 1932 letter—consisted in a new philosophical and methodological comprehension of cultural-historical theory, in a shifting of the emphasis, as a result of which the philosophy and the psychology of activity were moved to the forefront. (We will point out once again that the activity approach itself came to the Kharkov group from Vygotsky!)

December 1934: Leontiev gave a lecture in Kharkov, “And if you ask me—for the consciousness of man, is the formation of this world of constant meanings of things, this world of relations—in which real objective connections are revealed to the consciousness—the result of the appearance of speech. I will answer: no. First and foremost, it is the result of the transformation of the subject itself into a social, human subject, and speech is just the essential precondition for this” (quoted from A.A. Leontiev, 1983, p. 13). February 1935, the talk entitled “Psychological Investigation of Speech”: “Consciousness itself must be understood *as activity* . . . The *activity* that lies behind speech changes, speech changes . . .” (quoted from A.A. Leontiev, 1983, p. 13). At the beginning of 1936, the article “Student Mastery of Scientific Concepts as a Problem in Scientific Psychology” [Ovladenie uchaschimisia nauchnymi poniatiiami kak problema nauchnoi psikhologii]: “If we . . . are going to understand communication as the driving force of the process, such an understanding can lead us to incorrect conclusions that, from our viewpoint, are contradictory to the entire system of views of this author [Vygotsky]. . . . Change in the consciousness of the child occurs as a result of change in his intellectual activity as a system of psychological operations that is determined by the child’s real relationship to reality that lies behind this activity” (Leontiev, 1980, p. 174).** In 1936, there was the article “Study of the Environment in the Pedological Works of L.S. Vygotsky” [Uchenie o srede v pedologicheskikh rabotakh L.S. Vygotskogo] (we will discuss this further below): “The proposition by L.S. Vygotsky that consciousness is the product of a child’s verbal communication under conditions of his activity, in relation to the material reality that surrounds him, must be reversed: a child’s consciousness is the product of his human activity in relation to the objective reality that is realized under conditions of language, under

conditions of verbal communication” (Leontiev, 1998, p. 122). And, it is particularly well put in the author’s synopsis of the paper “The Psychological Study of Speech” (1935): “Behind speech (and behind communication) stands activity. From my perspective, this conclusion coincides with what *is contained in the works of Vygotsky!*” (manuscript).

And it is absolutely not by chance that the program of specific experimental studies by the Kharkov group has its roots in philosophical-methodological problems. We will very briefly state the characterization Leontiev himself made of the main stages of research of the Kharkov group, leaving a more detailed analysis for the second half of the book.

The first cycle of research (1932–33) touched on the “image-process” problem. Here there were studies of the relationship between speech and practical intellect (Bozhovich), discursive thought in the preschooler and the development of meaning (Zaporozhets, Bozhovich), and the mastery of the concept in the process of study (Leontiev). The start of experiments by P.I. Zinchenko on forgetting, and the design by Zaporozhets of the problem “perception as action,” belong to this period. The result of this cycle was, first of all, the proposition that in transference, meaning and generalization are not only revealed, but are *formed*, and that transference is not only an appropriate method for the study of generalization (Vygotsky), but is in and of itself a process of generalization. Communication is the particular condition for transference. Second, the proposition that there are two different kinds of transference (the application of a practical action in a situation, and a discursive process), and correspondingly, two different levels of communication. The image lags behind the process (experiments with the disengagement of meaning and operation).

The second cycle of research (1934–35) pursued the following goal: to bring the processes being studied “to the outside,” and follow them in external activity. Here the problem of the *tool* as an object for which a socially developed use is established arises most prominently. The tool is distinguished from the *means* (the subordinate of “natural psychology”). The famous experiments of P.Ia. Galperin, described in his dissertation in 1935, and the works of Zinchenko and Lenin, as well as Zaporozhets and Bozhovich, were a part of this. The overall result of this cycle of research was the conclusion, “to master a tool, as to master a meaning, means to master a process, an operation. It makes no difference whether this takes place in communication or in ‘invention’” (Leontiev).

How is the operation itself defined? First, through the objective properties of the object. But second, how the object appears depends on the relation of the person, on the process overall. “And this process is *life*.”

The main idea of the third cycle of research (1935–36) is the following: “The key to the morphology of consciousness lies in the morphology of activity.” The works of Lenin, Ginevskaia, Mistiuk, Khomenko, and others, but primarily G.D. Lukov, who experimentally demonstrated the interrelations of theoretical and practical activity by studying awareness in the process of play, are part of it. In the research of V.I. Lenin there arises the idea of the structure of activity as a whole (the dependence of the effectiveness of problem solving on the goal, on motivation, on the nature of the entire activity).

The fourth cycle of research (1936–40) is based on the premise, “all internal processes are built according to a model of external activity, and they have the same structure.” Here there were a multitude of studies, first among them Zinchenko’s study on involuntary memorization (memory as action), Zaporozhets’s on perception as action, Lukov’s study on play (the experimental “disengagement” of sense and meaning), and a whole series of others; it is interesting that at this time, to a large degree, the subject of study of the Kharkovites was the perception of art (Leontiev, 1994, pp. 42–46).**

Where were the ideas of the group spelled out? In his oral memoirs, A.N. recalled:

First, in Galperin’s unpublished dissertation. Second, surrounding the problem of “perception as action”—these works were published post factum. Zaporozhets has articles on this problem in Kiev publications. The study by Ginevskaia about the separation of the genetic center of a pattern, explaining the presence of an analysis of activity (action, goal). Another explication of this is Zinchenko’s dissertation on involuntary memorization. Finally, my introductory article to a collection about everyday and scientific concepts that was destroyed when the printing plates were taken apart. There the concept of activity was introduced.

But in general, “there was no time and no place to publish (for publications it was necessary to collect statistics, and we did not have time)” (ibid.).

Overall, what was Leontiev’s personal role in the works of the Kharkov group?

Let us begin by saying that he was continuously in Kharkov only

until the end of 1934 and beginning of 1935, after which he returned to Moscow, and spent time in Kharkov only occasionally. (For instance, D.B. Elkonin's letter dated June 26, 1936, was written from Kharkov.) And even after that he remained, as they say in social psychology, both the "instrumental" and "experimental" leader of the group. It is he [Leontiev] who provided the methodological and theoretical basis for all of the experimental work of the Kharkovites. This takes nothing away from the roles played by the other members of the group, for instance, Zaporozhets or P.I. Zinchenko. "Kharkov psychology" was created through a *collective effort*, but Leontiev was always at the center of the Kharkovites' activities. All of them recognized this and pointed to it in their (unfortunately, not at all numerous) publications.

We have not yet mentioned one of the areas of research by the Kharkov group, primarily of Leontiev himself—the study of the genesis of sensitivity and the psyche in general in the animal world and the stages of its development. It is obvious that this research was closely tied with other research. And when, as Leontiev related not long before his death, there began to appear "daphnia, fish, and cats" in his Kharkov laboratory, and the then young (like all members of the Kharkov group) Filipp Veniaminovich Bassin "got into daphnia," this research of extrapolation reflexes fit well into the unified methodological conception of the development of psyche. (Many years later, it was extrapolation reflexes that led to the fame of the Belgian psychologist, A. Michotte; but his work was carried out independently, and most likely he found out about Leontiev's work only after the two met in the 1950s).

During the Kharkov period, from 1933 to 1936, Leontiev was primarily developing (both theoretically and experimentally) a hypothesis about the fundamental genesis of sensitivity as the ability of elementary sensation. This hypothesis had not then been published and had only been spelled out verbally in lectures delivered in Kharkov and Moscow. The first publication on this subject appeared only in 1944 (Leontiev, 1944).** In parallel, he [Leontiev] worked on the problem of periodization of the phylogenetic development of the psyche in the animal world, and the problem of the relationship between innate and acquired experience. In 1936, in parallel both in Kharkov (jointly with V.I. Asnin) and in Moscow (jointly with Nina Bernardovna Poznanskaia), systematic experimental research was being conducted on the formation of sensitivity to inadequate stimulus—simply put, "seeing with the skin." But all of that was one part—and possibly not the most important one—of a gigantic

project undertaken by Leontiev during the second half of the 1930s, to which we will return shortly.

5. The first years without Vygotsky: The crackdown on pedology

Vygotsky died on June 11, 1934. L.V. Zankov and I.M. Solovev took charge of the memorial service held for him at the Institute of Defectology. Neither Leontiev nor even Luria, who had, along with others, signed the obituary in *Izvestia*, were allowed to speak. G.L. Vygodskaja recalls,

The hall could not hold everyone who came and we then decided to hold the gathering of mourners in the Institute courtyard. I remember that I saw A.N. Leontiev among those standing near me. People formed an honor guard around the coffin themselves (there was no change of guard, as is the custom now). I can see it as if it were right before my eyes, A.R. Luria stepped out of the crowd that was standing around the coffin, and with his head slightly lowered and fists clenched he walked decisively up to the coffin and took up a position as an honor guard. But very quickly someone (L.V. Zankov, I think) forced him back and stood in his place, and Aleksandr Romanovich returned to his place (his comrades could not forgive him for his momentary weakness). (Vygodskaja and Lifanova, 1996, p. 328)

Already by the sixth issue of the journal *Sovetskaia psikhonevrologiia* for 1934, Vygotsky's obituary, written by Leontiev in July, was published. This was a philosophical essay in which much was sorted out. It is plainly stated there that

Vygotsky's treatment of the mediated structure of human psychic processes and of the psyche as a human *activity* has served as a cornerstone, as a basis for all the scientific psychological theory developed by him—the theory of the *sociohistorical* (the “cultural”—as opposed to the “natural”) development of the human psyche.

Research into the genesis of higher cognitive functions allowed for the formulation of fundamental laws of their development. The first law is:

The very emergence of the mediated structure of human cognitive processes is the product of human activity as a *social* human. Originally socially and externally mediated, only later was it transformed into individual-psychological and internal activity, preserving in principle its

unified structure. The second general law is that the process of development and the transition of activity “from outside in” is essentially tied to the change of the entire structure of the psyche; now the place of separately acting cognitive functions is taken by complex new formations—functional psychological systems that are genetically interfunctional connections formed in the real historical process. The relationship between higher cognitive functions was at one point the real relationship between people, “the psychological nature of man is the aggregate of social relations rendered internally and becoming functions of personality, dynamic parts of its structure”—as this idea was expressed in one L.S. Vygotsky’s works.

The third law has to do with “speech as the condition for the emergence of conscious, intellectual, and volitional activity of man.” These studies by Vygotsky led to the development of the “theory of the systemic and conceptual structure of consciousness.” Vygotsky’s theory on consciousness “is for us the last and deepest expression of the idea of the sociohistorical nature of the human psyche, the *specific theory of man’s awareness of his—human—existence*. Meaning is a form of such consciousness. . . .

[We understand Vygotsky’s approach] not as a system of static truths that remain only to be accepted or overturned, but as the first, perhaps still imperfect, formulation of the path it has discovered. And if over the course of the subsequent development of the science of psychology, much of it will appear in a new light, much will be altered and even discarded, then what is definite and indisputable and forms its true core will appear all the more clearly. (Leontiev, 1983, vol. 1, pp. 19–21)

The obituary is interesting both from a retrospective and, so to speak, prospective viewpoint. In it the essence of Vygotsky’s approach is spelled out with absolute clarity and the continuity between the views of the Kharkovites and his own views is outlined. In particular, something is already clear to Leontiev here that he did not understand at the beginning of 1932 (judging from the letter)—L.S.’s ideas about activity and personality. On the other hand, it is an extremely brief summary of those propositions that subsequently were the main content of the then-unpublished *Materials About Consciousness* [Materialy o soznanii], especially *Methodological Notebooks* [Metodologicheskie tetradi]—Leontiev’s notebooks reflecting the formation of the concepts subsequently developed in the cycle of articles, written in the 1940s through the 1960s, which were included in his books *Problems of the Development of the Psyche* [Problemy razvitiia psikhiki], and *Activity, Consciousness, Personality* [Deiatel’nost’, Soznanie, Lichnost’]. Incidentally, the same treat-

ment of the meaning of Vygotsky's ideas, although "peppered" with formal reproaches toward him, is contained in the marvelous article "Psychology" [Psikhologiya] in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* [Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia], 1st ed., vol. 47, written by Luria and Leontiev, (1940).

In October 1934, Luria entered the All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine as director of the laboratory of psychopathology (later, clinical psychology). Leontiev, who became director of another laboratory—the laboratory on aging, and later the laboratory of genetic psychology—arrived there at the same time. At approximately that time, he became a professor of the Highest Communist Institute of Education (VKIP). (It is interesting that A.N. remained an employee of the Ukrainian Psychological Academy until December 1936.) Evidently, they did not even try to enter the State Institute of Psychology, which was headed by V.N. Kolbanovskii in 1934—precisely at that time there was another eruption of persecution of cultural-historical psychology.

The list of employees of VIEM during those years is impressive: the heads of departments, clinics, and laboratories there were (in 1935): L.S. Shtern; A.D. Speranskii; B.I. Zbarskii; Aleksandr Romanovich's father, Roman Albertovich Luria; A.V. Vishnevskii; P.K. Anokhin; Iu.P. Frolov; N.M. Shchelovanov; N.I. Propper (Grashchenkov); M.B. Krol'; N.P. Burdenko; V.A. Giliarovskii; A.I. Abrikosov; E.N. Pavlovskii; N.D. Zelinskii; P.P. Lazarev; G.M. Frank; A.A. Zavarzin; K.M. Bykov; L.A. Orbeli; I.P. Pavlov; S.I. Davidenkov; N.M. Krasnogorskii; and N.A. Bernshtein worked there as well.

On February 16, 1935, A.N. read a paper at the VIEM entitled, "The Psychological Study of Speech." The subtitle of the theses of this paper says, "Principal Foundations of the Research Plan for the laboratory of Genetic Psychology of VIEM" [Printsipial'nye osnovy plana issledovatel'skoi raboty laboratorii geneticheskoi psikhologii VIEMa].

This paper has not yet received detailed theoretical or historical-psychological analysis, although it is extremely interesting. We will cite it by theses (although the author's synopsis of the talk has been preserved).

Leontiev writes that it is essential to overcome the disconnect between consciousness and activity.

This, however, is possible only on the basis of the transformation of both the very concept of consciousness and the concept of human activity; activity itself ceases to be viewed in psychology as a "dynamic system of

reactions to a dynamic system of stimuli,” that is, physiologically, and begins to be understood as the activity of a subject “transitioning into an object” in the real process of human social practice, as its relationship to reality, mediated in its reflection in consciousness (practically realized in the word).

Then Leontiev offers criteria for distinguishing the physiological and the psychological:

While the subject of physiological study is internal processes that result in human activity, the subject of psychological study is activity as a relationship with reality, with the objects of this reality, objects toward which activity is directed as toward a problem, objects that determine activity and through which it is carried out. The fact itself—viewed in relation to the subject, that is, as an act by a given subject and not as some objective fact in its sociohistorical necessity—is a psychological fact and must be understood as such.

The second and third parts of the paper are devoted to speech. The analysis of various explanations for the development of meaning, A.N. states, “leads us to the conclusion that it is not possible to discover the true cause of development in communication itself (and even less so in the word itself), and confronts us with the problem of uncovering what lies behind the process of communication, behind the word itself. This constitutes the overall problem of our research.” The further course of his thinking leads Leontiev to the following conclusion: “Meaning as generalization, the vehicle for which is the word, has a dual quality: belonging to consciousness, it is a reflection of reality, an image of it; but at the same time, in terms of its structure, meaning is a system of operations, activity crystallized in the structure of meaning. These two aspects cannot be equated. They are opposite to one another specifically as image and activity, as ‘thing’ and ‘process,’ but they form a unity. Meaning is the unity of these opposites.” Further, “the development of the meaning of a word is at the same time the development of it as a sign and a means, that is, according to its manner of usage and the activity it stands for.” From here we have the following research hypothesis: “The development of children’s speech with its phasic and semantic aspects is defined by the development of the operations for which a word stands. In the process of its psychological development, these operations (activity) of the child change qualitatively, as the word itself changes qualitatively. *Historicism and the social nature of the child’s psyche are based,*

consequently, not on the fact that he communicates, but on the fact that his activity (his relationship with nature) is objectively and socially mediated. The change of its [meaning's] structure is tied to the development, primarily, of the child's 'practical generalizations' and is formed, as shown in preliminary studies, in the unique activity of the "transference" of decision. Finally, with the transition to higher levels of structure of the meaning of a word, inherent in internal, intellectual speech activity, communication also appears to be only a process in which activity is organized as a unique form of collaboration between people (all citations from Leontiev, 1983, vol. 1).

In the author's abstract of this paper, many positions are expressed more forcefully. Of the relationship between psychology and physiology, it is stated,

The physiologist answers the question of HOW the realization of one or another activity occurs (in accordance with what laws of the organism). The psychologist answers the question of WHAT is subject to realization, how and by what laws activity emerges. *The physiologist always begins*, always takes as his point of departure psychological reality, at times not realizing this himself.

And here is what we have for the last phrase of the abstract: "What can be said of a physiology that arrogantly turns away from reality, the realization of which it should be studying" (Leontiev, 1983, vol. 1).

Was A.N. really so naive as to think that such a paper would "get through?" After all, just a few months before Razmyslov's devastating article came out, "On Vygotsky and Luria's 'Cultural-Historical Theory of Psychology,'" where it was unambiguously stated that, "To a wide range of Soviet society 'the cultural-historical theory of psychology' is little known; 'cultural-historical theory' is only being established, but it has already managed to bring much harm to the psychological sector of the theoretical front" (Razmyslov, 1934, p. 78).** And to make matters worse, in his theses, Leontiev wrote everything "as it was," without thinking, evidently, about how it would be taken and understood. (Later he became much more cautious, and it is not by chance that very much of the material from the *Methodological Notebooks* was not published during his lifetime.) The result was a forceful rejection of the paper by the management of VIEM, especially by the physiologists working there. The matter reached the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party. The paper was not, of course, published, but A.N. recalled that "every-

thing passed without particular scandal,” and Leontiev remained on the staff of the Institute for some time—as he himself wrote in his autobiography, until its reorganization in 1937 (although according to documents he was fired on April 13, 1936, and his laboratory was closed). However, on June 28, 1936, that is after his dismissal, the very same VIEM Academic Council that had denounced his paper granted him the degree of Candidate of Biological Sciences without any defense of his dissertation and not Doctor, as G. Rückriem writes (2000, p. 411).

On July 4, 1936, a decree by the Central Committee of the Communist Party was published in the newspaper *Pravda* with the threatening title “On Pedological Perversions in the People’s Commissariat of Education.”

Up to that point, there had never been a case where a special decision of the Central Committee of the Party had abolished an entire science. And even later, when genetics and cybernetics were “closed,” and when “harmful” and “anti-scientific” tendencies had been discovered in political economy, physiology, linguistics, comparative literature, it was never formalized through a special decision. Stalin’s direct indication, or, in the cases of linguists and political economy, Stalin’s “authoritative” statement in the press were sufficient.

This decree was very illiterate decree. But it stated, in particular, that pedology “is based on pseudoscientific, anti-Marxist propositions,” among which was mentioned the “law” of the “fatalistic dependence of children’s on biological and social factors and on the influence of heredity and a kind of invariable environment. This deeply reactionary ‘law’ is in flagrant contradiction to Marxism, and the entire practice of socialist construction.” After such an evaluation, it was decided that “To entirely restore the rights of education and educators . . . to liquidate the teams of pedologists in schools and confiscate pedological textbooks . . . to discontinue the teaching of pedology as a special science in pedagogical institutes and technical schools . . . to criticize in the press all published theoretical books by contemporary pedologists,” and finally, “to transfer all willing practitioners of pedology into pedagogy” (*A History of Soviet Preschool Pedagogy*, 1980).** And so it was printed—with charming sincerity. Later, no matter what was done, everyone was afraid to talk about this out loud.

After the decree appeared, a typical “witch hunt” started, and it was by no means limited to pedologists. As Soviet historians of psychology A.V. Petrovskii and M.G. Iaroshevskii described the events occurring at the time:

The flood of accusations and slander rained down on pedology. This was followed by Party expulsions, dismissals from jobs, arrests, “penitence” at all sorts of meetings. Within six months after the decree was issued, more than 100 brochures and articles were published excoriating “pseudo-scientists.” . . . Psychologists, teachers, doctors, and other specialists, who, in many cases had nothing to do with “pseudo-science,” were accused of “smuggling in pedology.” (Petrovskii and Iaroshevskii, 1994, pp. 146–47)

It was especially bad for specialists in child and educational psychology—even the idea of offering such courses in teaching schools was completely eliminated.

It was especially hard on Vygotsky’s disciples. After all, Vygotsky was the author, along with M.Ia. Basov and P.P. Blonskii, of a multitude of textbooks and other publications on pedology! Unfortunately, the then People’s Commissar of Education, A.S. Bubnov (who did not have the slightest tie to education before being appointed, thus calling forth in the minds of the educated an association with Griboedov’s “I’ll give you a sergeant from my regiment to serve as a Voltaire”), found nothing better than to label specifically Vygotsky’s views as those most typical of pedology—while in fact his views were *absolutely atypical* of it (about which I wrote in my book about Vygotsky—A.A. Leontiev, 1990); G.L. Vygodskaia and T.M. Lifanova (1996) introduce many critical comments about pedology in their biography of L.S. Criticizing Vygotsky and Blonskii as “non-Marxists,” Bubnov wrote in the journal *Pod znamenem marksizma* (no. 10, 1936), “Professors Blonskii and Vygotsky are an example of total bankruptcy in the face of the problem that they undertook for themselves. They turned out to be people ‘with brains spoiled by reactionary professorial philosophy’ (Lenin)” (1936, p. 60).

A month earlier the same journal published an article by a certain V. Molodshii, “On a Scholarly Enemy in a Soviet Mask,” where, while Vygotsky was not mentioned by name (the actual target of the article was the famous mathematician, N.N. Luzin, although it was addressed to academics in all fields), it was stated clearly, “The enemy can harm most successfully in the sectors of the Soviet scientific front where traditions of the old academic world are still strong, where self-criticism is absent, and where there is a cult of ‘luminaries,’ groupings that idolize foreign scholars” (Molodshii, 1936, p. 17). In the same issue (no. 9), the opening article was by the director of the department of science of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, K.Ia. Bauman (strictly speak-

ing, the article appeared in *Pravda*, and the journal reprinted the article). As an example for all scientists, Bauman holds up T.D. Lysenko, who did not burden himself with lengthy and difficult scientific research but turned directly to practice and gave the country “marvelous works” (Bauman, 1936, [no page number]).

In the same issue, there is a report by F.I. Georgiev (hiding behind the initials F.G.) entitled “On the Situation and Objectives of Psychology in the USSR,” about a meeting of leading psychologists that took place during the summer, immediately after the decree was issued, in the editorial offices of the journal *Pod znamenem marksizma*. In order to understand the nature of this meeting, one must clearly see how such “activities” were conducted. (We will introduce the story as told by A.N. Leontiev himself.)

In 1936, my situation was very shaky. The crackdown on pedology was spreading to child psychology. I was taken under suspicion. The printing plates for our Kharkov compilation were destroyed, but so were the plates for many other books. Luria, Kolbanovskii, and I did not get stuck; we were neither victims nor prosecutors—we could not be compelled to speak out.

The form of discussion of the decree were “meetings,” to which we were summoned for such discussions by notices with imperative titles.

I recall the hall (of the People’s Commissariat of Education? the Highest Communist Institute of Education?). I found myself on a crowded presidium (about twenty people). There was a free space next to me. The old Bolshevik Mr. Lomov-Oppokov, who was overseeing education within the Central Committee, enters, and, accompanied by a welcoming sound in the hall, he sits down (right in that spot). L.V. Zankov speaks, delivering a denunciation of pedology and casting all sorts of aspersions on Vygotsky. Lomov writes a note, “What a scoundrel, that speaker!” and passes it, unfolded (so that I was able to read it) to another Central Committee activist sitting right on the other side of me. After Zankov, Lomov has a word, and praises Zankov as a model of self-criticism.

So, V.N. Kolbanovskii, who was then director of the Institute of Psychology, Luria, Leontiev, Galperin, Elkonin, Blonskii, and B.M. Teplov were “invited” to the editorial office meeting. Something similar to a tribunal—where the prosecutor and at the same time the judges were the academicians M.B. Mitin (the same “high priest of Stalinism,” and the tormentor of the Deborinists), the well-known psychiatrist A.B.

Aleksandrovskii, and Georgiev himself—that had been assembled to judge them, and even more so to judge the deceased Vygotsky.

Vygotsky was accused of subjective idealism, of believing that consciousness determines existence, and not the other way around (several years previously this was the favored reproach of Debordin and his school), and was called an anti-Marxist. And his disciples were not spared. The author of the report wrote:

Another psychological approach we see, and one that Comrade Kolbanovskii only touched upon, because it demands a detailed Marxist critique, is the Vygotsky-Luria approach. This school, taking cover under citations from the Marxist classics, in fact brings un-Marxist theory into Soviet psychology. This school has yet to receive appropriate criticism and unmasking. Its representatives: Luria (Medical-Genetic Institute), Leontiev (Higher Communist Institute of Education), Zankov (Experimental Institute of Defectology), Elkonin (Leningrad Pedagogical Institute), and others are extremely active in their defense of this so-called cultural-historical theory. (Luria, 1994, p. 75)

The discussion, however, did not bring the desired results. Even Kolbanovskii was embarrassed—after his flattering words about Vygotsky in the introduction to *Thought and Speech*—to unambiguously denounce him. Well, it is understandable that he called the decree “an outstanding decision,” and announced that “Vygotsky has a whole series of incorrect propositions, incorrectly formulated, capable of leading to politically reactionary conclusions,” and that they should be discarded. But at the same time he said that “his correct assertions should be preserved” (cited from Vygotskaia and Lifanova, 1996, p. 342). Not one of the genuine psychologists taking part in the meeting—including Teplov, who had nothing to do with the Vygotsky school, but was simply a marvelous specialist and an intelligent, decent person—agreed to the accusations put forward and not one bowed down. Elkonin, who himself had been removed from his post, even went to see A.A. Zhdanov to defend the memory of his teacher (Vygotskaia and Lifanova, 1996, pp. 344–45), but without success. Leontiev’s position earned a separate mention in Georgiev’s report—he [Leontiev], as it turned out, being one of the representatives of cultural-historical theory, did not feel it was possible to criticize his theoretical approach and uncover specific mistakes in his work. His speech, wrote Georgiev, was a model for how not to behave oneself when dealing with the most important questions on the psychological

front (Georgiev, 1936, p. 94). Luria “also did not feel it was necessary to criticize his mistaken theoretical approach at the meeting.”

It is particularly important to say something about Blonskii in this regard. He wrote a letter to Bubnov, in which he refused outright to understand or accept the decree about pedology. For the time, this was unheard of, impossible, simply desperate daring, and perhaps this is why they did not touch Blonskii (as, according to stories, they did not touch Budennyi after he fended off the officers from the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, armed with machine guns, who came to arrest him). But the recipient of the letter, A.S. Bubnov, as well as Bauman, were quickly denounced as “enemies of the people” and shot.

Gita L’vovna Vygodskaia recalls:

At the end of 1955, a high-level decision was made to lift the ban on Lev Semenovich’s works and to move them from special storage to open storage. But here it turned out that there was nothing to move to open storage—some of the books had been destroyed, and the others had disappeared. Among the collections stored at the Lenin Library, and in which Lev Semenovich had published work in his time, they had been cut out and there was a stamp, “Removed on the grounds of the Communist Party Central Committee decree, dated April 7, 1936.” Even in Freud’s book, the introductory article by L.S. Vygotsky had been cut out. (Vygodskaia and Lifanova, 1996, pp. 348–49)

But this was the result. Gita L’vovna describes the process as well:

At the Experimental Institute of Defectology, there was an employee who was careful in ensuring that all books by Lev Semenovich be destroyed. R.M. Boskis recalled how she stuck several books under the belt of her dress, donned a wide raincoat, and carried the books out of the Institute. It seems she thus managed to save and preserve *The Pedology of the Adolescent*. (Vygodskaia and Lifanova, 1996, p. 344)

Not only were books destroyed—the printing plates for books that were ready to be printed were disassembled. At times such manuscripts were destroyed by chance—for instance, Leontiev told how purely because of homophony they disassembled a collection by the Department of Soil Science of the Kharkov Pedological Institute, *Pedology* (this is another name for soil science). But certain things were not by chance—during the summer of 1936, the volume *Scholarly Notes* of the Kharkov Pedological Research Institute, including articles by Leontiev, Bozhovich, Asnin, Zinchenko, Khomenko, Mistiuk, and Asnina-Zaporozhets, was

prepared and had reached the proofing stage. It was also stopped, and the plates were disassembled. Luckily, the proofs were preserved, but many of the articles have yet to be published.

With every month the situation became more and more tense. In November–December, C.G. Levit, the director of the Medical-Genetic Institute (MGI), was hounded—this was the institute where Luria was working. In December Luria left the MGI (and VIEM at the same time) and in January, so as to keep a low profile, he transferred from the correspondence-course division to the resident division of the First Moscow Medical Institute. This was a very wise move, considering that by January 1937 Levit had been arrested, arrests of researchers from Luria’s former laboratory were rampant, and then the Medical-Genetic Institute was closed completely. E.A. Luria writes about her father, “After finishing the medical institute [in the summer of 1937], Aleksandr Romanovich decided that he would practice only clinical psychology. Working in a clinic was a relatively safe niche, far from the ‘hot spots,’—both from genetics, and from general psychology” (Luria, 1994, p. 76). For several years Luria, a world-renowned scholar, worked as a lowly physician—and survived.

In January 1937, a vicious brochure by Eva Izrailevna Rudneva titled *The Pedological Perversions of Vygotsky* [Pedologicheskie izvrashcheniia Vygotskogo] was published (with tens of thousands of copies—a massive print run for those times!). It leaves an impression on the modern reader that is not just depressing but more pathological than that. The analysis of Vygotsky’s works, writes the author,

reveals the anti-Marxist nature of his views and an organic connection between them and the anti-Leninist “theory of the dying out of the school.” . . . His works, and those of his followers, conducted on children, were essentially a mockery of our Soviet children. . . . Regarding the fundamental psychological-cognitive questions, he [Vygotsky] takes the position of subjective idealism, but as an eclectic [combining it] with vulgar materialism . . . he ignores Marxist-Leninist teachings. . . . Statements by Vygotsky on the issue of teaching separate subjects, have done great damage to our schools, and must be recognized as harmful. The methodological foundation of his statements “reflects a Machist? understanding of the intellect, its self-development, an independence from the external world, a metaphysical disconnectedness between thought and content.

Vygotsky stood “for anti-Leninist idealistic positions”; his theory of thought was methodologically and pedagogically “depraved.” The “sci-

entific” level of this brochure is evident in the example of a passage about the research of the German psychologist E. Jaensch on eidetic memory in children: “Incidentally, Vygotsky, who knew foreign languages very well and had spent time abroad,* could not have failed to know about the zoological hatred of the fascist demagogue Jaensch toward the Soviet Union and toward Marxism, and nonetheless he shamelessly dragged this rubbish through the pages of our press.”

In a word, “the harmful system of Vygotsky has to be denounced and discarded, and not corrected.” His followers are no better. “He and his disciples (Luria, Sakharov, Shif, Zankov, Leontiev) deserve to be recognized for uncritically spreading bourgeois methodology in our country.” And on the last page, it says, “Criticism of Vygotsky’s work is an urgent matter and not one that should be put off, all the more so as some of his adherents have yet to disarm (Luria, Leontiev, Shif, and others)” (all citations from Rudneva, 1937).** Sakharov, as is well-known, had died, and Zankov had obviously “disarmed.” Incidentally, it is interesting to note that during the last decades of her life (from the 1960s through the 1980s), Rudneva worked as a professor in the department of pedagogical psychology at the Moscow University School of Psychology, that is, under the direction of Leontiev—I remember her well. And even I found out about this brochure only after A.N.’s death when I was going through his archives—if Leontiev had bad feelings toward her (which would not be surprising), he behaved in such a way that no one suspected the existence of the booklet, or Rudneva’s role in Leontiev’s fate. As regards Zankov, A.N. also had fairly extensive contact with him during the post-war years.

Leontiev was fired from VIEM. The Higher Communist Institute of Education was closed in 1937, and the laboratory headed by A.N. in the Central Pedagogical Research Institute, which was part of the Higher Communist Institute, had already been closed in October 1936. As a result, Leontiev was unemployed (“Although in my Employment Booklet there was something filled in—the laboratory was formally transferred to the Institute of Teaching Methods,” A.N. recalled.) He was saved only by the fact that in the fall of 1937, the directorship of the Institute of Psychology was once again offered to K.N. Kornilov (evi-

*In 1937 this was enough motive for arrest and sometimes even execution, making this a simple political denunciation, albeit against the already deceased Vygotsky.—A.L.

dently, Kolbanovskii had not appeared to be consistent enough). In October of the same year, Kornilov gave A.N. a job at the Institute. At the same time, Leontiev gave various lectures and studied the perception of art at the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography and at the State Institute of Theatrical Art. Of course, there was no question of working with any “dubious” topics of a general, or even less so of a methodological, nature. And, according to the recollections of A.N. himself, at the Institute he studied the perception of drawings (based on experiments conducted in Kharkov by his colleagues Khomenko and Mistiuk), and dermal photosensitivity, which was part of the larger problem of the genesis of sensitivity. In any event, N.A. Rybnikov, recalling that period, described A.N.’s work in the following way: “A laboratory of ‘the development of psyche’ was again established, and its directorship was given to Prof. A.N. Leontiev. The work of the laboratory was devoted to two subjects. On the one hand, they introduced the subject of ‘the emergence of elementary forms of psyche.’ N.Kh. Shvachkin conducted work in another area: ‘the development of a child’s first words’” (*Psychological Institute*, 1994, p. 18).

The most curious thing, which can be clearly seen today, is that the study of dermal photosensitivity was parapsychological research! Of course, A.N. presented this research differently, talking about the regeneration of certain cells in the epidermis of the palm. While he clearly demonstrated his interpretation about the development of the ability to perceive light signals through the fingers, this quasi-physiological interpretation of facts is no more convincing than the presumption of an extrasensory aspect to this perception.

Many years later, A.N. published an article, co-authored with B.F. Lomov, V.P. Zinchenko, and A.R. Luria, entitled “Parapsychology: Fiction or Fact?” [Parapsikhologiiia: fiktsiia ili real’nost’?], which was immediately translated into six foreign languages.

Regarding the question posed in the title, a rather noncommittal answer was given: the devil only knows if it is fact or not—for now we do not have a basis for making a definitive judgment.

Until recently, in speaking about Leontiev’s biography, we proudly wrote that neither he nor other followers of Vygotsky ever expressed—in print—a word of criticism about Vygotsky. At the same time, we stated that Vygotsky’s name was forbidden up until 1956. (This, by the way, was not true—for instance, in the works of P.I. Zinchenko, at the

end of the 1930s, Vygotsky is criticized, albeit from a scholarly perspective, and in Luria and Leontiev's above-mentioned article for the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, Vygotsky is mentioned in a positive context, although accompanied by formal criticism. Below, we will see that in 1943, Leontiev gave a talk about Vygotsky's theory of consciousness. However rare they may have been, there were mentions of Vygotsky's name.)

But in 1998, it became clear that once Leontiev was, in fact, forced to criticize Vygotsky. His manuscript, entitled "Study of the Environment in the Pedagogical Works of L.S. Vygotsky (A Critical Study)" [Ucheniie o srede v pedologicheskikh rabotakh L.S. Vygotskogo (Kritricheskoe Issledovanie)], and evidently written in 1937, was found by chance by I.V. Ravich-Shcherbo in the archives of the Institute of Psychology. "By chance" because not a single person knew of its existence. It is absent from Leontiev's personal archive. He did not mention it in the listing of his scientific works, or even in conversations with his son and grandson. Consciously or not, he "repressed" this article, as they say in psychology. But after all, it is rather inoffensive: this was a formal, mandatory criticism of Vygotsky, written when Leontiev's job and—after the above-mentioned brochure—even his life were at stake, was almost transformed by A.N. into an apology for his views.

Let the readers judge for themselves.

Leontiev views Vygotsky's essentially important assertion as indisputable: that in every psychological fact both the property of the subject of activity and the property of the reality to which the realization of the activity relates are given in a mechanically irreducible form, and "the entire question boils down to the extent to which it is possible for the author to concretize it in further study." The theory that Vygotsky developed was not, in A.N.'s opinion, fundamentally mistaken from the very start—initially it is absolutely true, but it contains "specific propositions that lead the author to generally mistaken positions." At the same time, Vygotsky "persistently attempted to preserve this unity" (the unity of the specific personality of the child), "and stated that an absolutely correct requirement" of psychological analysis must be directed toward the relationship between personality and reality. "L.S. Vygotsky's position that consciousness is a product of a child's speech communication, under conditions of activity, must be reversed." Reversed, but by no means discarded! And here is the conclusion: the concept of environment, the concept of meaning, "like a whole array of other concepts introduced

into Soviet psychology by L.S. Vygotsky, truly enrich it and communicate essential vitality and specificity to our psychological analysis. It would be crude nihilism to simply discard the positive content that they reflect” (all citations from Leontiev, 1998).

Not a bad criticism of Vygotsky: of course, Vygotsky “remains a captive of bourgeois theory,” but the concepts he introduced truly enrich Soviet psychology and communicate vitality and specificity to psychological analysis. . . . Yes, Leontiev was clearly not “disarmed”—because the manuscript, evidently, remained in the Institute’s archives. Nonetheless, it appears that he was unable to forgive himself for writing this article—and tried to forget about it. . . .

Of special interest in this article is Leontiev’s analysis of Vygotsky’s concept of experience. It is clear that Leontiev’s concept of meaning—which appeared at approximately the same time and became one of the central concepts of his general psychological theory—grew precisely from this Leontiev’s concept of experience.

During these difficult years, A.N. literally seized any offer of work. For example, a July 15, 1939, letter to his family is intact. In it he describes in detail how, together with A.V. Zaporozhets, he read (or more likely dictated) lectures and gave examinations (for eight to ten hours per day) in the Cherkasskii Pedagogical Institute (there were hundreds of correspondence students in different departments, some unable even to write down what was dictated to them in Russian).

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